

Eleanor Antin Ronald Feldman

Drawn to recasting history through an operatic, largely imagined narrative, Eleanor Antin retells the epic saga of the elopement of Helen and the origin of the Trojan War in an exhibition of chromogenic prints (all 2007) titled "Helen's Odyssey." A filmmaker, photographer, and performance and installation artist, equipped with a large-format camera offering considerable depth of field, Antin proposes Helen as a creature of the gods (Zeus was her father) in a monumental grisaille tableau vivant, the 61-by-105¾-inch *Constructing Helen*. Artisans labor on marble sculptures of athletes in the middle distance as a sculptor brandishes a caliper to measure the nipple of a gargantuan sculpted Helen (realized by Antin through the wonders of Photoshop).

Helen appears in two 38-by-73-inch versions of the event that launched her to stardom, *The Judgement of Paris (after Rubens)*—*Light Helen*, which pictures her as a blonde, and a *Dark Helen* version of

the same work, in which she is a brunette. Each Helen is inserted at the edge of a classical landscape where, in this comically stagy moment, Paris is urged by the god Mercury to award the golden apple of discord to the most beautiful goddess on display. There is Athena, goddess of war, dressed in camouflage, brandishing an assault rifle; Aphrodite, goddess of love, in a claret-colored gown with clinging putto; and Zeus's consort Hera, in a maid's uniform, pushing a vacuum cleaner. (Choosing Aphrodite, Paris wins her favor and, with her aid, runs off to Troy with Helen, precipitating the Trojan War and enshrining her in history as a world-class beauty.)

Casting Call is a tableau worthy of Jacques-Louis David. Here, a giddy Helen shines in the company of an assortment of would-be models. Seated at a table laden with brushes and a large blank canvas, a long-haired, red-robed artist raises his hand to Helen in greeting. She responds in kind. Corinthian columns and drapes frame the scene. Elaborating on Helen's progress, Antin introduces what may be the dark Helen in the midst of *Plaisir d'Amour (after Couture)*. Faithful to the composition of Thomas Couture's *Romans During the Decadence*, the photograph features a lavishly columned interior and a cast of indulgent revelers in jewel-toned robes.

A 16-minute DVD shown on a plasma screen traces the preparations for Antin's ambitious program and documents the transformation of flesh to gray marble, the placement of an arm, a peek of underwear, women with rollers in their hair, the near-omnipresent putto (a curly-haired, winged child, draped in white) patiently waiting. When Antin cries "Action," her actors pose and remain still. Each shoot ends with a round of applause.

—Edward Leffingwell

Eleanor Antin: *The Judgement of Paris (after Rubens)*—*Light Helen*, 2007, chromogenic print, 38 by 73 inches; at Ronald Feldman.

