



*Claes Oldenburg - Clip 10*

## **“Between a boot top and a skirt bottom” London Knees**

It's hard to realize, from today's vantage point, how shocking the first mini skirt was. And it became an obsession with people so it lent itself very well to... especially to the context of London... to a monument. The comparison was made with the Elgin marbles which have a lot of knees in them, too. The colour of the knees came from the Elgin marbles. The idea was to monumentalize something contemporary, figurative, which was the knee that was revealed – actually the first revelations always took place between a boot top and a skirt bottom so that you had a definite section that you were dealing with all the time – you were seeing it constantly, this section. So that was the section that was selected. And then I wanted to do the ideal knee, because, I mean, you want to do an artwork, so you want to do the general ideal thing. So I went to a mannequin store because I thought I could start with a mannequin. I found that mannequins no longer cared about knees, they had very sketchy indications of knees, but they sent me to a used mannequin store where I bought a World War Two mannequin where the knees were very very clearly defined. And I bought the mannequin, I sawed off this portion that I needed, and then I duplicated that to get the... this was, say, the right knee, then I duplicated it to get the left knee, and turned it around so that it is actually

the same knee but it is reversed so that it looks like two knees. All these things were behind the scenes, and then finally the knee had to be soft so it was the first multiple I believe that I did which was cast in plastic, itself plastic, so that you could take the knee which looked like it was made of marble, it had the colour of the Elgin marbles, it looked very hard, and you could squeeze it – it was a soft knee. And this was presented in a box with all kinds of documentation which showed the knees in a really monumental scale on the banks of the Thames. Another thing that was coming into the landscape at the time were nuclear power plants that had these cone shapes and the landscape was filling up with these huge cone shapes, and these were an inspiration to the scale of the knee.

It came in a box, and the box – the knees were wrapped in felt, they were tied very neatly. It was kind of something voyeuristic at the same time a little bit sinister like someone was carrying around a couple of knees, you know, but that all was very London, I thought, you know – that mixture of all those ingredients.

