

GAGOSIAN MUSE

Free Sensuality: Ewa Juszkiewicz

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Bill Powers



Ewa Juszkiewicz, courtesy Gagolian Gallery, NY.

BP Marlene Dumas says she uses second hand images, but draws new emotions from them. Is this kind of thinking close to you?

EJ Of course! What I do could be considered a kind of recycling. I deconstruct, giving new life to the images of the past, and in these reinterpretations I let myself be guided by my personal emotions and experiences. This perspective is crucial in my process. I replace the classical elements with those from the world of nature, which are wild and ambiguous. By bringing together apparently incompatible worlds, I want to overthrow a well-known order and a free sensuality. My paintings are born from a deep desire to break existing patterns and to bring out emotions, feelings and passions.

BP I wonder if the meaning changes depending on whether you use mushrooms or plants to cover a woman's face instead of her own hair. I'm thinking about how a mushroom can be compared to decay.

EJ Nature has always fascinated me. Greenery, insects, fungi or hair can be equally exciting to me. It all depends on the forms they take. The world of mushrooms is extremely diverse. Their appearance can be curious and surreal. Fungi growth does not depend on light and they can proliferate in any direction, which is why they are never the same. Their individual shapes, configurations and colors stimulate the imagination.



On the left: Untitled (after Adolf Ulrik Wertmüller), 2020. On the right: Untitled (after Joseph Karl Stieler), 2020. Courtesy Gagolian Gallery, NY.

BP Can you tell me about the paintings you saved from history? Often they are paintings that were destroyed during World War II, aren't they? I think for example of what you are doing with this series, following the tradition of, say, Rubens "Battle of the Knights" which in turn was inspired by a lost painting by Da Vinci.

EJ Interestingly, you referred to that example. Indeed, there are some similarities between us. Just as Rubens' work was based on preserved sketches of Da Vinci's lost work, so my paintings are based on archival, black and white photographs depicting forgotten works of art.

My cycle of paintings refers to works of art that were destroyed during the war, in a fire or in other tragic circumstances, or that were stolen and never found again. Most of the time, however, these are losses that occurred during the Second World War. My paintings are not faithful reconstructions, they are free interpretations, in which I introduce my composition, my combination of colors and my individual gesture. The choice of photographs is not accidental.

Among the many images I found in the archives, I chose those that portray my personal loss, those that bring to mind places, things, situations or people that I have lost in my life and that I miss.

This project was born from a kind of nostalgia, of desire, both personal and collective. It is an abstract search for a presence. A personal confrontation with the past and an attempt to address the problem of the lack of something or someone.

Sometimes I think that obscuring the faces of the subjects makes us reflect more on their identity, almost like Basquiat erased the words in his paintings as a way to look at them more closely.

By deconstructing the portraits, I want to draw attention to the schematic and conservative way in which many of them are depicted. After all, most of the portraits we know of from art history embody the conventions that have been imposed on women. By reinterpreting their images, I want to revive history and overturn the aesthetic canons of a given period. This is my protest against the stereotypical perception of femininity. By substituting certain canons, I want to show the individual identity of women, their complexity and underline their uniqueness.



Untitled (after Jan Adam Kruseman), 2020, courtesy Gagosian Gallery, NY.

BP I find it interesting that you don't watch much cinema as your work is far from pop culture. What is your process for identifying a composition to work on?

EJ On the contrary! I love cinema and watch a lot of movies. Aside from the past, I am inspired by contemporary culture and fashion today. But in reality my paintings are not steeped in pop culture. The past attracts me, so my desire to relate to it feels natural to me. Ancient and classical painting can enchant. He can hypnotize with his technique and style. On the other hand, I object to many of the clichés that I find within it, and all of which motivates me to work. What I do through my paintings stems from the need for change.

My creation process is very intuitive right from the start. When a painting catches my attention, ideas immediately come to mind for how to transform it. After a first glance, I can immediately imagine the new forms. It all happens automatically and instinctively.