

Margaret Thatcher, Serena Williams, and Malala Yousafzai Inspire Tony Scherman’s Portrait Series

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Tony Scherman
Serena Williams, 2012–2015
Winston Wächter Fine Art

Known as the pioneer of modern [encaustic painting](#), Tony Scherman has been deploying the wax-based process to create his textured, visceral paintings since 1974. The technique, which involves layering hot wax and pigment on canvas, has been used by artists for centuries, from the ancient Greeks to the Byzantines to [Diego Rivera](#) and [Jasper Johns](#). Scherman, however, has become famous for using the technique on a far larger scale than his predecessors.

The Toronto-based Scherman paints landscapes, still lifes, and figures, both human and animal. However, he is perhaps best known for his portraits, particularly of women. The artist [has said](#) that he thinks “we’re living in a time culturally where the power of women and where the presence of woman as a distinct entity is of genuine interest.” Depicting women from historical and pop cultural contexts has become a central interest for Scherman. One of his best known past projects, for example, reimagines scenes left out of *Macbeth*. A selection from his recent series, “[Difficult Women](#),” is currently view at Winston Wächter Fine Art.



Tony Scherman
The Unknown Suffragette, 2014–2015
Winston Wächter Fine Art
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“Difficult Women” features portraits of women Scherman admires, including Margaret Thatcher and Malala Yousafzai, the young Pakistani activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner. In interviews, Scherman has said that he uses beauty—specifically, the technical beauty of his paintings—as an entrance point into complex themes. There is an [Old Master](#) quality to these paintings, with their dark, painterly surfaces and facial features sculptured out of light and shadow. Scherman’s palette is earthy and muted, and the waxy material at times looks faded and muddled, as though these works are far older than they really are. That aged quality lends these women a sense of gravitas that other forms of representation don’t necessarily possess. In *Serena Williams* (2014–15), the tennis champion appears in profile, peering out of the painting with a sense of caution that borders on suspicion. An elegant looking blonde in profile in *The Unknown Suffragette* (2014–15) looks both powerful, with her chin raised, and vulnerable in that she’s unable to return our gaze.



Tony Scherman
Malala, 2014–2015
Winston Wächter Fine Art

These women have far more complexity than we usually see in contemporary female representations. This world, after all, tends to view women, particularly famous ones, according to a limited number of archetypes, and “difficult” is too often one of them. What’s “difficult” in Scherman’s paintings though, is not the women themselves, but rather how to portray them with justice.

—Molly Osberg

“Difficult Women” is on view at Winston Wächter Fine Art, Seattle, Oct. 28th–Dec. 19th, 2015.

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