

kim? jessica lichtenstein ne? sanat

Iraz Polat

A very cutting-edge New York based contemporary artist Jessica Lichtenstein takes the female body as a mechanism to explore deeper themes of power, female representation, fetishism and objectification. She questions why we feel so comfortable to see the female body and sexuality as such ordinary objects in our world. But she does it in a very extraordinary and ironic way. Inspiring from Japanese erotic anime Hentai, she creates dolls in various scenes telling different stories. Besides that, Lichtenstein takes art as a daily practice and extends it to her own experience. I am amazed to get to know her closer, hope you will too.

So we are asking you to confront it and get undressed now!

get UNDRESSED!

Female body has been being an art object for ages. In your last exhibition, you reinterpret it in very different way. An installation of Japanese highly sexual anime dolls which are innocent/childish but very erotic at the same time. What do you tell us with this contemporary narration?

For me, the mass manufactured anime figures that I use in my art pieces, are perfect objects to explore deeper questions--why we as a society tend to hypersexualize women and why people disagree on whether this exploits women or celebrates the female form. These figures exist. People buy them. They are collectors' items crafted by toy companies based on Japanese comic book heroines. But outside of this niche world, not a lot of people know these figures even exist.

I've always been fascinated by these figures. Who buys them? Why Japanese companies can manufacture these toys yet you would never see a toy company in the US make a nude version of Wonder Woman or Cat Woman? But how universally, when people see these figures, there is something about their cartoonish coy innocence that almost counter balances their erotic nature-- and this to me is very interesting.

Thus by manipulating these hypersexualized figures and by placing them in a different context, i.e., taking them out of their toy store boxes and placing them into the white cube of the gallery, the public viewer has the chance to confront their own reactions to these figures--whether it be of shock, awe, disgust or beauty - and ask themselves what they are comfortable with, and why?

In these stylized scenes, the characters are aware that they are being watched. Why did you underline an act of viewing? Are we all exhibitionist and voyeurs? (Just watched your wedding video on vimeo, you too look so nice!)



I like the 3-dimensional nature of the figures precisely because the viewer has to gaze at the girl differently than a 2-dimensional image. It mirrors the way we look at people in real life. Up-down-left-right. Your eyes wrap around the figure as though you were taking her in. Some get embarrassed as they gaze at certain body parts, others strain their necks trying to see around certain parts that are hidden. The figures are posed so they seem aware that they are being watched- but it really serves the purpose of making the viewer conscious of their own gaze.

I don't know if we are all exhibitionists or voyeurs, but I definitely am at times. I'm fascinated by people- inside and out. I like catching glimpses of conversations, I sometimes find myself staring at someone only becoming conscious of it when their eyes meet mine. For me it's just natural curiosity. A way of listening and a way to be heard.

You're inspired with Japanese pornographic manga, which is sometimes criticized to be unsuitable for the young audience. Currently in Turkish art scene and academic platforms, there is an ongoing discussion of the limits and bans for pornographic artwork. What about your thoughts on artist's freedom?

Art, whether it be a painting, a book, a play, a dance... is really just a way for us all to express something and connect with people on an emotional level. It's as simple as that. If you read too much into it, you don't really understand the concept of Art and there's no way you'd be reading this article.

Please tell us about your future dolls...

I'm right now working on a show that will exhibit in May at gallerynine5 in New York City. The concept is based on feminine consumerism. Instead of focusing on necessities of survival, such as food, shelter and water, the new pieces ironically play with the idea of women gathering luxury items like Hermes bags, Louboutin shoes, Cartier jewelry. The female figures are smaller and the objects around them are larger. And the scenes and pieces are more complicated than my previous pieces. I'm really excited to see peoples reactions.

What about power of fantasy, does it matter?

Of course it matters. Fantasy, to me, is just imagination allowed to run wild. What can be better than that?

