

# Petzel

KEITH EDMIER

*Her Soul*

Launched October 20, 2020

Petzel is pleased to present the online exhibition, *Her Soul*, a show of recent works by sculptor Keith Edmier. The exhibition encompasses four sculptures made by Edmier between 2016–2020, alongside related historical materials. The sculptures, titled: *Inspiration*, *La Fornarina*, *Undine*, and *Beatrice Cenci*, all share a number of components. Mainly, they center on the lives of women – real, historical, and mythological, all intertwined. Each of the works tells the story of four connected artists, all of whom dealt with great adversity to their lives and careers at the expense of well-known men in positions of power. Edmier often employs amalgamated timelines and multiple forms of reproduction in his work (both physically in sculpture casting and printing, as well as in a biographical sense of actors embodying others on film). Building on these themes and his background in the film industry, all of the sculptures weave female film actors into their narratives and or formal elements. Of these four subjects – three have worked as artist’s models in their lifetime or played one on film. All four have art historical relationships.

*Inspiration* tells the story of artist’s model and actress Audrey Munson. In 1919 Munson began publicly naming the men who had tormented and harassed her throughout her career, including the American newspaper proprietor William Randolph Hearst, who went on to use his media empire to publish scandalous stories about her personal affairs in the papers. Edmier has sculpted a portrait of Munson based on a description of a life-cast made of her for her first film (also entitled *Inspiration* [1915]). Rendered in hyper-realistic detail with a silver breathing tube placed in her mouth to represent the process of producing the original life-cast as well as a play on the title, to inspire, to inhale, or to breathe in life.

With *Beatrice Cenci*, Edmier weaves together the legacy of Louisa Lander, an American sculptor who traveled to Rome at the age of nineteen, and Harriet Hosmer, one of the most distinguished female American sculptors of the Nineteenth Century. In 1855 Lander arrived in Rome and joined a prominent circle of expatriate artists and writers – only to have her budding career thwarted due to an alleged affair with famed novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne. In Rome, Lander befriended fellow artist and expatriate Harriet Hosmer, who fought and challenged many prejudices towards female sculptors of the time. While together in Italy, Hosmer finished one of her most famous sculptures, of historical figure *Beatrice Cenci* [1856]. Cenci figures prominently in Hawthorne’s novel *The Marble Faun* [1860], in which one of the main characters, Miriam (who is considered to be based on Louisa Lander), paints a portrait of her. Edmier has cast Beatrice Cenci in pink dental stone, based on the head of Hosmer’s sculpture and executed in the same scale at 3/4 life-size. With yet a final historical twist, Edmier models off of the likeness of American actress Adrienne La Russa, who played Cenci in a film made by Italian director Lucio Fulci in 1969.

In February of 1859 Louisa Lander began working on a small-scale statue titled *Undine* [now lost], commissioned by an American patron, Mary Warren. The sculpture was to be situated within a fountain of Lander’s design. Edmier’s *Undine* sculpture takes as its inspiration the description of Lander’s lost work, as well as two of roughly five contemporaneous *Undine* sculptures by other Nineteenth-Century artists which still exist today: *Undine Receiving Her Soul* [ca.1855] by Chauncey Ives and *Undine* [1867] by Joseph Mozier. The scale of Edmier’s iteration is the same as Lander’s lost original – four feet high. The figure stands on a base surrounded by shells, and serves as a portrait of Lander, bearing her likeness based on the one existing image of her, an engraving. Produced in synthetic materials, *Undine* clasps a sterling silver sculpting tool in her hands above her head and is draped in cast fishnet resembling a

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veiled mourner, echoing the shawl of Lander's most well-known sculpture, *Virginia Dare* [1859].

Lastly, Edmier's copper relief *La Fornarina* memorializes Czech actress Lída Baarová. Baarová is depicted in her acting role as Margarita Luti, the mistress and model to the High Renaissance painter Raphael, in the 1944 Italian film of the same title. *La Fornarina* alludes to the archetypal story of the artist-muse relationship in the Western tradition, yet for Baarová, it was anything but that. At the height of her career, Baarová's affair with Joseph Goebbels led her to be blacklisted and eventually, experience a nervous breakdown. Edmier explores the theme of *La Fornarina* in his sculpture by swapping Luti for Baarová in Raphael's *La Donna Velata* [1516], giving the Czech actress a High Renaissance flourish.

Additional supplementary ephemera related to the artists and men that they were connected to (at great consequence) are also incorporated into the exhibition, below.