



**Every Rape
in the
Met Museum**

Macushla Robinson





This book is made up of text drawn from the Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection database available through their website. The text includes cataloguing information such as the title, medium, dimensions, and provenance of a piece, as well as the contextual catalogue entries from which museum labels are drawn.

The project began with textual analysis of the language that the museum uses to describe images of rape. I searched the collection database for the keyword 'rape', which returned 181 results. Not all of these pieces have rape in the title: some have it in the description. I have assembled the following text using something from each work that came up in that search result (with the exception of two: I omitted those works that were titled 'the rape of the lock' since that title is allegorical). I have not changed the sequence of the words, nor have I added anything at all to the text. I have extracted words and sentences and arranged them on the page to give it emphasis, weight and rhythm.

In the process of extraction and arrangement, patterns emerge. A few mythological rapes get repeated over and over again. There are, for example, 34 works titled variations on The Rape of Europa in the museum's collection, but many more that depict the same story without using the word 'rape'. These scenes of rape are stock standard, reinscribed ad nauseum to prove the artist's grasp on art history and mastery of materials. Each catalogue entry is a study in fine-grained variations; the way the light falls, the use of fabric to hide and in turn reveal flesh, the twisted limbs, the serpentine lines, the verisimilitude of the pose, the choice of colours, the object's various owners before it came into the museum. Who best brought out the pathos of the scene? Who best eroticized the fleeing body, the grasping hands?

Take, for example, the catalogue entry (which sits beside the work on display as a wall label) for Poussin's painting *The Abduction of the Sabine Women* on view at The Met Fifth Avenue in Gallery 621. The label is a total of five sentences long. The first two sentences give a summary of the story that the painting depicts. The third sentence, which is arguably the linchpin of the label because it suggests the significance of the work and thus why the viewer should care, emphasises Poussin's mastery of his subject: his use of this oft-repeated scene of abduction and rape represents an "the opportunity to display his command of gesture and pose and his knowledge of ancient sculpture and architecture." The fourth sentence describes one figure in the painting, presumably to address the oddness of the yellow garment to modern viewers who are likely unfamiliar with it. The final sentence addresses the provenance of the work, naming two famous owners whose possession of the piece only add to its historical significance and financial value. It's almost as if the rape were a blank slate upon which the artist inscribes himself. The themes of mastery and ownership are ubiquitous.

This is unsurprising.

When you say a word over and over again it loses all meaning. When you paint or draw or sculpt a rape over and over again, the rape disappears from the scene. It leaves us wondering what rape actually means here, in the sanctified, enclosed spaces of the museum. What does it mean to describe the rape of Proserpina as a popular romantic scene? Whose consent was not sought? To whom did a woman's virtue belong? And how was that virtue, and its theft, a weapon of war and a tool in the inscription of power? What does it mean that the rape and abduction of the Sabine women was followed by the Sabine women intervening, years later, to keep their fathers and husbands from killing each other? And what, above all, does it mean to find them beautiful?

What does it mean that we don't name the women known to have been raped by these artists on the labels of their work? Or the benefactors whose names grace the walls of the museum in plaques and dedications? The title, Every Rape in the Met Museum, is an ambitious impossibility. There can be no comprehensive inventory, there are too many moments that did not get that name, that went uncatalogued. There can be no real grasp on the magnitude of violence, possession and mastery accumulated and sanctioned here, nor have we reckoned with the complexity, the ethical entanglements, of such adulation.

Europa : 38
The Sabine Women : 24
Proserpina or Persephone : 16
Ganymede: 11
Lucretia : 8
Arethousa : 1
Caenis : 4
Diana : 1
Rebecca : 1
Orithya : 5
Cassandra : 2
Tamar : 1
Helen : 3
Joseph : 1
Dinah : 1
Hippodameia : 1
Jole : 3
Philomena : 3
Sudaba : 1
Cephalus : 1
Amymone : 1
Sita : 1
Nameless : 14

Women artists
Sophia Blesendorf
Kathe Kollwitz
Vivian Westwood
Lala Rukh

Europa

The Rape of Europa
and Mercury
and the Three Graces

Decoration

case and dial

Gift.

The exterior of this watchcase depicts the Rape
both miniature
versions of paintings
in any case
a reverse image
rarely signed
the best enamellers
so adept

enameled gold

Movement

gilded brass and steel

partly

blued Horology

an individual hand is difficult
if not impossible

these exquisite
parallels

emblazoned with
the arms
the case
the favored
the most important
the royal court
the inventory

an eight-day movement

patrons with a special liking
for enameled gold

Rape of Europa

A Gift

Italian

Rape of Europa

Date
Medium
Dimensions
Classification
Credit
Accession

Rape of Europa

ca.
dry point

Sheet (Trimmed)
Prints
Gift of
Number

Rape of Europa

ca.

Rape of Europa

gold
enamel
diamonds
emeralds
pearls
rubies

metalwork
gold
platinum

credit
accession

The Rape of Europa

French

Paris

Red chalk
Drawings

Rape of Europa

One of twenty-two panels
forming the ceiling
from the Palace,
called Il Magnifico,

The general distribution
and partition of the ceiling appears
to derive from that of a vaulted
and painted ceiling in
Nero's Golden House in Rome.

Rape of Europa

One of twenty-two panels
forming the ceiling
from the Palace,
called Il Magnifico,

The general distribution
and partition of the ceiling appears
to derive from that of a vaulted
and painted ceiling in
Nero's Golden House in Rome.

– especially sarcophagi.

The Rape of Europa

after

(unidentified collector)

stamped in black ink, belonging to

The Rape of Europa
(Iupiter tauri imagine Europam rapit)

lettered
bottom
center

Bit Boss with

the Rape of Europa

Copper alloy

bronze

gold

gilded

boss

bull

anonymous

goldsmith

Equestrian

Equipment-Bits

ornamental

decorated

a scene in relief

the abduction of the princess

Europa by Jupiter

cast with imitation pearls,

diamonds and fleur-de-lis

scene seems

at this time

mass produced

relief and chasing

a talented goldsmith

a unique luxury piece

a wealthy rider.

Arms and Armour

Objects of Art