

Tell us about yourself (fun facts, hobbies, interests, location, age etc)

I am 24 years old living and working in Brooklyn, NY. I paint and draw in a small studio in a building with many other emerging artists. I currently work as a Studio Manager to the established artist, Zaria Forman, and I will be attending the School of Visual Arts MFA in Fine Arts program this upcoming September. I attended Skidmore College for undergraduate college and received my Post-Baccalaureate certificate from the San Francisco Art Institute.

Your work is centred specifically around nude women - What made you choose this for your subject?

I have always been drawn to the human figure as a subject in art. Landscapes or abstract work, while I appreciate how beautiful and powerful they can be, were never as fascinating to me as the human figure.

There became a point in my artistic career when I was drawn to depicting the female nude and I didn't know why, I had no reason for doing it other than thinking the form was beautiful and I enjoyed abstracting and manipulating it to further enhance that beauty. I have nothing against drawing the male nude -- I have drawn and painted the male nude many times -- but as a woman myself, there is something empowering and fundamentally satisfying about drawing the nude female.

People who have seen my work are often thrown by the fact that I am a heterosexual female drawing nude women; as if gay women and heterosexual men were the only ones allowed to appreciate the female body and sexual organs on such a level. No, I am a woman, I have boobs and a vagina and I appreciate them and find them beautiful without being sexually attracted to them.

I imagine that you get a spectrum of reactions to your work, what are some typical reactions? What about some reactions that stand out in your mind?

Oh, boy, do I ever! I get reactions ranging from complete and total fear of my work to absolute love and appreciation for what I am trying to talk about. It's really quite interesting to see the varying reactions from people of different ages, sexual orientations, and genders. It was shocking to see how many women were afraid to even walk through my studio door or were unwilling to talk to me about my work. It made me sad to realize how many women are afraid of their bodies.

During an open studio I had recently, there were many people who came into my space and really loved my work. They told me that they thought it was beautiful and really well done, but said, "I could never hang this on my wall." I typically respond with, "well, that's the point of my work, isn't it -- to have people be ok with putting a beautiful painting of a woman, with every intimate detail, including the vagina, depicted on their wall?" Many didn't have a response to that...

What inspires your work?

I am inspired by my life experiences as a woman. Society teaches me and all women to be ashamed of my body, my vagina. There is a lack of education surrounding the vagina in America and I feel this is a root cause of social problems such as the cat-calling and rape culture that is still all too prevalent. When we talk casually about the vagina, it is often in a negative light -- saying things like, "stop being such a pussy" or "she was such a cunt". How can we expect people to respect a part of the body, and the human being it is a part of, if we talk so negatively about it? Within my work, I am trying to re-contextualize the way we address every intimate part of a woman's body by juxtaposing the poetic writings of the 17th century mid-wife, Jane Sharp, with images of women exposing themselves.

Who are your muses and how do you choose them?

My muse is every woman. Any woman who has ever felt ashamed of their gender; or felt afraid walking down the street; or been disregarded or had her rights taken away from her simply because of her gender.

I source my images from old pornographic magazines. Some people feel this is an unexpected source, but I do this mainly for practical reasons since I don't have the funds to pay a model; and I don't know many models who would pose for me the way I would need her to, even if I did have the budget for it.

Talk to us about your process - from concept to canvas, how does a piece come to be?

During the beginnings of a new piece, a lot of time is spent searching for new pornographic magazines to source from. I then flip through those magazines trying to find usable and interesting images. I have discovered that I have the best luck finding intriguing images with *Penthouse*; *Playboy* barely shows the exposed vagina and *Hustler* is too focused on women shoving objects inside themselves.

Once I flag the images that most interest me, I try to arrange interesting compositions with them. Often times I need to manipulate and change the poses in my head, and ultimately in the painting, to end up with a successful composition. If there is a pose I have in mind for a composition, but can't find it in one of my magazines, I will pose and take images of myself.

I begin with pencil sketches and when satisfied with the composition I move on to my acrylics and gouaches. I usually work pretty quickly -- intuition is a major part of my process. I have become so familiar with the female form that recreating it large scale, abstracting it slightly through line, has become second nature to me.

During breaks, I read my Jane Sharp text. I annotate and pull quotes I find fascinating and applicable. My sketchbook is full of Jane Sharp quotes and as the drawing/painting develops I flip through the quotes looking for one that fits best with the image. Sometimes the pairings are deep and dark and sometimes they express hints of sarcasm, but they are always meaningful and poetic.

My process involves a lot of creating and "erasing" and then reworking. There are many layers in my paintings, especially the vaginas. Often times they will have four or five layers. I am constantly painting over the vagina I just spent hours painting with white acrylic, scraping it back while still wet, and then start a new detailed painting on top. It is the only way I feel I can correctly portray the complex organ that is the vagina -- physically and symbolically.

What message are you sending through your artwork?

My current series takes the often pernicious way in which the female body is portrayed and transforms it into something beautiful and empowering. I do this by juxtaposing excerpts from the poetic writings of Jane Sharp—a 17th century midwife—with sourced images of highly sexualized women from pornographic magazines, as well as with images of my own body.

The contrast between these commoditized, sexual images and those of my own body highlight the seemingly ineliminable gap between everyday women and the ideals to which they are held. Pornographic images, often objectifying in their approach to the female body, promote and perpetuate certain fantasies regarding women. I open a dialogue about the way such distorted sexual ideals ultimately affect women by appropriating and re-contextualizing this often hostile caricature of femininity.

In contrast to the passive, objectified women found in pornographic images, the figures in my series take control of their own sexuality. Ambiguous, multifaceted poses simultaneously conceal and expose, forcing the viewer to stare at and study the various contours of the female body; the figures' returned, confronting gaze re-contextualizes the viewer's stare, asking them to question the power dynamic at the root of objectification culture. The returned gaze of my figured says, "I am proud of and comfortable with my body. See it as I do and be ok with viewing me in my entirety."

Subtly rendered text directs the viewers' gaze through the women's bodies and highly rendered, red vaginas. The strategic use of the color red in an otherwise limited palette both dramatizes and—much like Sharp—*celebrates* the very source of female sexuality. My line work bridges the visual and written elements of the work; the lines tracing the figures mimic the lines of Sharp's text. The linear style of my work is achieved by fusing techniques from both painting and drawing.

Why do you paint?

It's how I best express myself. It's the easiest and most productive way for me to organize and express my thoughts. Painting is my life. Beyond that, art is a great means for starting important discussions. It is a wonderful forum for addressing and celebrating what I find most important and beautiful in the world and then sharing it with others.

Do you have any intention of incorporating male figures into future works (why / why not?)

Since my current series addresses issues surrounding the vagina and the female body, no, I do not have any intention of incorporating male figures. However, I expect my work to change and grow and delve into new realms of discussion; so, who knows, male figures may be included at some point, in some new series, in some expanded version of the discussion or an entirely different discussion that may reveal itself to me.

Would you consider your work sexual in nature, or is it something else?

It is sexual only due to the fact that I am addressing sexual organs; but other than that, no, I do not consider my work sexual in nature. I find my work to be more political or social than sexual.

Who are some of your influences (painters, people you know)

Egon Schiele, Gustav Klimt, and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec are major influences of mine -- so much so that I have their signatures tattooed on my painting arm. However, they were all men depicting women and that is where I differ drastically from them. Being a woman, I bring something to the female, and to the context of the work, that they could not.

All the women who fight on a daily basis to be treated with the respect and acknowledgement they deserve are the people who influence me every day and make me passionate about what I am doing.

What can we expect to see from you in upcoming works?

Seeing as I am beginning graduate school this coming fall, you can expect my work to become even more developed and change drastically. I don't know for sure where my work will go next, but I am excited to find out.

(please let me know how you'd like us to credit you - website social media etc)

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