

NEWSLETTER

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Submission #1:

OBJECT! An Artistic Play on Words with respect to the Portrayal of Women.

I began to think about the OBJECT! Series when our newspaper published a centerfold photo about a bombing of Aleppo. A woman ran into the street through a dust cloud grabbing two children, one in each hand. She held an orange colored blanket that looked very much like a blanket we used to have at our house when I was a child. One of the kids was crying as his mom feverishly dragged him along, his feet not touching the ground, his face bloody. The woman had blood on her face and white dust covering her black coat. Her kids' brightly colored clothes were an alarming contrast to the cloud of greyish dust; so vibrant and alive. I wondered where they were running, how or even if they would find shelter. Would the mother be able to find food for her kids? What had she left behind? Women in conflict zones rarely get their stories told, yet they are the ones who suffer the greatest impact, experience the most traumas and must find a way to carry on. They usually have no say in the politics of conflict, but must deal with its consequences. They are the ones who muster the most resilience and find the courage to even keep their family going. Those were my thoughts while observing the photograph. I decided I did not want to stay a 'quiet' observer and even if I didn't know the personal story of this particular woman or the outcome, I wanted to make her visible while being cognizant not to project anything inauthentic upon her. So, I painted her.

I wanted to make some sort of counterpart of the way important political events and wars have been painted throughout history to honor and glorify the victors, and male heads of state. Francois Gerard's painting "The Battle of Austerlitz," about Napoleon's feats, and Jacques Louis David's painting "Consecration of the Emperor Napoleon I and Coronation of the Empress Josephine," are two works that are exemplary of this long held tradition in art. The canvases are enormous in scale, filled with active battle scenes and soldiers with the emperor overseeing the battlefield. Eugene Delacroix's "Liberty Leading The People," regales a bare breasted (!) woman who personifies freedom as she storms forward with the national (!) flag in hand. Believing that the personal is indeed political, I began portraying real women around the globe whose stories are discarded as insignificant. I recalled, from anthropology classes, that women in many societies were viewed as prestige goods, 'prestige,' because they were/are bearers of life and 'goods,' because as a commodity, they could be 'deployed' to increase the group's prestige. It explains the methods with which men secure control over the women in a group. Feminist studies in anthropology have focused on the conditions perpetuating the low status of women, transculturally.

My process of working begins with the collection of newspaper clippings and online articles about women's station in societies around the world. I reflect on how they are portrayed, how they are written or talked about, and how they present themselves if they are allowed independent agency in the public sphere. The result is a personal commentary on these stories; I portray these women and I use the word "personal," since I cannot deny my own context while doing this work.

As a European woman, I strongly believe in human rights and women's rights, I reject cultural relativism as condoning a status quo, freeing us from making an ethical judgment on certain situations, from taking a stand within the tension between what is and what 'should' be. The way women are objectified angers me, wherever it happens, the way women are reduced to their bodies, denied agency in more or less subtle ways, denied/impeged freedom of movement in the public sphere, threatened with sexual violence, denied opportunities, denied visibility and voice unless women bear their breasts. For me, ideally, feminism is a movement for equal rights in all spheres of life and should be a mutual concern to men and women alike.

From this train of thought, the OBJECT! Series evolved into poster-like paintings of women and girls. Inspired by images and stories found on the web and in written media, these paintings portray 'real' women as they are living everyday sexism, inequality, gender-based violence. The title "OBJECT!" is a word play, confronting the media images of women we are bombarded with in Europe or the US, suggesting women must be sexual in order to even be seen. For instance the music and film industry often objectify women in images that are manipulated and reduce them to only their physical bodies. My artistic confrontation takes form by making available a limited edition of postcards, made of each painting, referring to 'pin-up' postcards. These are distributed freely worldwide to feminist organizations, women's artists' organizations, gender studies departments, feminist art galleries, NGO's, UN Women et al.

"Women And Children First," women and children refugees drowning in the Mediterranean, appealing to a gendered approach of the refugee crisis of the summer 2015, captioned "WOMEN AND CHILDREN FIRST" alluding to the Birkenhead Drill, a code of conduct whereby the lives of women and children are to be saved first in a lifethreatening situation, typically abandoning ship, when survival resources such as lifeboats were limited.

Oil on paper 15" by 18 1/8"

Girl with a Blue Burqa, rendering her invisible, under tutelage, prey to sexual violence, a silenced victim with no rights of her own. These arguments of purity, chastity, honor, religious or cultural, are they installed to cut women out of the public sphere, excluding them from Life they are the bearers of?

Oil on paper 15" by 18 1/8"

A Century ago, the US and many Western countries removed men's legal right to discipline their wives. In these countries today, the most dangerous place for a woman is her own home. When domestic violence still kills women, what beliefs are we still teaching our sons and daughters?

Oil on paper 15" by 18 1/8"

The series of paintings is thus gradually evolving into a social commentary on the situation of women today and hopefully one day they will be on display as such. For now they can be viewed through my site riavandeneinde.tumblr.com

Submissions

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