

## From Myth to Fragment

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### Freud's Collection

After the death of his father Freud acquired the first objects of what would become the antiquities collection housed at the Freud Museum, London. These initial acquisitions consisted of copies of Florentine statuettes which, provided him with “a source of extraordinary *Erquickung* (reinvigoration/comfort) during this difficult period of loss and mourning.”<sup>1</sup> The collection expanded and was displayed in Freud's study: enclosed in glass cabinets, arranged on shelves, or lined up in tightly ordered rows at the front of his desk.

### Hiller's Collection

In her major retrospective exhibition at Tate Britain, Susan Hiller, a well-known British artist, presented a work she named: *After the Freud Museum*.<sup>2</sup> Drawing inspiration from Freud's collection, she used archaeological display boxes, each containing an object collected by the artist and accompanied by a text.

For instance, box 015, entitled *Άδης / Hades*, contained a labeled sample of water collected by Hiller from the river Acheron—the passage to the underworld—along with a photograph of a multilingual sign (Greek, English, German, and Italian) found near the sanctuary of Persephone and Hades. As Hiller recounts: “It was a hot day, but it was cold in the shade. Trying to collect water from the Acheron in the deep gorge was difficult; the banks were slippery. I nervously wondered what I had come here to seek.”

Another example is box 034, *Journey / jêr'ni*, which contained a photograph of an engraving after Rembrandt's *Moses* from the Freud Museum, a catalogue text, and seven fossils collected by the artist in the desert near Mount Sinai.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Freud, S., *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, 1887–1904*, éd. Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 1985, p. 214.

<sup>2</sup> Details at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/in-focus/from-the-freud-museum-susan-hiller/from-the-freud-museum>

<sup>3</sup> Hiller, S., *Susan Hiller*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Ann Gallagher, Tate Britain, London 2011, p.87.

As Hiller writes: “Freud’s impressive collection inspired me [...] but if it is a kind of index to the version of Western civilization’s heritage, then my collection taken as a whole, is an archive of misunderstandings, crises, and ambivalences that complicate any such notion of heritage.”<sup>4</sup>

Hiller referred to the objects she collected as “fragments, not pieces.” One might argue that the very heterogeneity of these fragments enabled her to suggest that the works on display did not point toward a single, unified, “epic form to what is operative through the structure”<sup>5</sup>, such as that evoked by Freud’s antiquities. Instead, they invite multiple interpretations, reflecting the dimension of varity that is constitutive of the psychic reality of these two collectors.

In this way, Hiller’s “gentle” mimesis subtly disrupted the logic of “Freud” and invites us to revisit his collection from a different perspective, one beyond the father, that is to say, in the form of spare/detached parts.

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p.88.

<sup>5</sup>Lacan, J., *Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, trans. D. Hollier, R. Krauss and A. Michelson, New York/London: Norton, 1990, p. 30.