

Raphaëlle Peale; Venus rising from the sun



**'Venus rising from the sea'
1822
oil on canvas
Raphaëlle Peale**

First Impressions:

When I first look at this work, I see a cloth floating in the air; yet at closer inspection I realise it's being held up with strings and that there is a hint of someone standing behind the cloth as there are arms visible and a foot. The painting makes me think about my own shirt being hung up in the garden – the resemblance seems uncanny because of the strange dark background surrounding the cloth.

Strangely enough is the fact that there is no visible sea within the painting although the title suggests Venus is *rising from the sea*. It's as if Venus just had a shower and is standing behind shower curtains combing her hair.

Basic elements:

Contrasting colours are used to create the sense that the cloth seems to be floating. The stark white of the cloth brings out the cloth into the foreground, while the dark brown background suggests the background. There are also undertones

used to suggest the overlapping as the cloth edges drape over itself. Subtle variations in these tones have been skilfully used to create a realistic 'wavy' cloth,

Content:

A cloth is hung up in the foreground and there is a woman standing behind the cloth in the distance which is suggested by the size difference between the cloth and the woman. The woman – The God Venus is *Rising out of the sea* as suggested by the title.

Mood and atmosphere:

The painting is quite unique in that it doesn't evoke any real mood; The white cloth suggesting purity with the God Venus behind it – undominating, creates a peaceful scene. However, because we are only given limited visibility of what lies behind the cloth, we don't know what to expect, and so there is a sense of apprehension.

Context:

Raphaelle Peale was born in Philadelphia (1774–1825) is *Venus Rising from the Sea--A Deception*, is his most famous painting. Drawing on a familiar mythological theme in European painting, Peale took the title from a work (circa 1772) by the English painter James Barry and used a few elements of the original as well.

Composition:

This painting seems to be carefully planned as the composition although simple is visually complex; because of the nature of *Trompe l'oeil* (trick of the eye). The cloth at the front is supposedly smaller the God Venus behind the cloth, however distance and perspective has been used to create a size difference which challenges what we may see as normal. The cloth itself is rather complex because of the interesting use of overlapping to create a sense of realism and to add some life to a supposedly lifeless cloth.

Links:

I chose this painting by Peale as it is quite unique; I was attracted to the interesting depiction of the cloth dominating the image. I find the way overlapping and contrasts to create shadows is very interesting. This concept has influenced me with my work as I have studied the nature of clothes and overlapping and shadows for my 'identity' work.

Also, the way the cloth dominates the foreground and Venus standing at the back to emphasize a size difference is an interesting concept which I have thought of incorporating within my 'identity' project as I'm focusing in on interesting compositions creating interesting scale variations such as a close up into a still life scene in which a tennis ball dominates the foreground with larger objects in the in the mid and background seen as smaller objects. This is typical of the style *Trompe l'oeil* (trick of the eye).

What's different however is that my work doesn't include any people as Peale's painting does.

Evaluation:

I like the way Peale creates a scale variation, however , I still feel the painting is lacking – he could possibly have included other objects or people in the background or even just a hint, to create an even deeper sense of depth within the painting.. If I could ask Peale a question, I would ask him what interests him in the *Trompe l'oeil* style and what inspired him to paint this painting and why he called it '*...rising from the sea*' when there is no visible sea., or did he mean something else – possibly a *bath*?