



Shark Lady in a Balldress

Date

1988

Primary Maker

Dorothy Cross

Medium

Bronze

Dimensions

110 x 70 x 70 cm

Description

Dorothy Cross attended the Crawford Municipal School of Art, later studying 3-D design at Leicester Polytechnique and silver-smithing in Amsterdam. She uses an eclectic range of materials in her work including finely wrought silver, found objects, video and musical performance.

With these, she develops long-established interests in issues such as gender, sexuality, authority and eroticism, seeking to challenge traditionally accepted stereotypes and conventions associated with them. She draws frequently on Jungian and psychoanalytical theory in her exploration of human identity. Shark Lady in a Balldress confronts us with apparent contradictions. Highly symbolic, sharks are commonly seen to signify threat, aggression and fear. They are also generally assumed to be male. Here, the 'aggressor' turns out to be female and protrudes from a delicate ball gown of woven bronze, although she is also ambiguously phallic, with breasts readily interpreted as testicles, referencing Jung's anima/animus theory. Perhaps she is 'dressed to kill' - we are certainly tempted to acknowledge the pun. The work is both grotesque and endearing, repellent and wittily amusing, but succeeds in providing a strong challenge to traditional presumptions of dominance and aggression as male qualities, and the female as docile, and essentially a passive object of desire.