



ELEANOR RAPPE

PLATO'S STUDIO:
fragments & Restorations

ON BEAUTY

Πλατο ωας α πισιοναριψ
Ωηο σαιδ τηατ Βεαυτιψ
Αλωνε οφ αλλ της φορμισ
Χαν βε περχειωεδ βψ σιγητ
Βεαυτιψ αλωνε
Χαν αωακεν υσ
Το της ηιγηερ ωορλδ
Τηυσ παιντινγ ωας αχτυαλλψ
Τηε χηιεφ μετηοδ
Οφ ινστρυχιον
Φορ ηισ μορε
Αδωανχεδ διςχιπλεσ

ΣΑΡΑ Λ. ΡΑΠΠΕ



Portrait of Plato

ON BEAUTY

Plato was a visionary
Who said that Beauty
Alone of all the forms
Can be perceived by sight
Beauty alone
Can awaken us
To the higher world
Thus painting was actually
The chief method
Of instruction
For his more
Advanced disciples

SARA L. RAPPE

ELEANOR RAPPE sets out to prove Plato's theses by using art as scientific methodology. Her labyrinths, studio objects, ruins, and parchment maps of archaeological sites point us to a world that Plato himself created—or so she would have us believe. Unlike the scientist who starts by testing in order to prove theories, Rappe already understands and accepts what she has discovered. Her proof lies in the intrinsic credibility generated by her art: her paintings, objects, and installations.

The work is speculative, but not unlike the work of modern architects who have completed buildings from the drawings of Antoni Gaudí and Frank Lloyd Wright. Eleanor Rappe has purposefully entered Plato-the-artist's mind and visually interpreted his intent.

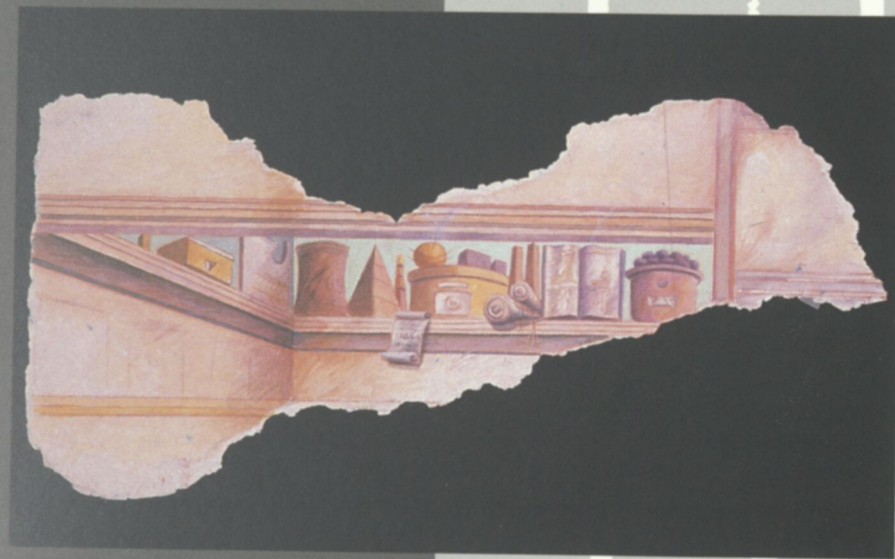
The installations and individual works in this exhibition—fifth in the Laboratory Exhibitions Series of the Museum of Fine Arts—demonstrate Rappe's deep concentration on the work of Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle: their ideas and their production. Through the filter of her own complex mind she brings us a faux scenario that is, perhaps, true to its origins.

STUART A. ASHMAN

Stuart Ashman is Executive Director of the Museum of Spanish Colonial Art in Santa Fe, and the former Director of the Museum of Fine Arts.

PLATO AND THE JUMBLE SALE

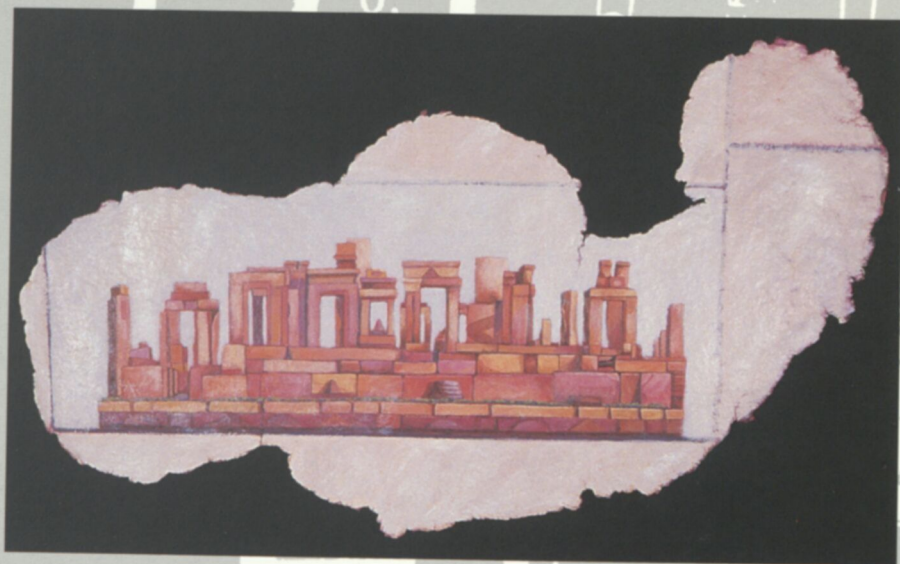
Truth may lie at the bottom of what we know—under the discarded sweaters and socks of accumulated Knowledge. Truth, however, also may be the empty space on the shelf where lint and dust and, perhaps, ether coalesce into a pattern that we hope is meaningful, for we've built a pile of assumptions based on that pattern. No one is more at the bottom of Truth-building in Western society than Plato—hailed as the father of Western philosophy, oft credited as the text to which all other philosophy is a footnote. The Athenian is hard to ignore. Eleanor Rappe is concerned with both Truth and Art and how we come to make assumptions about each.



This installation is not an art exhibition in the usual sense of the word. It is, rather, an archaeological presentation. The work is a discovery or excavation of what only exists in fragments, of what has been hidden from view, of what time has all but forgotten. In this sense, *Plato's Studio* recreates the ancient art of memory; it focuses on the emblematic relationship between object and world. If Platonism is idealism, the art of the *Studio* is a fragmentary idealism. The artist offers the fragments as tokens of a much greater vision, a recollection not just of the past, but a meditation on the wholeness of time.

The playful inventiveness encountered in the *Studio* relies on an invocation of the past, as if to assert that no object is complete in itself. The modern world is largely a collection of objects that are taken to have value in and of themselves. The discovery of *Plato's Studio* allows the artist to rework some of these objects backwards in time, back into the life of the world, back into memory, and so, lift them out of the world.

— SARA L. RAPPE, UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN



ABOVE LEFT: *The Shelf of Forms*
LOWER RIGHT: *Presence of the Archetypes*

Much as Aristotle has been associated with analysis of the written arts, Plato has long been considered to have disdained the visual arts, especially painting. The evidence most often cited for this is his allegory of the cave in which painting is at a third remove from reality. At the center, closest to Truth, are the forms, then come instantiations of reality and, finally, imitations. The idea of a bed is the form; the actual bed, handmade by an artisan according to a plan, is the instantiation; while the depiction of a bed in a painting is the imitation. *Plato's Studio: Fragments and Restorations* makes us question this definition—is the Truth or truth, perhaps, the inverse?

Professor Yun Lee Too has written for this exhibition:

Maybe the findings of the *Studio* are not after all depictions of the real universe that the philosopher writes about in his works; perhaps the art itself is the final reality, of which the written works are copies.

With Yun Lee Too's suggestion in the forefront of our minds, we can turn from the heady abstractions of philosophers and philologists to the things themselves. In *Plato's Studio* the artist proposes to expose the results of more than ten years of excavations from Omega House Studios, now known as *Plato's Studio*. Like all excavations, indeed like most knowledge-gathering ventures, the evidence collected is fragmentary and partial. Conceptual glue is required to bind it all together. Rappe challenges us to do just that.

What can we make of the portraits of Homer and Socrates, the works of art depicting mathematical equations, and the models of Platonic solids? Did Plato

use these objects to instruct his students . . . or did he hide them in the back room for more private explorations?

Perhaps the biggest challenge Rappe sets forth with her accumulation of goods is to ask us to consider the "function" of art. Can art be a way of learning about the world or learning about oneself, or both? What role, we continue to wonder, did art play in creating Knowledge? If we can suss it out here, in the conceptual pile of laundry that is the result of a fictive archaeological dig, maybe it can help us in thinking about what art does for us in our everyday lives.

In the artist's words:

Essentially this project is in the nature of a collaboration between myself and scholars and other interested parties. It questions the validity and nature of scholarship, the distinction between the true and the false, and the ways we accept or reject information. To what extent are we influenced in our beliefs by convincing labeling, the right context, and "official" presentation? Are we aware of the . . . danger inherent in our desire to believe? Although the line between reality and fantasy is often crossed in the presentation of the *Studio*, the underlying issues carry connotations worth serious consideration.

Eleanor Rappe walks the line between perceived impressions and reality in this installation of "fictional archeology," fifth in the Laboratory Exhibitions Series.

She asks viewers to question not just what they know but how they know it, and the forms through which they know it. Plato—whose writings deride artists as imitators and fabricators far removed from Truth—is exposed in this exhibition as a "closet artist" himself.

We are grateful to the Museum of New Mexico Foundation and to several anonymous donors for their generous financial support. The Museum and this project have flourished under Acting Director Mary Jebson. Pat Hall, Lisa Kirk, and Tom McCarthy spent many hours working on the evocative video that accompanies the exhibition. Sara Rappe





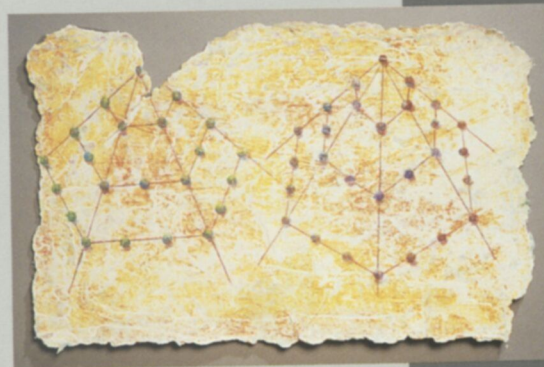
and a raft of other scholars contributed their know-how and humor. Charles Sloan spent many hours designing and installing *Plato's Studio*. Herb Lotz and Ford Robbins photographed the work with clarity of vision. Michael Sumner and Melody Sumner Carnahan of Burning Books supplied the inspired graphic design and editing that the project deserved. Stuart Ashman lent his active mind to this challenging work.

Richard Tobin put together a trenchant yet lighthearted panel that teased apart the ideas in the installation. And, we thank Eleanor Rappe for her art and her continuing investigations into the hidden recesses of Western culture.

ALINE CHIPMAN BRANDAUER
 Curator of Contemporary Art
 © 2001

One of the paintings affixed to a scroll seems to be a rendering of the entablature of the Parthenon in a severe state of disintegration, a view that is utterly impossible for the fourth century when Plato carried out his teachings under the gaze of the monument then less than a hundred years old. But the image does reflect the state of parts of the building after the seventeenth century. In the *Timaeus* Plato defined time as a moving image of eternity (*Timaeus* 37d). A philosopher/seer should be able to view time as a unit, not only as a movement paced according to number. Plato's projection of decay that prefigures the demise of a great period of civilization is remarkable, but not unique.

—JUNE W. ALLISON, OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY



ABOVE: *Equations*
 LEFT: *In the Season of Spring*
 AT TOP: *Outside the Gates*

The Athenian
 is hard to
 ignore.

Ἡ Ἀθηναία
 ἵσ' ἡαρδ' το
 ἱγγορε.

In my opinion the philosopher had only a shallow knowledge of the art of painting and the only reasons he refers to it so often are, A: being the most illusionistic of the representational arts, painting is, as it were, a ready-made metaphor for Plato's view of reality; and, B: painting was all over Athens during Plato's lifetime and he could presuppose a familiarity with it on the part of just about anyone frequenting the city. Conceivably he dabbled in the fine arts in his youth and gave them up for philosophy, in the same way that Socrates apparently gave up sculpture for speculation.

—EVA KEULS, UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Pyramids with Fruit and Water Jar: On loan from the private collection of Herr Dr. Prof. H.G. Fabrizious, Bern, this fragment is undoubtedly from *Plato's Studio*. The connection to Plato was made just prior to the opening of this exhibition by Frau Gudrun von Bülow of the Altertumsverein (Wien) after having stumbled on an entry in the diary of Prof. Fabrizious: "Imagine my surprise when I happened upon a fragment in the dirt representing pyramids, fruit, and a water jug. All of a sudden it came to me: Plato, in order to illustrate one of his main points in his dialogue, *Timaeus*, actually drew these objects, despite his usual railings against art and artists.

—RICHARD J. HOFFMAN,
SAN FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY

It is amazing how many people ask if it might be true that Plato did indeed have a studio. Thus, the exhibition makes a provocative statement engaging the public in an intellectually challenging debate dealing with the nature of scholarship, the transmission of information, and our own personal belief systems. None of the work has been drawn from a literal reading of Plato's dialogues, but creates its own level of imaginary art and culture—a kind of "parallel universe" which weaves in and out of our so-called real world. I like to think of these artifacts as if they have been recovered and then restored. To this end I have used many found objects in the construction of the artifacts. Rather than trying to achieve a uniform aesthetic ideal I accept as a premise that whatever comes to us from the past is beyond our control.

In Memoriam Bruce Weinberg: former student and colleague who made most of the paper used in this exhibition. Many thanks to Lisa Kirk and Pat Hall for their support and encouragement, and extra thanks to Pat for her many hours of plastering and sanding. I am grateful to all the scholars who have taken the time to contribute their learned thoughts and insights, and to Aline Brandauer for her belief in this work.

This project is in large part a collaboration with my daughter, Sara Rappe, a classicist at the University of Michigan. Sara has researched and written much of the text material and has always understood the conflation of imagination and reality. With love and thanks.

ELEANOR RAPPE



The Omega House Studios represent one of the most unusual discoveries of Greek art and artifacts. The unknown workshop was discovered by chance in 1983 by the American archaeologist Eleanor Rappe when she tried to retrieve a lucky coin that fell from her hand into a small hole in the mosaic floor in room number six. After a series of unsuccessful attempts to retrieve the coin, she began to enlarge the hole and soon discovered an opening and three steps leading down into what appeared to be a small room. After several days of excavation the archeologist arrived at the Sculpture Studio and eventually the Secret Room. Definitive evidence has since proven that this complex was the site of Plato's Workshop.

FRONT COVER: *Potsherds* (οστρακιά)
BACK COVER: *Symbolic Maze*
PHOTOGRAPHY: Herb Lotz and Ford Robbins
GRAPHIC DESIGN/EDITING: Burning Books



ELEANOR RAPPE was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. She received a Bachelor of Arts from Brooklyn College and a Master of Arts from Indiana University. In 1963–64 Rappe lived in Vienna, where she studied painting at the Akademie der Bildende Kunst and made her first visits to Rome and Pompeii. She has since traveled extensively throughout Greece and Turkey, the Middle East, Egypt, and Italy. The artist's studies of many of the sacred sites of antiquity inform her art; her work reflects her investigations of the visual and philosophical aspects of the classical world as both reality and potent symbol.

A member of the Los Angeles Printmakers Society, and the Southern Graphics Council, Rappe is a former president of the California Society of Printmakers. In June of 1996 she retired as Chairperson of the City College of San Francisco Art Department and moved to Santa Fe. Currently she is a member of the Visual Arts Advisory Council of the College of Santa Fe and serves on the steering committee of the Friends of Contemporary Art (foca); Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe.

Rappe's work is held by many public and corporate collections including the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Achenbach Foundation for the Graphic Arts; American Telephone & Telegraph; the Bendigo National Art Gallery in Victoria, Australia; the Minneapolis Institute of Fine Arts; the United States Embassy in Moscow; Claris in San Jose, California; Lucas Films; the M.D. Anderson Library at the University of Houston; the Portland Art Museum; the Oakland Museum; Bank of America, San Francisco; the Encyclopedia Britannica; and Caesars Palace, Las Vegas.

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

National Invitational Print Exhibition, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York, 1968

Recent American Graphics, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, California, 1971

Prints California, Oakland Museum, Oakland, California, 1975

California Printmakers in Great Britain, Print Council of Great Britain, London, England, 1975

Cærulea—Ruins and Restorations, San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, California, 1977 (collaboration)

Eleanor Rappe—Etchings, Triton Museum of Art, Santa Clara, California, 1979 (solo)

Treasures of Cærulea, M. H. de Young Memorial Museum, San Francisco, California, 1980 (collaboration)

Libro de Horas, Museo de Arte e Historia, Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, 1980

JPA—CSP Exchange Show, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum, Tokyo, Japan, 1985

Los Angeles Printmaking Society 9th National Exhibition, Wight Art Gallery, University of California, Los Angeles, California, 1986

Eleanor Rappe, Stanford University, School of Humanities, Palo Alto, California, 1988 (solo)

The Art of Illusion—The Musée, West Georgia College, Carrollton, Georgia, 1989 (solo)

Artists Books, Mills College, Oakland, California, 1989

US—UK Print Connection, Print Council of Great Britain Traveling Exhibition, 1989

ARTIST/Book, City College of San Francisco, San Francisco, California, 1996

EDGES + Interfaces, American Print Alliance, West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia, 1996

Pacific States Biennial, University of Hawaii, Hilo, Hawaii, 1996

New Mexico 2000, Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1999

Villa of the Mysteries in Pompeii: Ancient Ritual—Modern Muse, University of Michigan Art Museum, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 2000

Plato's Studio: Fragments and Restorations, Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 2001

EXHIBITION DATES:

March 16 — July 30, 2001

GALLERY TALKS:

Wednesdays, March 21
and July 4, 12:15 pm
by Museum admission

PUBLIC PROGRAMMING:

**Les Faux Arts: A Symposium
on Plato's Studio**

moderated by Richard Tobin,
art historian and critic
Sunday, March 18, 1 pm
St. Francis Auditorium
Museum of Fine Arts, free



Eleanor Rappe's discovery of *Plato's Studio* is a cultural event that cannot be underestimated. The unearthing of the *Studio* sheds radical new light on the work and thought of an individual who is perhaps antiquity's most important and influential mind, asking us to reassess his supposed animosity to art. The contents of *Plato's Studio* offer us pictorial depictions of literary material, and graphic and plastic replicas of the mathematical world that the philosopher discussed in the *Timaeus*.

Plato's Studio presents us with an opportunity to rethink art as mimesis or imitation, and perhaps in some surprising ways. Maybe the findings of the *Studio* are not after all depictions of the real universe that the philosopher writes about in his works; perhaps the art is the final reality, of which the written works are copies.

— YUN LEE TOO, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY