

Earthly Delights

Sophia Xeros-Constantinides



The voyage of
discovery is not
in seeking new
landscapes but in
having new eyes

Marcel Proust
(1871 – 1922)

Right:
Sophia Xeros-Constantinides
Natura Morta #4 (Veduta di Castel Franco) (2012) (detail)
from the series *Earthly Delights*

Cover:
Sophia Xeros-Constantinides
Natura Morta #1 (Veduta dell'Anfiteatro di Arezzo) (2011) (detail)
from the series *Earthly Delights*



Earthly Delights

Sophia Xeros-Constantinides

8th July to 28th July, 2012
Jackman Gallery, Melbourne, Australia

del. Ferroni. dis. e inc.

Veduta di Castel Franco



Journeys to unfamiliar places

By Dr. Wendy Garden
Maroondah Art Gallery

“...the foreignness of what you no longer are or no longer possess lies in wait for you in foreign, unpossessed places.”¹

The popularity of the Grand Tour amongst British and European nobility in the eighteenth century ensured a steady market for landscape paintings and prints of historical places.

Vedute, an Italian term for views, was a particularly lucrative genre. They were finely executed and highly detailed images of significant sites on the Grand Tour. Rendered as either paintings or more often prints, they provided a pictorial souvenir of the journey. A collection of vedute prints forms the substrate for Sophia Xeros-Constantinides’ recent body of work, *Natura Morta* from the series *Earthly Delights*, 2011-12.

Sophia Xeros-Constantinides
Natura Morta #10 (Veduta della Pieve di S. Giovanni di Siena) [2012] (detail)
from the series *Earthly Delights*

Xeros-Constantinides came across the folio of prints entitled *Viaggio Pittorico della Toscana* (Pictorial Journey of Tuscany) on her own travels to Italy. The nineteenth century reproduction prints consist of large, double-page sheets incorporating a black and white etching of a veduta from the Tuscan region on one side and on the other a written description of the scene depicted.

Each veduta provides the backdrop upon which Xeros-Constantinides constructs her collages combining disparate imagery from magazines, nineteenth century medical atlases, contemporary medical texts, illustrated books and her own etchings. Continuing her investigation into collage as a vehicle to consider the schisms and disjunctures of women’s bodily experiences, Xeros-Constantinides creates uncanny scenes that agitate the vistas beneath.

The traveller is usually a sightseer. The moving eye seeks out significant sites often fixing upon a view from predetermined vantage points in the journey. Cultural historian Mary Louise Pratt, in her analysis of colonial travel writing, discusses the ‘landscanning European eye’ as one that beholds ‘the landscape that offers itself.’² Her choice of language is revealing. ‘The eye “commands” what falls within its gaze; mountains and valleys “show themselves,” “present a picture;” the country “opens up” before the visitors.’³

According to Pratt the land passively submits to possession by the eye. This has resonances with art historical discourse around the European tradition of the painted female nude. The body of woman is compliantly offered to the male gaze. In both landscape and paintings of the female nude, looking is understood to adhere around the spectacle of nature’s beauty; and in both the sexual politics of looking historically determined the privileged position of the male gaze.

In the image *La Figura nella Veduta #1 (Veduta di S. Piero a Sieve)*, 2011, slithers from a photographic reproduction of a classical Greek sculpture of a female torso are embedded amongst the undulations and rising hills surrounding the village. In this work the body *is* the landscape. Prints and paintings of both vedute and the female nude facilitated a form of visual possession and gave rise to various conventions that often led to standardized depictions. Xeros-Constantinides

bases her collages on these layers of visual history to disturb these conventions. Through tearing, cutting and repositioning she re-vision the body to provoke a more complex engagement with representations of women.

In Italo Calvino’s *Invisible Cities*, Marco Polo reflects on his travels to Kublai Khan:

‘...the more one was lost in unfamiliar quarters of distant cities, the more one understood the other cities he had crossed to arrive there; and he retraced the stages of his journey, and he came to know the port from which he had set sail, and the familiar places of his youth.’⁴

In the *Natura Morta* works Xeros-Constantinides presents a visual journey that makes strange the scene before the viewer. Fragments of photographic imagery from magazines are combined with medical illustrations of the body’s interiority. Absurdist forms compress time and space amplifying the collisions and intersections in the history of visual representation. The vedute prints are never completely obscured by the assemblage of imagery that sits on their surfaces but rather are held in tension, contorted into a foreign place that makes the body of woman unfamiliar.

The collages themselves are organised around the logic of the still life, in particular vases of flowers or bowls of fruit. The still life genre includes lavish depictions of abundance, meditations on the brevity of life and admonishments on the vanity of earthly pleasure.

Xeros-Constantinides’ images are more aligned with the visual surplus that characterized sixteenth and seventeenth century Dutch still life than the more austere table arrangements of the Spanish tradition. For the Dutch, paintings of flowers were rarely simple celebrations of nature’s beauty, but more often entangled with extravagant displays of power and wealth. Typically the flowers painted were not found wild in the countryside but were instead the products of intense horticultural labour.⁵ Imported flowers such as the tulip, which sold for exorbitant prices in the seventeenth century, were combined with other exotic specimens and each was depicted in flower regardless of seasonal variations. Hence human

mastery over nature was celebrated in this genre. Individual flowers could be imbued with rich symbolism and bouquets of various flowers often contained their own coded messages.

However regardless of differences in meaning, what characterized the genre was an intense visual scrutiny of nature's forms and differences. So too the bodies of women have been constantly subject to rigorous observation.

In both art and literature fruits and flowers could serve as metaphors for female body parts and genitalia in particular. For instance a woman's loss of virginity is described as her 'deflowering.' Biological determinism historically harnessed definitions of gender to the body, conflating woman with nature. In various creation stories woman is the earth bearing grass, flowers and trees.

In painting, fruits, flowers and the body of woman were rendered as sensual delights naturally available for the gratification of men's needs and desires.⁶ Like the fruit from the trees, the body of woman promises nourishment. As the giver of life, its succulence is visually plundered in both



pornographic imagery and traditions of painting which deny the body of real women while celebrating a sublime ideal.

The disconnect surfaces in Xeros-Constantinides' images as a theatrical excess. Her works are typically organised around a vessel, whether a vase or chalice – the cup that giveth. Each contains a riot of dismembered body parts offered up for the visual pleasure of the viewer.

For instance in the work *Natura Morta #1 (Veduta dell' Anfiteatro di Arezzo)*, 2011, a breast redolent of a strange melon is placed on top of a medical illustration of a dissected womb. Tracings of needlework spill out in the foreground, which together with a black and white tapestry template, declares a lineage with women's traditional sphere of artistic production. The chalice they are contained in is cut from a photograph of a peach-coloured satin bodice intricately embroidered. The fleshy pinks of the various forms heightens a sense of the erotic adding to the sensuousness of the image.

Combining a surrealist sensibility with a Dada interest in the disjunctures that arise from unexpected placements, Xeros-Constantinides' seductive images take the viewer on a deranged visual journey to revoke popular cultural representations of women and unleash a more nuanced understanding of contemporary experience.

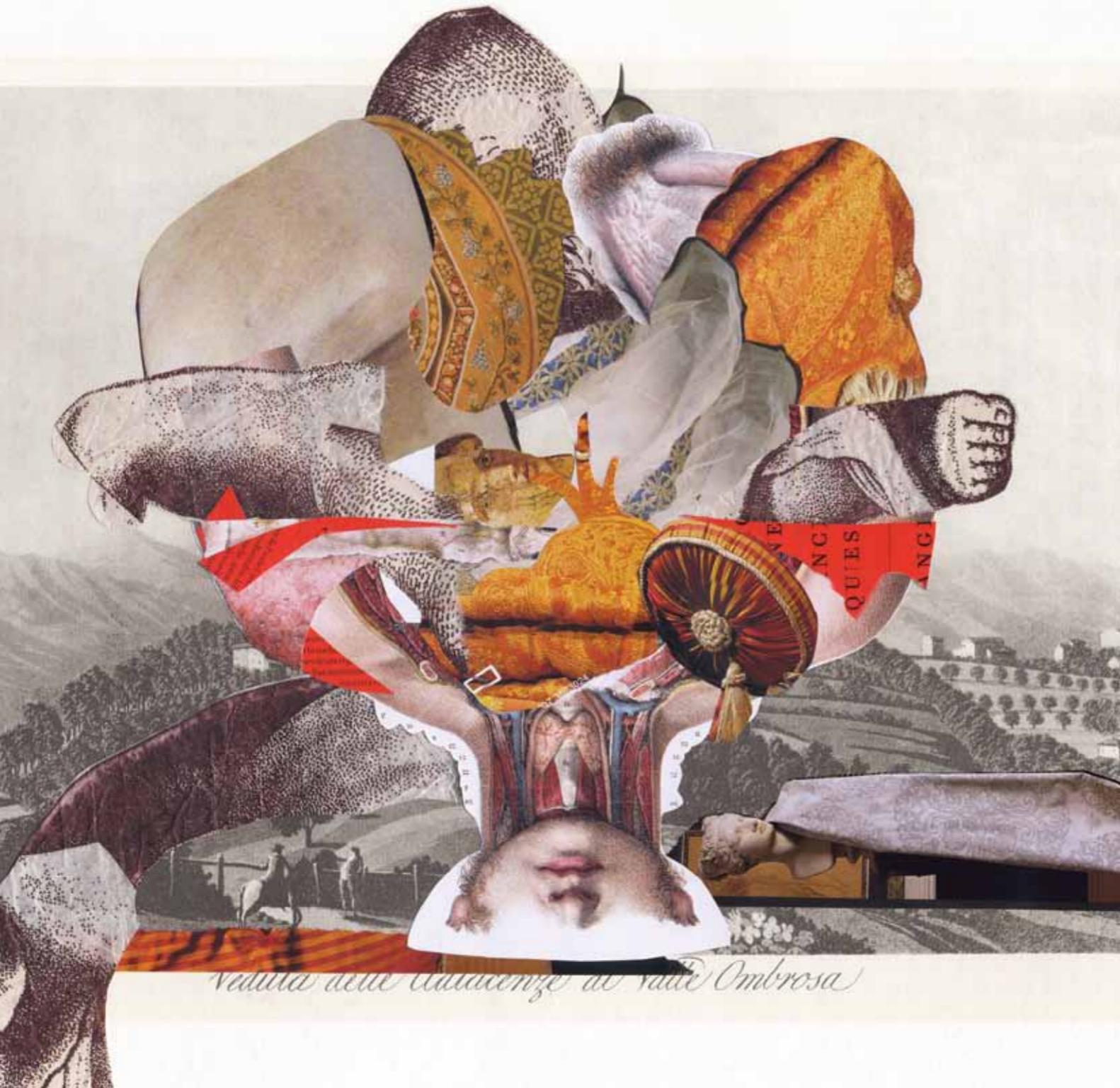
DR. WENDY GARDEN

- 1 Italo Calvino, *Invisible cities*, Vintage Books: London, 1997, 24.
- 2 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial eyes, travel writing and transculturation*, Routledge: London & New York, 1992, 60.
- 3 *Ibid.* Emphasis in original.
- 4 Calvino, 24.
- 5 Norman Bryson, *Looking at the overlooked, four essays on still life painting*, Reaktion Books: London, 1990, 104-105
- 6 Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old mistresses, women, art and ideology*, Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1981, 119.

Sophia Xeros-Constantinides
Natura Morta #8 (Veduta della Terra di Figline) (2012) (detail)
from the series *Earthly Delights*

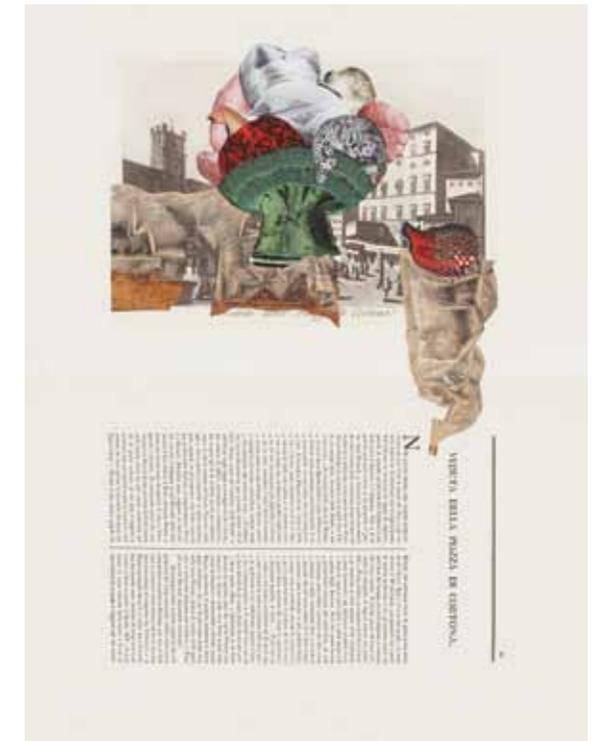
Sophia Xeros-Constantinides
Natura Morta #5 (Veduta di Valle Ombrosa) (2012) (detail)
from the series *Earthly Delights*





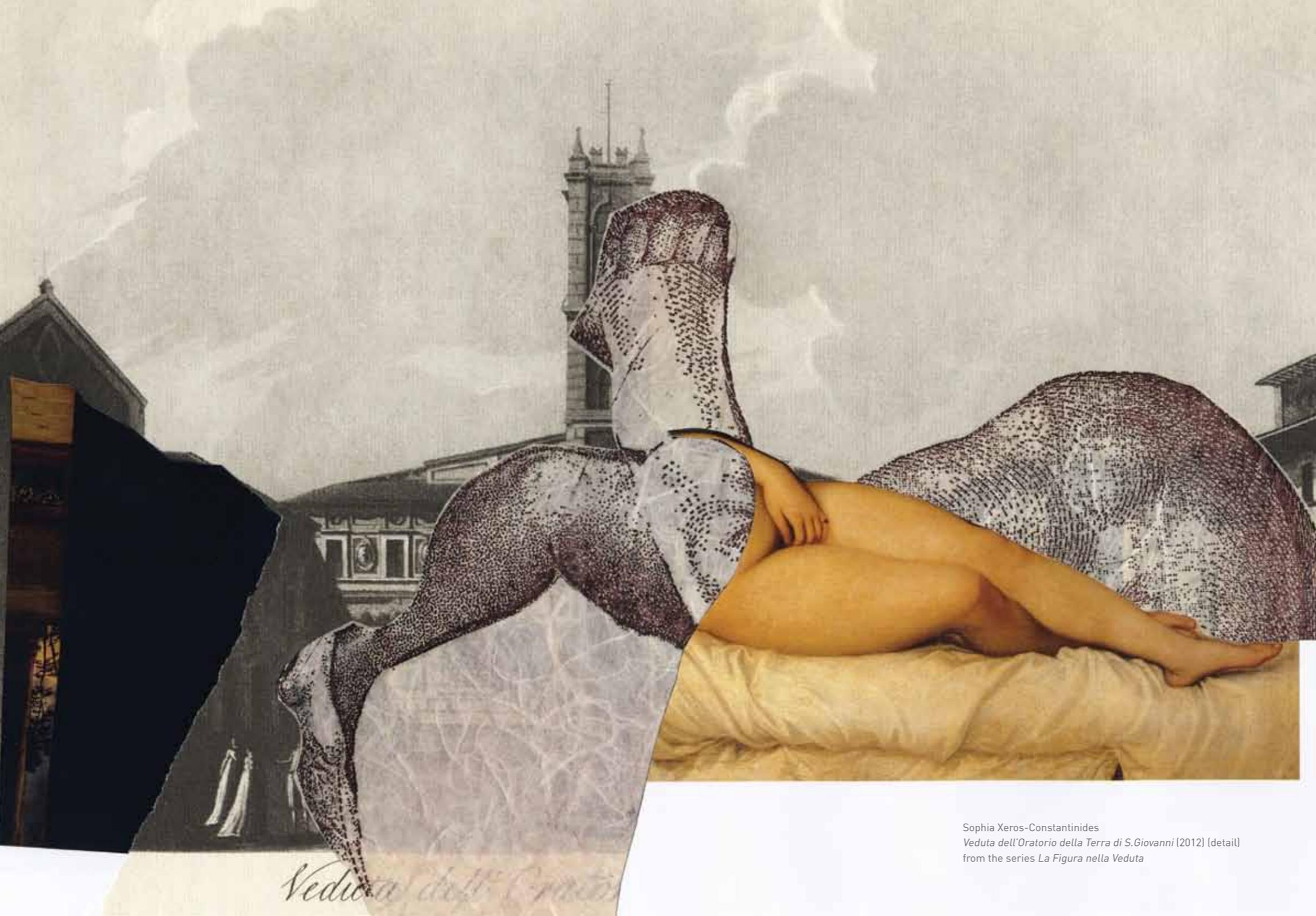
Creativity is that marvelous capacity to grasp mutually distinct realities and draw a spark from their juxtaposition.

Max Ernst (1891-1976)



Left:
Sophia Xeros-Constantinides
Natura Morta #7 (Veduta delle Appartenenze di Valle Ombrosa)
(2012) (detail)
from the series *Earthly Delights*

Above left:
Sophia Xeros-Constantinides
Natura Morta #2 (Veduta di Paterno) (2012)
from the series *Earthly Delights*
Above right:
Sophia Xeros-Constantinides
Natura Morta #3 (Veduta della Piazza di Cortona) (2012)
from the series *Earthly Delights*



Sophia Xeros-Constantinides
Veduta dell'Oratorio della Terra di S. Giovanni (2012) (detail)
from the series *La Figura nella Veduta*

Artist Statement

In the *Natura Morta* (2011-12) works, from the series *Earthly Delights*, I have extended my visual exploration of the world around me with an intergenerational and cross-cultural collage 'play'.

The series was conceived in 2011, whilst on a trip to Italy with fellow artists where I happened upon a second-hand set of reproduction prints depicting antique views of Tuscany, *Viaggio Pittorico della Toscana* ('Pictorial Journey of Tuscany'). The reproduction bi-fold pages were exquisite in their detail, encased in battered cardboard bindings, and blemished with age. It felt like I had uncovered a treasure trove buried in time.

My impulse has been to work from each bi-fold in turn, using the material as a source of compositional inspiration for collage, referencing the genre of still life ('natura morta') and incorporating some of my own etching print-work in the form of collage fragments, as well as found imagery from magazines, books and reproduction medical texts. I am proposing alternative pictorial journeys for the viewer, seen through the lens of my own gender and culture – that of a twenty-first century feminist Australian artist and clinician, with a Mediterranean heritage.

Natura Morta works (2011-12) from the series *Earthly Delights* are exhibited in various forms - either as original collage on bifold support, or as limited edition prints from collage on canvas and/or on archival Hahnemule photorag paper.

SOPHIA XEROS-CONSTANTINIDES

Sophia Xeros-Constantinides – Earthly Delights

By Esther Gyorki
MArtCur

Whilst visiting Tuscany in 2011, Sophia Xeros-Constantinides chanced upon a second-hand set of reproduction prints, *Viaggio Pittorico della Toscana* ('Pictorial Journey of Tuscany'). Surrounded by visual, cultural and historical inspiration, with countless masters, including Botticelli, Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci, hailing from Tuscany, it is unsurprising that *Natura Morta* was conceived here.

Contrasting with the influences from Tuscany, Sophia's work also evokes the Dadaist photomontages of Hannah Höch, particularly the themes of femininity, and the role of women and beauty in contemporary society with her work also conjuring up thoughts of a surrealist nature reminiscent of Salvador Dali and Kurt Schwitters' fragmentation. Similar to Schwitters' *Merzbilder*, created from materials collected in the streets and parks and then recreated into something new, *Natura Morta* has given a new meaning to the Tuscan imagery and text.

Yet to simply compare Sophia's work to history would overlook the essence of her focus. Referencing the genre of still life, with origins from the Middle Ages and gaining popularity during the Renaissance and again with the Dutch and Flemish masters, Sophia takes the still life art form, renowned for its depiction of inanimate and often sedate imagery, and rejuvenates it by contrasting the entrenched genre with her lively, layered collages exploring and unfurling the human form, beauty, culture and gender.

Sophia's fusion of the still life with the text, history and connotation of *Viaggio Pittorico della Toscana* adds an additional layer of meaning to the works. The juxtaposition of the imagery with the text, further enhanced by the disparity of the collage placed horizontally across the work, emphasises the insignificance of the meaning of the words, yet nevertheless conveys the importance of the synthesis of text and imagery.

The work of Sophia Xeros-Constantinides is at once spirited, thoughtful and evocative, suggesting and providing possibilities and contrasts within itself, its influences and its inspiration.

ESTHER GYORKI



Above:
Sophia Xeros-Constantinides
Untitled #3 (2012) (detail) from the series *A La Mode*

Opposite left:
Sophia Xeros-Constantinides
Untitled #1 (2012) from the series *A La Mode*

Opposite right:
Sophia Xeros-Constantinides
Untitled #2 (2012) (detail) from the series *A La Mode*



Seeing is the consequence of optics;
Observing is the consequence of
imaginative contemplation.

Ian Semple (1928-2011)



List of Works

All works are by the artist Sophia Xeros-Constantinides
Prints from original collage onto canvas and onto paper have been
made by Christopher Pennings at J.C.P.

Works on display in the exhibition "Earthly Delights" have been
selected from the following:

Limited Edition Archival Pigment Prints on 400gsm Canson Museum Canvas

Natura Morta works from the series *Earthly Delights* (2011-12)
Edition number 5
Size: Each 100cm(h) x 142cm(w), except #5 which is
123.5cm(h) x 100cm(w)

Natura Morta #1 (Veduta dell'Anfiteatro di Arezzo) (2011)
Natura Morta #3 (Veduta della Piazza di Cortona) (2012)
Natura Morta #5 (Veduta di Valle Ombrosa) (2012)
Natura Morta #7 (Veduta delle Appartenenze di Valle Ombrosa) (2012)
Natura Morta #4 (Veduta di Castel Franco) (2012)

Original Collages on found bi-fold printed paper

Natura Morta works from the series *Earthly Delights* (2011-12)
Size: Box-framed as bifold 70cm(h) x 53.6cm(w) or 35cm(h) x 53.6cm(w)

Natura Morta #2 (Veduta di Paterno) (2012)
Natura Morta #9 (Veduta del Castello di Monterchi) (2012)
Natura Morta #8 (Veduta della Terra di Figline) (2012)
Natura Morta #12 (Veduta della Piazza) (2012)
Natura Morta #6 (Capella de' Depositi Medicei in S. Lorenzo) (2012)

Original Collages

Frolicworks (2010)
Size: 30cm(h) x 24cm(w) and framed 50.5cm(h) x 43.5cm(w)
Striped Leg (2010)
Bare Back (2010)

Left:
Sophia Xeros-Constantinides
Natura Morta #11 (Veduta di Castiglione Fiorentino) (2012) (detail)
from the series *Earthly Delights*

Limited Edition Archival Pigment Prints from original collages
on 308 gsm Hahnemule Photo Rag Archival Paper

1. **Natura Morta** works from the series *Earthly Delights* (2011-12)
Edition number 10 – Dry mounted and framed
Natura Morta #10 (Veduta della Pieve di S. Giovanni di Siena) (2012)
Natura Morta #11 (Veduta di Castiglione Fiorentino) (2012)

2. **La Figura nella Veduta** works ('The figure in the Landscape')
Edition number 10 – Dry mounted and framed
La Figura nella Veduta #1 (Veduta di S. Piero a Sieve) (2011)
La Figura nella Veduta #2 (Veduta della Piazza dell'Annunziata) (2012)
*La Figura nella Veduta #3 (Veduta dell'Oratorio della Terra di
S.Giovanni)* (2012)
La Figura nella Veduta #4 (Veduta del Giardino Agrario) (2011)

3. **Untitled works from the Embodied series** (2009-10)
Framed size 186cm(h) x 115.5cm(w) Edition number 20
– *Untitled #10* and *Untitled #9* (2009-10)
Framed size 121cm(h) x 94.5cm(w) Edition number 20
– *Untitled #4*, *Untitled #2* and *Untitled #3* (2009-10)

4. **Untitled works from A La Mode series** (2012)
Edition number 10 – Dry mounted and framed
– *Untitled #3*, *Untitled #1* and *Untitled #2* (2012)

5. **Hermaphrodite** (2010)
Print size 100cm(h) x 110cm(w) Unframed artist proof

6. **Cavort from the Boudoir series** (2010)
Unframed artist proof
Print size 205cm(h) x 144cm(w)

7. **Blonde and brunette in Europe** (2012)
Edition number 10 – Dry mounted and framed
Print size: 60cm(h) x 60cm(w)



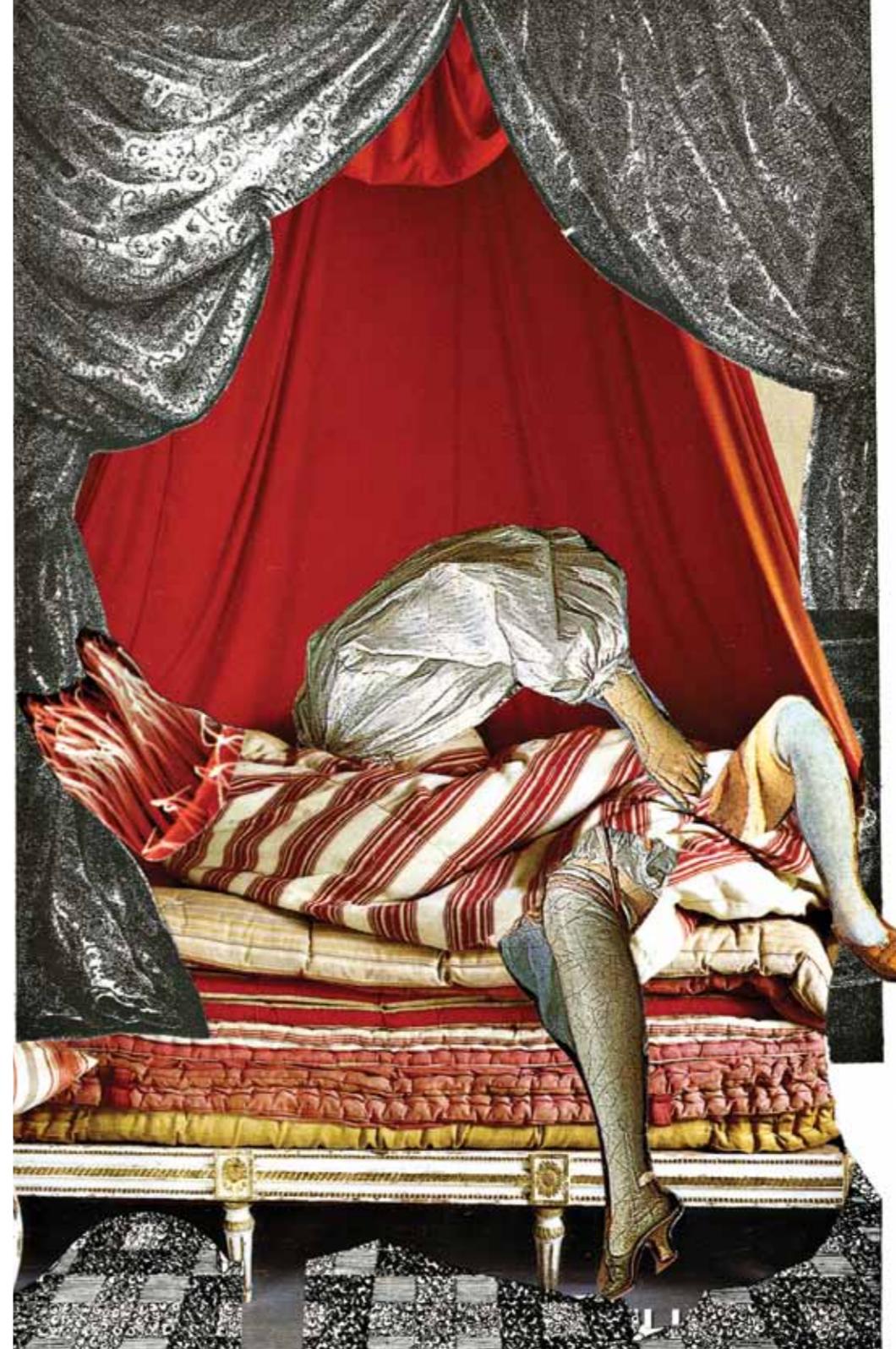
Artist Bio Sophia Xeros-Constantinides

Sophia Xeros-Constantinides' art explores the female form and questions what it is to be human. Her art-practice is characterized by appropriation and juxtaposition, which manifest in her collage works on paper and in her prints and drawings. These works challenge integrity and identity, recall surrealistic and uncanny forces and give expression to alternative realities.

She was a selected exhibitor in the 2010 Swan Hill Print & Drawing Prize, in the 2010 Beleura National Works on Paper Exhibition at the Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery, and in the 2010 Fremantle Print Prize.

Xeros-Constantinides is a Post-Graduate PhD student with the Faculty of Art, Design & Architecture at Monash University, Caulfield. She has exhibited prints at the *Impact-7* International Printmaking Conference at Monash University in September 2011, and presented a conference paper entitled *Fertile Bodies: Fearsome space, collage and the maternal print archive*.

The artist at home.
Photograph taken by Konrad Winkler (2012)



Sophia Xeros-Constantinides
Cavort (2010) from the *Boudoir* series (detail)
Digital artist proof print from original collage
on archival Hahnemule photorag paper

Acknowledgements

My appreciation is extended to Monash University Faculty of Art, Design & Architecture, for the opportunities afforded to study art and art-making with talented and dedicated people. To my post-graduate supervisors, Dr. Caroline Durré and Professor Bernard Hoffert, thanks for your continuing support of my growth and development as an artist, and as an aspiring researcher.

To fellow Postgrads who ventured abroad with me in June 2011 to Italy, I raise a glass in memory of enjoyable hours spent in the heat on the roof-terrace of Hotel Flora, Prato, listening to the pealing of bells and the ambulance sirens, captured by Gordon Monro in his sound-scape recording. And everywhere we ventured we feasted on exquisite imagery, collaged to perfection in the Biennale's *Tra* Exhibition at the Palazzo Fortuny in Venice.

Closer to home, I am indebted to those who, in our computer-age, still find interest in imagery born of old-fashioned paper, scissors and glue. It is becoming increasingly difficult for artists and gallerists to survive in the present economic climate, and so I am particularly grateful for the opportunity to exhibit *Earthly Delights* with Frank Malerba and Ruth Parkinson in Jackman Gallery's fine space.

It has been my pleasure to work with Christopher Pennings of J.C.P. to transform some of the small original collages to a bigger scale (as limited-edition prints) for exhibition. His keen artistic eye has been integral to the visual outcomes. Konrad Winkler deserves mention for his photographic portrait, and for his acumen in relation to things visual – I value the conversations we have about art and life.

It has been exciting to publish this small catalogue to accompany the show.

I am indebted to Dr Wendy Garden and Esther Gyorki for their fine essays and to Bronwyn Oster for her creative flair with the catalogue design.

Once again my appreciation and gratitude to family and friends for their forbearance in the face of my singular passion.

SOPHIA XEROS-CONSTANTINIDES

Melbourne, Australia, July 2012

Sophia Xeros-Constantinides is a Post-Graduate PhD student with the Faculty of Art, Design & Architecture at Monash University.

Sophia Xeros-Constantinides' art can be found at bittersweetembrace.com

Dedicated, on the anniversary of the Australian High Court Mabo decision, to imaginative contemplation serving justice and equality of opportunity.

And to the child in us all – for as Paul Coelho (b.1947) has observed: "a child can teach an adult three things: to be happy for no reason, to always be busy with something, and to know how to demand with all [her] might that which [she] desires."



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Sophia Xeros-Constantinides
Veduta di S. Piero a Sieve (2011) (detail)
From the series *La Figura nella Veduta*



Veduta di S. Piero a Sieve

Sophia Xeros-Constantinides
Veduta del Giardino Agrario (2011) (detail)
From the series *La Figura nella Veduta*



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Veduta del Giardino Agrario