



# **The Body of Raphaëlle Peale: Still Life and Selfhood, 1812-1824 (Ahmanson Murphy Fine Arts Imprint)**

*Alexander Nemerov*

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The American painter Raphaëlle Peale (1774-1825) left a legacy of vibrantly beautiful still lifes depicting objects such as fruit, vegetables, and meat. In this lively and literate study, the first book-length exploration of the artist, Alexander Nemerov presents a radical new reading of these paintings focusing on the uncanny quality of Raphaëlle's still-life objects. Nemerov argues that the physical presence of these objects is not strictly their own but that of the artist's body. This imagery of embodiment, Nemerov argues, relates deeply to Raphaëlle's own time.

*The Body of Raphaëlle Peale* focuses on not just Raphaëlle's paintings but also the visual and intellectual culture of early-nineteenth-century Philadelphia, to which these works intimately relate. More broadly, the book presents a reading of romanticism in the American visual arts. Above all, it is an argument about selfhood in Raphaëlle's era. Raphaëlle's focus—in paintings both playful and morbid—was the pleasures and horrors of being a mere body, of being less than a self.

Nemerov's primary source of evidence in this study is Raphaëlle's art itself. After considering its theoretical and historical implications, he returns to the images, deftly guiding us to a fresh understanding of these remarkable paintings. Nemerov's formal analysis is infused with a sophisticated awareness of interdisciplinary issues, and he gracefully balances the formal, the theoretical, and the historical throughout his narrative. This beautifully illustrated study is sure to stimulate renewed appreciation of an exceptional American artist.

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