

# Powerful spirits

When Tony Scherman encountered some of the great portraits in Tate Britain, he suddenly became aware of there being a "presence," "a thinking feeling being" on the other side of the picture plane. He knew he had to get to that place in his own work.

Scherman's latest series is *Difficult Women*, on view at Winston Wächter Fine Art in Seattle through December 19. The gallery notes, "Scherman focuses on those who have been labeled 'Difficult Women,' capturing the powerful spirit behind each. For Scherman, this is tribute to the women he admires, and an exploration of the difference between *difficult* and *difficulty*. The women he captures are athletes, politicians, teachers and pioneers. They are symbols of struggle and hope. His paintings are an 'acknowledgement of—and respect for—the feeling of difference that resides within women—a feeling that men can only think about...'"

He was also inspired by Andy Warhol, whose portraits formed a triangle among the sitter, the artist and the viewer. He tries to create that triangle in his larger-than-life encaustic portraits, especially those of celebrities. Each of us

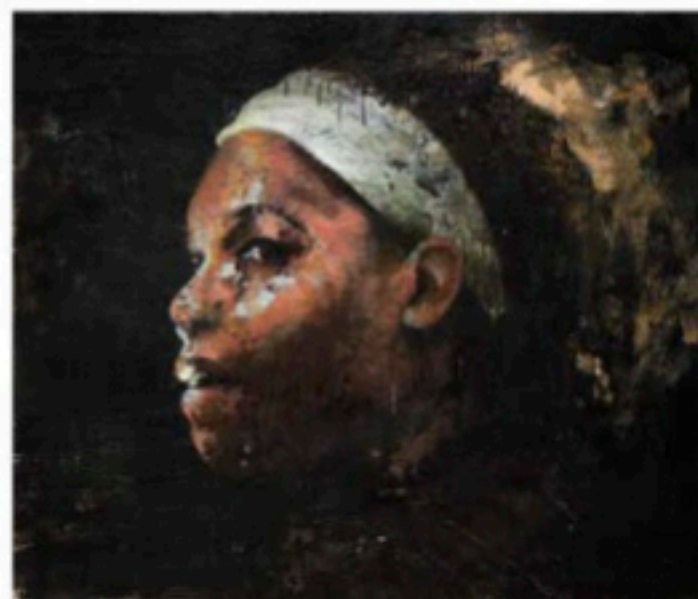
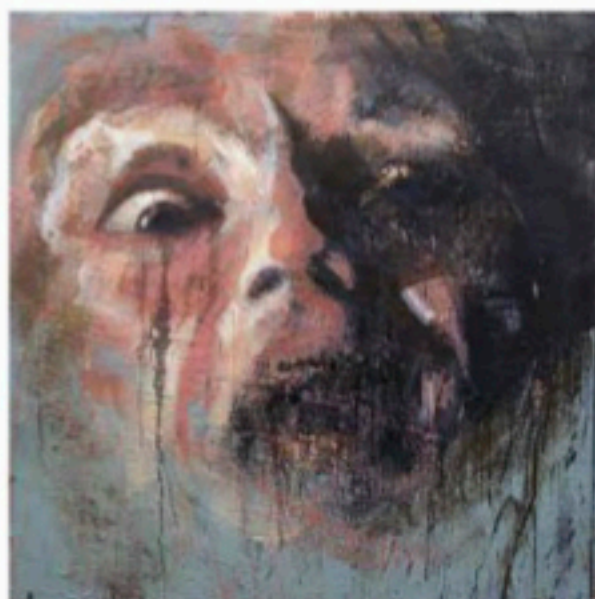


1  
*The Unknown Suffragette*,  
encaustic on canvas,  
60 x 60"

2  
*Salem: The Last Witch*,  
encaustic on canvas,  
60 x 60"

3  
*Serena Williams*,  
encaustic on canvas,  
72 x 84"

4  
*Malala*, encaustic on  
canvas, 48 x 45"



brings our own awareness and experience of the celebrity to our viewing the portrait and its "meaning" is contingent upon that.

Among the *Difficult Women* is *Malala*, the young Pakistani activist for female education. She survived an assassination attempt and won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014 at the age of 17. Malala can be seen as having encountered *difficulty* in her life, and being *difficult* for her unrelenting commitment to her goal.

Scherman pushes the ancient technique of encaustic, which involves wax mixed with oil paint and pigments. He scrapes, drips and burns the encaustic to create luminous and textured surfaces.

No. 1 ranked women's singles tennis champion *Serena Williams* peers from the dark canvas with a gaze that reveals her fierce independence and her determination to do things her own way.

At 60 by 60 inches, *Salem: The Last Witch* is the most startling among his

new paintings, depicting only part of the face of the last victim of the Salem Witch Trials as she is about to meet her fate. Scherman relies on our knowing the story of the witch trials to supply a context for the terrified face in his portrait of an innocent woman who fell victim to mass hysteria. Or is it a portrait of the fleeting moment of madness that led to her being accused? Regardless of the interpretation, there is a real person on the other side of the picture plane. ●