

Emma Jacobson

Professor Cohen

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Power Is A Double Edged Sword

Every aspect of the Metropolitan Museum of Art exudes power. The huge staircase to the doors, the marble floor and towering ceilings, the well-dressed citizens of New York City lining the halls, and most of all, the awe-inspiring, larger than life art collection for the ages. No matter how many times I visit the Met, the same feeling still washes over me when I step into the hall after checking in. A sensation of wonder and smallness, like I'm a speck on a diagram of Earth, looking from above down the maze of rooms and stairwells that make up the museum. The power of so many artistic legacies and histories and stories together in this one palace of creation stops me in my tracks. This was why I have chosen to curate my exhibition around the theme of POWER.

*Eternal Springtime* by Auguste Rodin will be the first piece in the exhibition. When I first laid eyes on this piece, I was struck by its sense of tragedy and desperation. It was displayed alone on a solitary podium, and carved in a pure, milky white marble. *Eternal Springtime* is sophisticated and idealistic, the two figures' bodies sculpted and lean. While the position is deeply passionate, with the woman knelt on the floor, back arched in a graceful surrender, the piece is also very tasteful, almost tame, with neither their genitals nor faces in full view.

*Eternal Springtime* appears to depict something so perfect that life could not possibly continue on without it. The male figure kneels with one arm outstretched and the other cradling his fragile lover. I see him as more in power than he is in love. The female figure, however, with her body almost entirely supported by the male figure's embrace, is much

more in love or in need of love, but not in power. *Eternal Springtime* is not just another statue about love. It is about the eternal anguish of loving someone, needing someone, who doesn't love or need you. It is about loving someone in power, which has always and will always be happening, and for this reason it is truly timeless.

*A Bedroom in Bernstorff Palace near Copenhagen* by Johan Vilhelm Gertner will be the second piece in the exhibition. This ethereal oil painting offers a different take on power. *A Bedroom in Bernstorff Palace near Copenhagen* depicts a bedroom interior straight out of a fairytale, with walls covered in gauzy pink floral fabric gathered at the top like a circus tent for a princess. The mirror reflects portions of the seemingly spacious room that otherwise cannot be seen. A tufted ottoman sits atop a plush carpet beside twin night tables that are designed far more for show than for function. The power present in *A Bedroom in Bernstorff Palace near Copenhagen* is the power of privacy, of luxury, of comfort and peace.

Power, here, takes the shape of a soft and inviting room that is always vacant and waiting for you. A place of quiet and safety where you are protected and surrounded by beauty and opulence, a place no one can disturb, interrupt, or penetrate. *A Bedroom in Bernstorff Palace near Copenhagen* evokes a fascination in me comprised of an almost equal desire and jealousy. It is the room of someone with the power to chase beauty instead of survival.

*The Burning of Sodom (formerly "The Destruction of Sodom")* by Camille Corot will be the third piece in the exhibition. Unlike the previous two works, there is nothing beautiful about *The Burning of Sodom*. There is a different form of power present here in the biblical scene, a higher power. The color palette is oppressive, rusty browns and greens and orange like the bleak aftermath of a war. The faces are steeped in shadow, taking the shape of sunken skulls atop bodies of the living. One girl hides her face in fear of what is happening and what is to come.

The figures in *The Burning of Sodom* are the victims of power, not the wielders. The oil painting seems to be attempting to evoke sympathy for these figures, who bear the burden of a family trying to continue on as an all powerful being smites them with destruction and fire. To me they carry an innocence about them, especially the figure that is left behind and turning to dust, as though there was nothing they could do to prevent this inevitable end from catching up to them, forever on the run from the earth and sky itself. *The Burning of Sodom* is memorable because of its cruelty and crushing sense of bleakness, an illustration of what misuse of great power can do to the powerless.

*Nefertiti–Miles Davis* by Awol Erizku will be the fourth piece in the exhibition. *Nefertiti–Miles Davis* depicts an intersection of cultural and political power, connecting power with royalty, as it is a depiction of the bust of Nefertiti, queen of the 18th Dynasty of Ancient Egypt. In contrast to *The Burning of Sodom*, *Nefertiti–Miles Davis* offers a look at using power for good. Queen Nefertiti was known to be a well-loved ruler and powerful woman who changed the way women were viewed in politics forever.

The statue, a bust coated in mirror tile like a disco ball, was impossible to ignore. It commanded my attention and caused me to look up instinctually as I entered the small, dark room where it was hung from the ceiling, spinning in circles. *Nefertiti–Miles Davis* is a symbol of power through its ties to royalty, its beauty and flashiness, and its iconic namesake, who is still admired, discussed, and remembered to this day.

Power is a shapeshifter. It takes different forms, inspiring awe, fear, or many times both. Power can even take the shape of our beloved Metropolitan Museum of Art, which, while providing a magical haven for the study and appreciation of the arts, has also been accused of misusing its power, specifically by trafficking and looting antiquities for their collection from regions like Nepal and Kashmir. My POWER exhibition aims to dissect the

many ways in which power can manifest itself and explore the idea that power is a double edged sword, often utilising beauty to make the cruel more palpable.



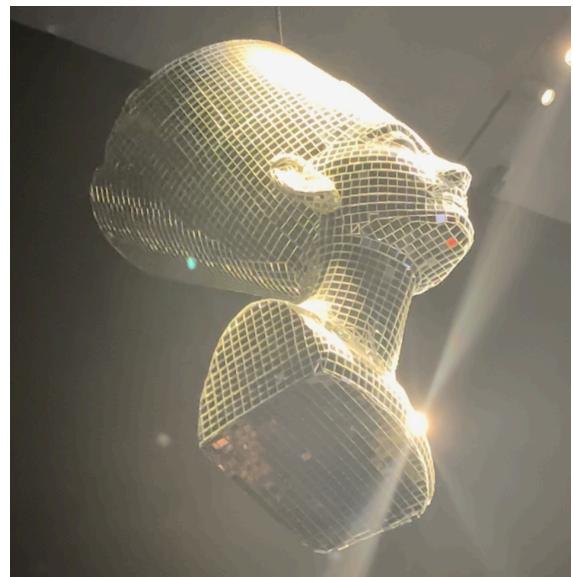
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