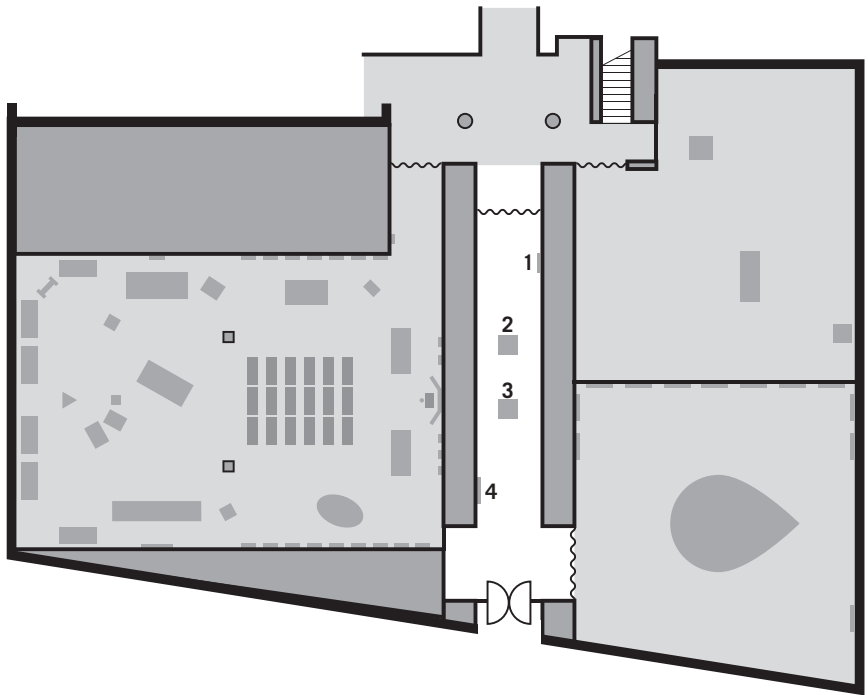


FLECK CLERESTORY

Blue Beard, 2016



1. *Blue Beard (Six Swedish Keys, c. 1770–1800)*
2. *Blue Beard (Female, Head & Key)*
3. *Blue Beard (Male)*
4. *Blue Beard ("After John Ferguson Weir: 'His Favorite Model'," 1886), 2016*

Blue Beard, 2016

Collection of six provincial Gustavian-era skeleton keys, Sweden, c. 1770–1800

Hand-wrought and cut steel, each mounted on custom-made steel stand,
displayed on a custom-made, steel, wall-mounted shelf

Smallest key: 6 inches (15.2 cm) in length

Largest key: 8 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches (21.3 cm) in length

Steel shelf: 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ (h) x 17 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches, 7.0 (h) x 44.8 x 7.0 cm

Artist's articulated female manikin (holding disembodied head of male manikin), French, late 19th century and skeleton key, European, 19th century

Manikin: Molded papier-mâché, plaster, leather, rope, wood, iron; supported
on adjustable stand affixed to ebonized quartersawn oak octagonal pedestal;
labelled "1209" on thigh

Originally retailed by La Maison Berville, an arts supply store on the
Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin, 9th arrondissement, Paris

Figure: 63 $\frac{1}{2}$ (h) x 19 x 9 inches, 161.3 (h) x 48.3 x 22.9 cm

Overall height including pedestal: 87 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches, 221.6 cm

Disembodied head of male manikin: 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ (h) x 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches, 18.4 (h) x 24.1 x 18.4 cm

Pedestal Base: 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ (h) x 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches, 60.3 (h) x 40.6 x 40.6 cm

Skeleton key: Hand-wrought and cut steel, 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ x $\frac{1}{2}$ inches, 21.0 x 9.5 x 1.3 cm

Artist's articulated male manikin, French, late 19th century

Molded papier-mâché, plaster, leather, rope, wood, iron; supported by adjustable
stand affixed to ebonized quartersawn oak octagonal pedestal; labelled "1208" on thigh

Originally retailed by La Maison Berville, an arts supply store on the
Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin, 9th arrondissement, Paris

Figure: 66 $\frac{3}{4}$ (h) x 22 x 10 inches, 169.5 (h) x 55.9 x 25.4 cm

Overall height including pedestal: 90 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches, 229.9 cm

Pedestal Base: 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ (h) x 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches, 60.3 (h) x 40.6 x 40.6 cm

Original clipped-corner platform base (in the collection of the artist):

1 $\frac{3}{4}$ (h) x 31 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 21 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches, 4.4 (h) x 79.4 x 55.6 cm

Pair of custom-fabricated standing display vitrines, 2017

Mahogany, glass, linen, brass fittings

113 $\frac{1}{2}$ (h) x 38 x 38 inches, 288.3 (h) x 96.5 x 96.5 cm

After John Ferguson Weir: "His Favorite Model," 2016

Facsimile pigment print of original painting by John Ferguson Weir
(American, 1841–1926), on stretched canvas, replica hand-gilt wood and
plaster frame Original painting: oil on canvas, signed and dated
(date indistinct: 188?), in period gilt frame

Printed canvas: 25 (h) x 19 1/4 inches, 63.5 (h) x 48.9 cm
Replica frame: 32 1/2 (h) x 26 11/16 x 3 1/8 inches, 82.6 (h) x 66.7 x 7.9 cm
The original framed painting is in the collection of
Yale University Art Gallery (Gift of Vincent Price, B.A. 1933)
Image courtesy of Yale University Art Gallery

Though sourced from different parts of the world, these two manikins are united here in a scenario. Unlike the roosters who face off in conflict in the *Marburg! The Early Bird!* segment of this exhibition, the protagonists stand together in back-to-back apposition. The viewer approaches the scenario either from the lobby, thus encountering the female figure first, or from the waterfront entrance, thus encountering the male first. The female carries the disembodied head of another example of the same male manikin. It has the same face as the one standing here. Since the male figure in the vitrine is not headless, the placement, contextualized by the painting and the keys, suggests a filmic sequence in which the female has, in fantasy if not in fact, decapitated the man.

The fairy tale of Blue Beard appears first in literary form in French in 1697, when Charles Perrault (1628-1703) included “Barbe-bleu” among the original eight stories in *Histoires ou contes du temps passé*. The basic story and its tropes, however, are much older and appear in the folklore of diverse cultures. Shakespeare references an earlier English variant, “Mr. Fox,” in *Much Ado About Nothing*, a comedy written about a century before Perrault’s publication.

In Perrault’s version, which through subsequent translations for children’s books has become the most familiar, a mysterious but immensely wealthy man, whose large blue beard makes him look like an ogre, persuades a young girl to marry him and move into his castle. Called away for business, he gives the girl six large keys that unlock rooms, chests and cupboards filled with his riches; he also gives her a smaller key to a room at the end of a corridor, but forbids her to unlock the door:

“You may open everything, you may go everywhere, but I forbid you to enter this little room. And I forbid you so seriously that if you were indeed to open the door, I should be so angry that I might do anything.”
(*Old-Time Stories told by Master Charles Perrault*, trans. by A. E. Johnson, Dodd, Mead and Co., 1921; reprinted in *Perrault’s Fairy Tales*, Dover Publications, 1969).

Though quietly compliant at first, his young wife disobeys her husband. After Blue Beard leaves, she explores the house with friends and neighbours, unlocking all the doors permitted. Then, overcome by curiosity, she cannot resist sneaking off alone to the forbidden room, where she finds the corpses of Blue Beard's previous wives hanging from the walls and the floor covered with blood. Terrified, she tries to hide her transgression after Blue Beard returns, but the little key gives her away. Smeared when she accidentally dropped it in the forbidden room, the blood, magically, will not wash off completely. Blue Beard is incensed:

"Why is there blood on this key?"

"I do not know at all," replied the poor woman, paler than death.

"You do not know at all?" exclaimed Blue Beard; "I know well enough.

You wanted to enter the little room! Well, madam enter it you shall—

you shall go and take your place among the ladies you have seen there."

She begs for mercy, but Blue Beard "had a heart harder than stone." He grants her time to pray, however, and she is saved by the just-in-time appearance of her two brothers, who kill the ogre. Since he has no heirs, the young girl becomes "mistress of all his wealth." After settling money on her family, "the rest formed a dowry for her own marriage with a very worthy man, who banished from her mind all memory of the evil days she had spent with Blue Beard."

The origins of the Blue Beard story remain uncertain, though the character in Perrault's French version has been associated with the historical Gilles de Rais (1405-1440), a military commander and associate of Joan of Arc subsequently convicted and hanged for the serial sexual abuse and murder of young boys (but not of any woman or wife); the character has also been linked to Conomor the Cursed, a 6th-century Breton king who, according to legend, killed his wives when they became pregnant after he was told he would die by a child's hand. The plotline, however, is likely too widespread to be tied to a single historical figure, and it also embodies numerous symbolic devices and motifs from the wider world of fairy tales.

A blue beard is the title character's principal distinguishing characteristic, and immediately suggests an unnatural and suspicious nature by its very colour. The beard sets him in the company of other furry or hairy beasts in the fairy tale tradition, in this case a threatening authority figure (perhaps

a threatening father figure, given that the other characters are all young siblings). Fairy tale animals or beasts are by no means always dark or evil (as with the beast in “Beauty and the Beast,” for example, or the cat in “Puss in Boots”), but here Blue Beard is immediately isolated as one whose beard “made him so ugly and frightful that there was not a woman or girl who did not run away at sight of him.”

There are both sexual and, given the fate of Blue Beard’s wives, misogynistic elements to the story, too, which portrays the young wife as independent in allowing her curiosity to guide her and “disobedient” in breaking the taboo against entering the small room. Though never named, the young wife is, like numerous young fairy tale characters of both sexes, pitted against a more adult character and forced into a life-or-death struggle. With its focused male-female dynamic, “Blue Beard” is a darker counterpart to “Beauty and the Beast,” in which the love of the young heroine tames and redeems the savage beast and finds fulfillment for them both. In “Blue Beard,” the power of love is not a factor, the young bride’s short marriage being more like a physical test or trial to gain control. As the victor, she comes out of it wiser, richer and fulfilled. The relationship with Blue Beard starts and ends with betrayal. His silence about the fate of his other wives is a betrayal of her trust in him, while her insistence on using the forbidden key is a betrayal of her promise to follow his instructions. Through her betrayal, however, she becomes a stronger individual who can banish “from her mind all memory of the evil days she had spent with Blue Beard.”

Beyond the characters, the locked space (if not a room, then perhaps a cupboard or a chest) is also a common element of fairy tales. Often a repository for wealth and riches, it may also be, like the forbidden room in Blue Beard, a hiding place for dark secrets. For every locked space, there is usually a key to open it, sometimes, as in “Blue Beard,” with supernatural powers. Unlike the six keys Blue Beard encouraged his wife to use, the key to the forbidden room “was bewitched, and there was no means of cleaning it completely.” When the blood was removed from one side, it reappeared on the other. Besides unlocking physical wealth or closely held secrets, keys may metaphorically unlock the future or the means to achieve some goal, insight or desire, though these may not necessarily be beneficent or beneficial.