



NOIR CATCHER

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HÉLÈNE DELMAIRE

MY EYE WAS SEDUCED BY A PORTRAIT OF A GIRL, WITH A PORCELAIN WHITE ADOLESCENT FACE AND A VIVID BRUSHSTROKE PASSING OVER HER EYESIGHT LIKE A SOFT WHIPLASH. SHE WAS STARRING AT ME WITH HER EYES WIDE SHUT, BENEATH A THICK LAYER OF OIL PAINT... ANONYMITY HAS ALWAYS BEEN FASCINATING TO ME. BEING VULNERABLE, FRAGILE TO EXPOSE ONE'S IDENTITY. PUTTING AN ARMOUR PROTECTING YOU AGAINST THE WORLD. THAT IS WHAT BROUGHT ME TO THE SENSUAL WORK AND SOUL OF FRENCH ARTIST HÉLÈNE DELMAIRE. HER WORK EVOKES PURE BEAUTY WHILE SUBLIMING THE IMPERFECT.

I HAD THE PLEASURE TO HAVE THIS GENUINE TALK WITH HÉLÈNE, WHILE HER CAT WAS PASSING MADLY AROUND HER STUDIO. IN THAT TIME SHE WAS PREPARING HER UPCOMING EXHIBITION, WHICH WILL BE HELD THIS DECEMBER IN [LAURENCE ESNOI GALLERY](#) IN PARIS. TAKE A GLIMPSE INTO HER DELICATE WORLD OF FLOWERS, STRANGERS AND OBSCURITY.

THIS INTERVIEW IS DEVOTED TO ALL FRAGILE SOULS, VULNERABLE LIKE CHINA.

'I AM NOT TRYING TO REPRESENT PEOPLE AS MUCH AS SYMBOLS OF HUMANNESSE... ESPECIALLY WITH THE ERASED EYES, PEOPLE STARRING VAGUELY INTO SPACE...'

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PORTRAIT OF HÉLÈNE DELMAIRE
ILLUSTRATED BY KATARZYNA JAGIELNICKA FOR NOIR CATCHER

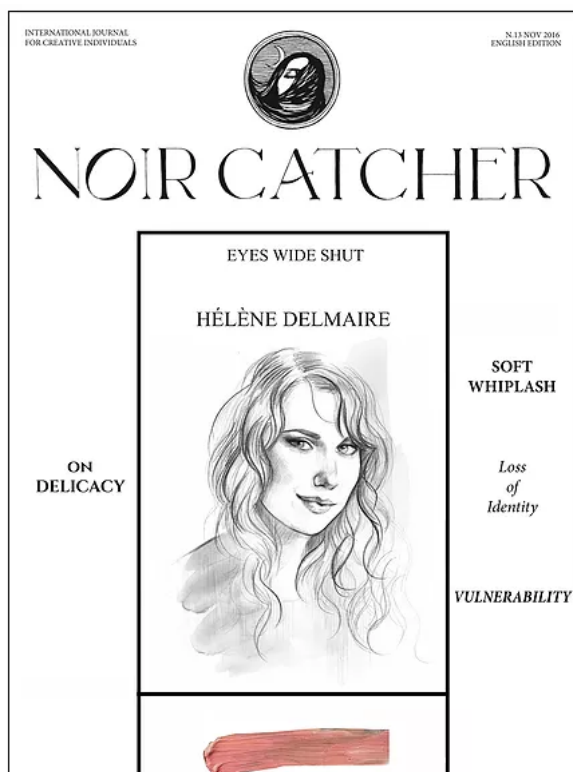


MOST OF THE PEOPLE YOU PAINT SEEM LIKE IN A DELIRIUM, IN A DAYDREAM... A FAVOURITE FEELING OF MINE, WHICH ATTRACTED ME TOWARDS YOUR WORK...

I GUESS YOU CAN SAY THEY ARE DREAMERS. WHAT I AM INTERESTED IN IS WHAT YOU CAN NOT REALLY COMMUNICATE TO OTHER PEOPLE, EMOTIONALLY AND INTELLECTUALLY. ALL THE WORDLESS STUFF... THIS IS WHY I PAINT. IT IS SOMETHING I CAN NOT EXPRESS WITH WORDS... PEOPLE LOST IN THEIR OWN WORLDS. BUBBLES. CONNECTION OUTSIDE EVERYDAY HUMAN BEING LIFE.

WHO ARE THE WOMEN BEHIND YOUR PAINTINGS?

IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER WHO THEY ARE. FRIENDS, STRANGERS, EVEN MYSELF. I AM NOT TRYING TO REPRESENT PEOPLE AS MUCH AS SYMBOLS OF HUMANNESSE... ESPECIALLY WITH THE ERASED EYES, PEOPLE STARRING VAGUELY INTO SPACE... IT'S A LOSS OF IDENTITY... THIS IS WHY I REMOVED THE EYES. WHEN YOU SEE SOMEONE'S EYES IT BECOMES A PORTRAIT IMMEDIATELY, THERE IS A DIRECT COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE VIEWER AND THE PAINTED ONE, WHICH I DO NOT WANT TO. AT THE END OF THE DAY TO DOESN'T REALLY MATTER WHO THEY ARE... JUST HUMAN IN GENERAL.



WHAT ARE SOME LITERATURE WORKS YOU WERE MOVED FROM?

I REALLY LIKE READING PEOPLE'S JOURNALS. VIRGINIA WOOLE, ESPECIALLY "TO THE LIGHTHOUSE" THERE ARE PASSAGES THAT REALLY EXPRESS THINGS I FEEL ARE INEXPRESSIBLE THROUGH WORDS. FLEETING FEELINGS... I CAN NOT REALLY READ VIOLENCE. DO YOU KNOW HARUKI MARUKAMI? I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S WRONG WITH JAPANESE WRITERS... I LIKE HIS BOOKS, BUT THERE IS ALWAYS THIS TORTURING PASSAGE... RECENTLY I HAVE READ DOSTOYEVSKY'S "IDIOT" FOR ME IT IS NOT VIOLENCE, BUT A REALLY PURE SOUL, PUTTING PEOPLE FACE TO FACE WITH EVIL...

SPEAKING OF VIOLENCE, IN A PREDOMINANTLY MASCULINE BRUTAL SOCIETY, IN WHAT DO YOU STILL FIND DELICACY IN THIS WORLD?

AFTER TRUMP'S ELECTION... (LAUGHS.) I STRUGGLE WITH THAT A LOT. I USED TO BE QUITE IDEALISTIC WHEN I WAS YOUNGER. I AM NEAR 30 NOW AND THE MORE THE YEARS PAS THE MORE DIFFICULT I FIND IT TO BE HOPEFUL. THE PAINTINGS ARE A WAY TO KEEP IT OUT THERE AND NOT GO CRAZY... I AM VERY SENSITIVE AND VULNERABLE. YOU DON'T NEED TO LET YOURSELF DOWN FOR USELESS STUFF. I RECENTLY JOINED THE ARTIST COLLECTIVE HERE IN MY CITY, LILLE, AND IT GIVES ME HOPE. SOME PEOPLE THERE HELP EMIGRANTS, TEACH THEM FOR FREE ET CETERA. THERE ARE BUNCH OF INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS LIKE THAT, WHICH MAKE YOU THINK. MAYBE THE WORLD IS SCREWED UP BUT WE CAN STILL DO SO MANY GOOD THINGS BY OURSELVES.

IF I UNDERSTOOD CORRECTLY, PAINTING FOR YOU IS AN ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE REALITY?

IT IS A WAY OF TRANSFORMING IT, A WAY OF COPING WITH IT. KEEPING ALIVE THE ESSENCE OF WHAT I FEEL RIGHT IN THE WORLD, FOCUSING ON THAT.

ARE YOUR WOMEN IN A WAY SUBMISSIVE, GLAD OF LOOSING THEIR IDENTITIES? ARE WE SEEING THEIR INNER EMOTIONAL SELVES THROUGH THE DISTORTION?

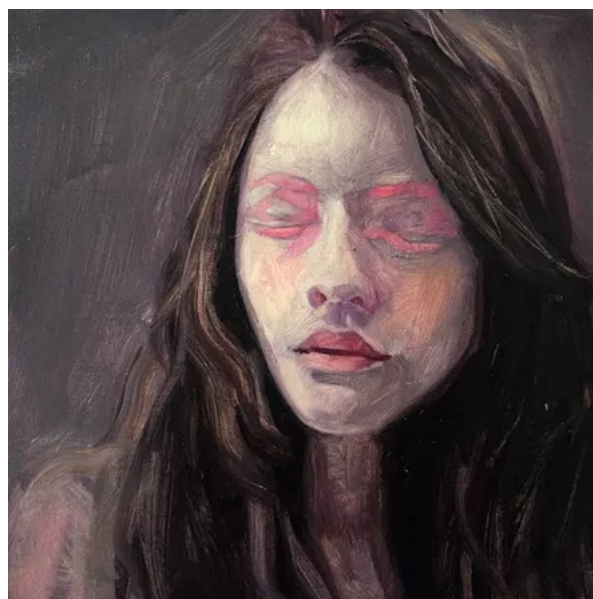
I THINK IT IS MORE OF ABANDONMENT IN THE SENSE OF LETTING GO. THEY DON'T CARE OF WHAT IS OUTSIDE, OR THAT PEOPLE DON'T KNOW. IT IS MORE BEING IN TUNE WITH ONE'S SELF, NOT WITH WHAT IS GOING ON DIRECTLY AROUND YOU.

AS ZADIE SMITH WRITES: "BUILDING AN IDENTITY IS THE EASY WAY OUT." WHAT DO YOU THINK ON THAT? WHEN WE "EAT THE LOTUS FLOWER" AND FORGET OUR IDENTITY, DO WE COME CLOSER TO OUR SUBCONSCIOUS AND TRUE SELF?

IT IS NOT EASY ACTUALLY. ESPECIALLY NOWADAYS. FOR ME IT IS HARDER AND HARDER. THERE IS SO MUCH NOISE AROUND US, THERE ISN'T MUCH TIME ANYMORE WHERE YOU FIND YOURSELF ALONG WITH YOURSELF. YOU HAVE TO FACE WHAT IS INSIDE OF YOU. I WOULD SAY IT IS NOT THE EASY WAY OUT, BUT THE OTHER WAY AROUND. FACING YOUR DEMONS AND FEARS.. BUT ALSO ALL THE BEAUTIFUL THINGS...

YOU SAID SYLVIA PLATH IS A GREAT INSPIRATION OF YOURS AND HER POEMS ARE LIKE A SLAP IN YOUR FACE. DO YOU TRIED TO RECREATE THIS FEELING IN YOUR ARTWORKS WITH THE BRUSHSTROKE?

IT COULD BE THAT. WHAT I LIKE ABOUT HER WORK IS THAT IS A MIXTURE OF COMPLETE VULNERABILITY AND THERE ARE ELEMENTS OF DEPRESSION BUT THERE IS A REALLY GREAT STRENGTH, VIOLENCE AND ANGER IN HER WORKS.. IT IS A COMBINATION OF OPPOSITES THAT I FIND REALLY INTERESTING... I AM NOT ANGRY AS SHE WAS BUT THERE IS STRENGTH... EXHAUSTION...



I SPEND A LOT OF TIME OF A DRAWING, RETOUCHING, CHOOSING THE COLOUR PALETTE... AND AT THE END THERE IS THE MOMENT I FEEL LIKE "SCREW THIS."

WHAT IS YOUR FIRST MEMORY OF PAINTING? HOW DID YOU FORM YOUR PASSION?

I REMEMBER IN MY PRE-PRIMARY WHEN I WAS THREE, I KEPT ON ARGUING WITH MY FRIENDS THAT CRAYON SHOULD BE USED FOR THE SKIN, THE PINK CRAYON, AND I THOUGH FOR EXTERNAL EXPERIENCE.. MY DAD IS A MEDIEVAL HISTORY TEACHER AND HAS A LOT OF BOOKS WITH IMAGES OF ILLUMINATIONS. SO THOSE WERE



THERE IS A SAYING THAT A PAINTING CARRIES THE ENERGY OF ITS CREATOR. HOW DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU WILL ALWAYS LIVE ON THROUGH YOUR KIDS OF YOUR IMAGINATION AND TALENTED HAND? WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT AN ARTIST SHOULD GIVE FROM HIMSELF?

I DON'T REALLY THINK OF LIVING THROUGH THE PAINTINGS. THEY ARE AN EXPRESSION OF ME. IF THEY ARE HERE AFTER 100 YEARS OR MORE WOULD BE GREAT, BUT IT IS NOT THE FIRST THING I HAVE IN MIND. WE ALL HAVE SOMETHING DIFFERENT TO GIVE, BUT THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS TO BE 100% HONEST IN WHAT YOU DO AND LISTEN TO WHAT IS INSIDE OF YOU AND WHAT WANTS TO GET OUT. TRY TO BE AS MUCH AS CLOSE TO THAT. PEOPLE INSTINCTIVELY FEEL THAT WHEN YOU GIVE YOURSELF, WITHOUT TRYING TO IMPRESS. WHEN YOU ARE TRUTHFUL.

WHAT IS YOUR UTOPIAN IMAGINARY SPACE FOR AN IDEAL EXHIBITION FOR YOUR WORKS ALL TOGETHER?

IT WILL BE REALLY COOL TO HAVE A MASSIVE SPACE WITH LOTS OF PLANTS, LIKE SOME SORT OF JUNGLE. WITH LOTS OF LIGHT AND EXOTIC FLOWERS, WITH PAINTINGS HIDDEN IN BETWEEN. NATURAL SOUNDS.. LIKE A ZOO-JUNGLE THING.

WHAT IS THE MOST INTIMATE THING AND SPACE FOR YOU?

I WOULD SAY MY JOURNAL. I HAVE BEEN WRITING IN IT SINCE I WAS A TEENAGER. THE PAINTINGS ARE ALSO MY MOST INTIMATE PLACE. THEY ARE INTIMATE IN A WAY, LIKE A ROUNDABOUT, THEY ARE NOT ABOUT MYSELF BUT THEY COME FROM MYSELF, A REALLY INTIMATE THINGS I CAN NOT EXPRESS TO MYSELF. THE JOURNAL IS THE EMOTIONAL DUMP.. WHEN JUST THINGS AREN'T RIGHT.. AND I PUT IT IN THE JOURNAL. FOR PHYSICAL PLACES.. BEING ALONE IN NATURE, COMPLETELY ALONE, REMOTE... DOESN'T HAPPEN VERY OFTEN.

'WE ALL HAVE SOMETHING DIFFERENT TO GIVE, BUT THE MOST

MAYBE THE FIRST PICTURES THAT REALLY MARKED ME. THEY ARE REALLY FASCINATING - BIZARRE ANIMALS, MUTI-COLOURED LEOPARDS, AND ALL RELIGION STUFF...

IS THERE A SINGLE PAINTING, AN ARTIST OR MOVEMENT THAT CHANGED THE WAY YOU LOOK AT ART?

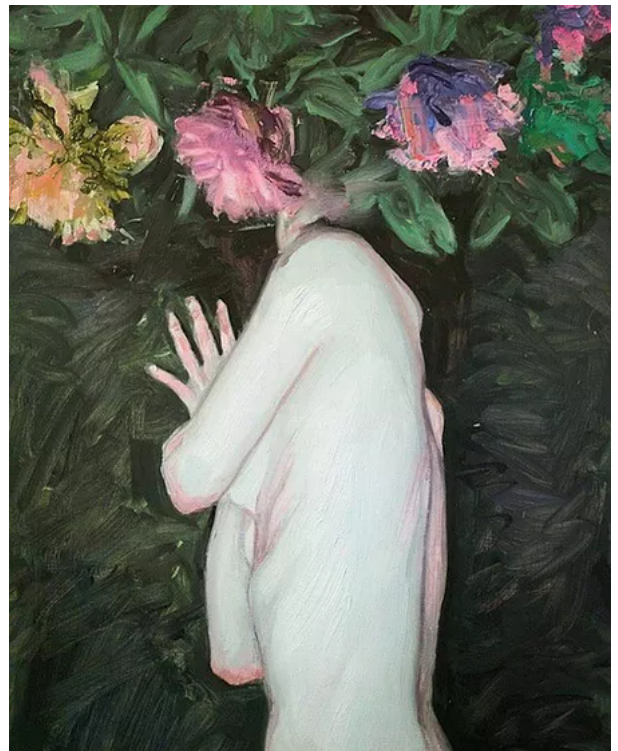
I AM QUITE INSPIRED BY PHOTOGRAPHY NOWADAYS. MORE SUBJECT WISE, THAN TECHNIQUE WISE.. ALL THE ARTISTS WORKING ON THE IDEA OF VULNERABILITY AND STRENGTH. INITIALLY I WAS INTO PRE-RAFAELLITES AND BELGIUM SYMBOLISTS, WHO I STILL LOVE. VIENNESE SECESSION AS WELL. NOWADAYS, I LOOK AT MORE CONTEMPORARY PAINTERS. MAINLY, ARTISTS, WHO BRIGED THE GAP BETWEEN ABSTRACT AND FIGURATIVE ART. FOR EXAMPLE, TIMOTHY WILSON. HE PAINTS A LOT OF LANDSCAPES NOWADAYS. OR BENJAMIN BJORKLUND. WHO PAINTS ANIMALS IN A NICE COLOUR PALETTE.

DO YOU PAINT MORE SPONTANEOUSLY OR WITH A CERTAIN PLAN IN MIND BEFORE STARTING?

I AM A PRETTY ORGANIZED PERSON WHEN IT COMES TO PAINTING. AS FAR AS I HAVE AN IMAGE, AN IDEA IN MIND BUT TOWARDS THE END IT IS SPONTANEOUS. FOR EXAMPLE, THE STROKE THING. IT WAS NOT AN INTELLECTUALIZED THING. I DIDN'T KNOW WHY I WANT TO DO IT, I JUST FELT IT. I WORK WITH PHOTOGRAPHS SO I WANT TO RECREATE THROUGH THEM WHAT I HAD IN MY MIND INITIALLY AND THEY NEVER END UP BEING EXACTLY THE SAME, NEW THINGS COME UP WHILE DOING THE SESSION. ONCE, I SPENT A LOT OF TIME OF A DRAWING, RETOUCHING, CHOOSING THE COLOUR PALETTE... AND AT THE END THERE IS THE MOMENT I FEEL LIKE "SCREW THIS." THOUGH, IT IS QUITE A STRUCTURED PROCESS.

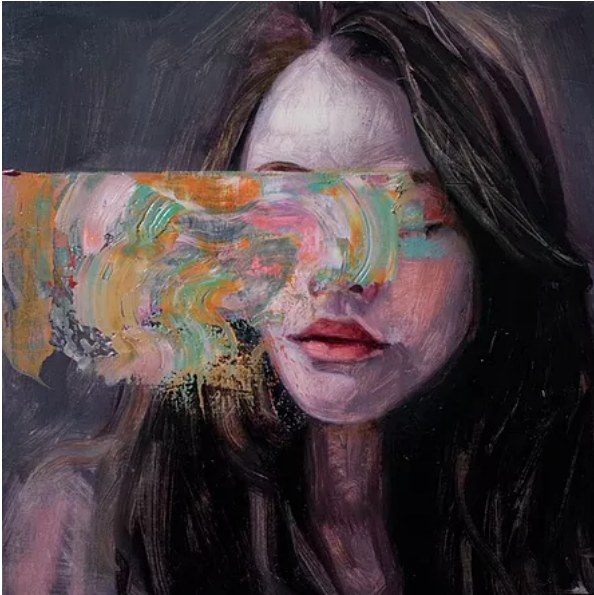
HOW DO YOU REACH YOUR INNER BALANCE AND CRYSTALIZE YOUR MIND TO REACH THE "AHA" MOMENT?

THIS IS SO TRICKY. I DON'T THINK I HAVE FIGURED THAT OUT. I DON'T THINK I EVER WILL. I DON'T REALLY CONTROL IT. IT IS ALWAYS A STRUGGLE TO FIND OUT WHY YOU ARE BLOCKED AND HOW DO YOU OVERCOME THAT.



SPEAKING OF LONELINESS, IS THE JOURNEY OF THE ARTIST A DESOLATED ONE? PAINTING MUST BE A QUITE AND LONELY PROCESS...

IMPORTANT THING IS TO BE 100% HONEST IN WHAT YOU DO AND LISTEN TO WHAT IS INSIDE OF YOU AND WHAT WANTS TO GET OUT.' ►



WHAT LAYS AT THE ALLURE OF FEMININITY AND THE NAKED FEMALE BODY FOR YOU?

IT IS JUST AESTHETIC BASICALLY. WHEN I PAINT MEN, I ALWAYS LOOK FOR MORE ANDROGYNOUS TYPE OF MEN. IN NATURE THERE IS THE FAIR SEX. WHEN YOU LOOK AT PEACOCKS, THE MALE IS MORE BEAUTIFUL. ALSO, MAYBE BECAUSE THEY SAY ALL PAINTINGS ARE A FORM OF SELF-PORTRAIT. I AM PROBABLY DRIVEN TO FEMALES BECAUSE THEY ARE CLOSER TO WHAT I WANT TO COMMUNICATE. THE HUMAN ELEMENT IS WHAT INTERESTS ME.

WHAT IS THE STRANGEST DREAM YOU EVER HAD?

OH MY GOD I HAVE SO MANY. I WRITE THEM IN A JOURNAL. I HAVE VERY DISTURBING ONES... REALLY TERRIFIC HORRIBLE STUFF. JUST LOTS OF BIZARRE THINGS, FANTASTICAL CREATURES.. TRAVELLING..

helenedelmaire.com

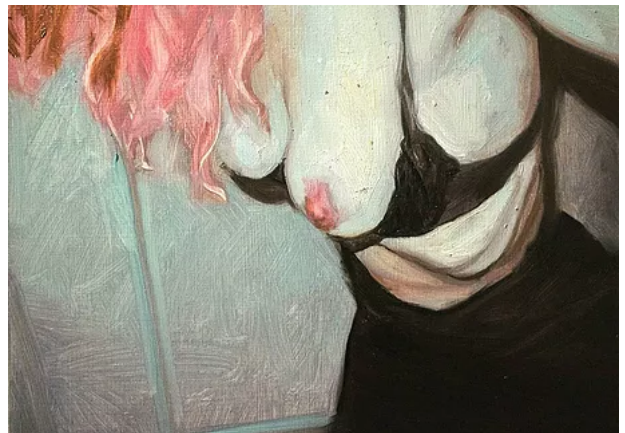
MAYBE INTIMATE BUT NOT LONELY. WHEN YOU ARE PAINTER YOU ARE ALONE IN YOUR STUDIO, ALONE WITH YOUR STRUGGLES, WITH YOUR BLISS... BUT THEN YOU SHARE IT. IT HAS THESE TWO SIDES. WHEN YOU SHARE IT, IT CONNECTS YOU TO THE PEOPLE. SOMETIMES IN UNEXPECTED WAYS... WHEN PEOPLE ARE TOUCHED BY IT, IT IS A REAL CONNECTION EVEN THOUGH IT MIGHT BE WITH SOMEONE YOU HAVE NEVER MET. IT IS ISOLATED BUT ALSO CONNECTED.

IS THERE STILL A GLASS CEILING ISOLATION FOR FEMALE ARTISTS IN THIS FIELD?

YOU SHOULD ASK ME IN 20 YEARS. (SMILES.) FOR YOUNG ARTISTS IT IS MUCH EASIER THAN BEFORE BECAUSE OF THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA. HOWEVER, LAST YEAR I WENT TO ROUND TABLE IN PARIS, I'VE HEARD A WOMAN AGED 40 SAYING THAT THREE OF HER GALLERIES DROPPED HER, WHEN SHE TOLD THEM SHE WAS PREGNANT. THEY SAID TO HER THEY CAN NOT GUARANTEE TO THEIR CLIENTS SHE WOULD BE AS PRODUCTIVE AND AS SUCCESSFUL SHE IS AT THAT VERY MOMENT. THAT WAS REALLY SHOCKING FOR ME. THERE IS DEFINITELY A STIGMA, WHEN YOU HIT THIS MEDIOCRE POINTS. OBVIOUSLY THERE ARE TRACY EMIN AND MARINA ABRAMOVIC. THERE WAS A RETROSPECTIVE OF 100 LIVING ARTISTS IN CENTRE POMPIDOU, AND I THINK THERE WERE JUST TWO FEMALE ARTISTS. I DON'T FEEL IT RIGHT NOW, BUT I THINK THERE IS STILL THIS GENDER PROBLEM GOING ON.

IS THERE A COMPOSITION OR A SUBJECT YOU HAVE ALWAYS VISUALIZED IN YOUR MIND AND WANTED TO PAINT BUT YOU HAVEN'T YET?

THERE ISN'T ONE SPECIFIC IMAGE, BUT LARGER SCALE COMPOSITIONS WITH LOTS OF PEOPLE, IN NATURE... HAVE YOU HEARD OF VINCENT DESIDERIO? HE IS A PAINTER, WHO DOES REALLY BIG COMPOSITIONS... THERE WAS KANYE WEST VIDEO RECENTLY BASED ON ONE OF HIS PAINTINGS (LAUGHS.) I THINK IT WAS PRETTY AWFUL BUT HE'S PAINTINGS ARE REALLY BEAUTIFUL... 15 PEOPLE IN A BED... I DON'T THINK I AM TECHNICALLY GOOD ENOUGH TO DO THAT YET.





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