



NEW YORK SEATTLE



NINU NINA

by Leila Antakly

Jessica Lichtenstein's Perfect Storm

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LEILA ANTAKLY



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DIGITAL WONDERLANDS OF LUSH FORESTS AND TREE NYMPHS

Welcome back Jessica! We've been featuring this artist's work over the years and excited to share our latest conversation on her recent show, *Perfect Storm*, an exhibition of digital, sculptural, and installation work which is a direct response to the wild and weird combination of volatile conditions – covid, economic uncertainty, racial reckonings, political climate – creating emotional turmoil and upheaval over the past year, as well as the general everyday beautiful thoughts and anxieties we are all dealing with.

Since we last chatted, what has changed the most about your approach to your art?

When I first started out I was super into shock value and controversy. Buying half naked mass marketed dolls and putting them on toilets. My art contained question about artistry, authenticity, originality, appropriation, sexuality, authorship, consumerism. As I've grown I think my art has more of a sentimentality and fragility to it. I've allowed myself to be more vulnerable and for my art to read as a diary. This show has less to do with figurative bodies and sexuality and everything to do with thoughts that underly that superficiality.

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How do you see the art world in general evolving?

Things are already changing. And honestly they are changing at a warp speed that is so crazy, it's hard to keep up or even comprehend. When I started over 10 years ago, you couldn't get anywhere without a gallery. Now with social media, you can control your content and most importantly, collectors can follow you directly. There's a rebirth of art happening in the digital and crypto space too. NFTs. Digital art was never a thing in the "Fine Art" world and was always portrayed as "low brow" art. What did you do with digital art? Just print it as a poster? Collectors were hesitant to buy TV screen art or projector art. So I had to come up with ways to produce my digital art. Hence the thick acrylic pieces I made that are laser cut to look more sculptural on the wall. But that solution came out of a main problem...people don't collect digital art. Now with the NFT boom, things will change. You will always have paintings and mixed media art for people to hang on their walls. But as the media of art has grown to encompass technology...whether it be photoshop, maya, AI...a lot of artists who were strictly relegated to commercial work or graphic design, will hopefully get their dues. Don't get me wrong, it will take awhile to sift through the good, the bad & the ugly, and differentiate between "art" and "collectors items"...there's a lot of vetting to be done after the dust settles in this craze. But it shall be interesting.

Have your greatest inspirations or influences changed?

My greatest inspiration still comes from nature. And the world around us. This whole show was born out of the year 2020 and the highs and lows of this unprecedented year. The show is called "A Perfect Storm," basically all the storms of 2020, covid, racial, socioeconomic, political, sexual...that coalesced into a mega-storm. There's a piece in the show that is a 3 wall installation of my tree nymph girls being blown in every direction by hurricane winds, and a sheath of Bernini-esque sunlight poking out below on a path. Below are scattered leaves in the shape of girls, cut from mulberry paper. The piece is called "After the Storm." A reminder that this too shall pass. But also a reminder that like in nature, more storms will come...always come. We live in cycles. Winter, spring, summer, fall. And the rest of the show works through the mental capacity to deal with that knowledge and either celebrate or despair over it.

Favorite place in the world?

I live between Jackson Hole, Wyoming and NYC. NYC gives me the crazy, frenetic energy that I need to be creative. Jackson gives me the peaceful moments in between. Yin and yang. And I have to say, being in NYC these last few months as we reach

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hopefully the end stages of covid, has been invigorating. NYC will come back in spades this Summer:)

Tell us something you won't share with anyone else...

I still don't know what I want to be when I grow up.

Anything else you want to share?

Creating this show during covid was one of the supreme pleasures of my life. Spending time in quarantine collecting quotes from romantic poetry, literature, newspapers, blogs, social media, philosophy....looking at all these quotes together, compiling them into hearts...at a time of political discord and racial reckonings and a health crisis...i'm so lucky to do what I love, and to love what I do. And so lucky that in helping myself and answering questions for myself, I can impact people to ask those same questions or touch people in a way that unites and brings our shared thoughts and experiences together. I'm grateful.



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