

## **Robert Graham at Ace Gallery “The Female Form”**

Featured in the Beverly Hills Ace Gallery, Robert Graham's nudes occupied both floors of the spacious gallery. Only female nudes existed in Graham's exhibit entitled “The Female Form,” and every female body was physically flawless and appeared to be under the age of thirty. His knowledge of youthful female anatomy is evident, even glaring. What about wrinkles or scars? Is it not the imperfections of the human body that make people beautiful and interesting? Neglecting the distinctions of gender, age, and body type, Graham created an army of beautiful, young, female robots. He refused to acknowledge the peculiar individuality of each human being. He even fell short in creating a dynamism or tension within the poses he chose. On the contrary it would appear that Graham utilized his artistic ventures to satisfy more carnal needs rather than academic studies.

Graham's models were young, attractive, and often placed in compromising positions. When his models do wear clothes, they are most likely scantily clad coyly revealing their panties or lack there of. The poses of Graham's sculptures rarely stressed the movement of the body, but simply accentuated the sexual anatomy. Often poses blatantly portrayed women in vulnerable, submissive positions. A few figures lay on their stomachs, knees bent, feet in the air, and hands behind their head as if they had been ordered to do so by a police officer--or in this case Robert Graham. Other female figures lay on their backs on a pedestal with their feet resting on a lower pedestal so the genitalia is prominently displayed with their arms crossed over and hiding their face. The realistic rendering is flawless and breathtaking, but the sexual implications linger uncomfortably.

Skillfully executed with a looser, gestural technique Graham's group of tall, vertical, charcoal drawings stand apart from his usual hyper-realism. However *Klara*, the young, vulnerable figure portrayed in the series, shyly spread her legs as she sat on a stool or stood facing the viewer. *Klara* appeared to be fourteen years old.

Considering today's booming adult movie industry, Graham's video “studies” of young women screamed pornography. One video entitled *Gina* from 1998 featured a young, voluptuous woman dancing seductively like a stripper. The video work focused

on various sections of women's bodies, often conveniently cropping the head out of the frame. The video screens were set up similar to desktop computer monitors on a low ledge with several rolling office chairs in the middle of the small, intimate room. The resemblance to internet porn could not be more obvious, although it did not appear to be an intentional comparison.

Ace Gallery dedicated one room solely to Graham's female busts. Unlike traditional busts Graham included the entirety of the breasts ending the sculpture at the navel. It appeared to be more of a study of breasts, again young and sensual, than a series of portraits. Anjelica Huston modeled for one of the busts, reminding the art world of Graham's celebrity connection. Athlete turned model, Gabriella Reece, also posed for Graham and is featured in the exhibit.

One sculpture included in "The Female Form" successfully portrayed emotional, human struggle with a dynamic pose of the figure that goes beyond the sexualized aspect of the female body. *Jennifer*, a seated figure in cast bronze made in 1996, clutched and pulled back on her big toe creating an expressive, physical tension. Graham's work would leave a greater impression on his viewers if he emphasized human emotion with more dynamism. Despite its sexist implication Graham's exhibit proved his talent as an impeccable draftsman in the sculptural arts.