



VIEW GALLERY

13 JANUARY 2014

## AMERICA MARTIN

*Fiction or Fact, Baby Got Back*

Painter America Martin's portraits feature figures of full-bodied females, all as calm as a lonely lotus flowers floating on a river bed. Her new book *YES!* is overflowing with unapologetically exaggerated hips, hands, feet, and noses. She paints nude women in a way that only a woman can, with honesty and grace, and her fascination with honoring distinctive forms has led her to a collection of beautifully strange paintings. She's got a voice as soft as cashmere, and within a few minutes of speaking with her, you know that she's the driver who backs up traffic to let someone merge in.

*In the introduction to YES!, the women you paint are described as as hyperreal, with their dominating hands and feet centering them and making them complete. Describe what it means to be a complete woman.*

Oh wow, that's a great question. The introduction was actually written by Stacy Davis, so that's her interpretation of my paintings; I didn't write that.

*Do you agree with her?*

Yes, absolutely. But that's a question of balance, that's really hard. I find as a fine artist that painting and being interested and curious in the world helps me be a more complete person/artist. In my life there is no 'life and then art,' there's no line that's been drawn. My life is my art, my art is my life. So, if I had to answer that, how could I be a complete woman is to be continuously curious and able to learn constantly because if you're engaged in life then you're always gonna be a lot happier as a person because you're gonna be actually learning and sharing things that other people have figured out. So for me, when I engage in learning that helps me all the time.

*The images really do have a nice balance to them, because on one hand, yeah, we get these women with uncommonly bold features, but they're painted in common places, they're relaxed and stoic. Describe where this balance comes from and the need for it in your artwork.*

I find beauty in big bold truths, so I tend to paint women with more substantial features because there's an honesty there. There's an unembarrassed personal dignity that I find when someone is just doing what they're doing, be it their art form or their body form. So I tend to be drawn to those elements of the female form. But the balance between the way I do figures and the common places—I think that painting and art, no matter what it is, it is an expression of joy. An expression of an overwhelming, inspiration of being alive. You can be an artist who is more into the dark side of things, but still you are celebrating being alive to make art. So I think that's something that's a common factor in all of us, whatever art form—even if you're an accountant, that's an art form. So the universal space that the figure is in, we all are celebrating being alive because we gear up everyday and we do it time and time again even when it's hard. So I think it's really fun to paint something bold and yet it's something that everybody can understand or have a mutual understanding for.

*What did you draw as a kid? What was art for you growing up?*

When I was nine I fell in love with art, it was my first love, because I found a book about Vincent van Gogh. So I used to spend all those hours as a kid in my room trying to draw the trees out my window, and mixing the colors of the paint trying to copy the colors that Van Gogh had made in his book with my teeny watercolor set, trying to figure it out. [I'd get] my dog to come sit in my room and I'd draw him from every angle over and over again. And before that I drew hats, always lots of hats, and it's funny I still love people who wear hats. It's a really great style people had back in the day and when people wear it today, I think it's amazing

*Are any of your paintings self-portraits?*

Well, not really anymore. I used to do only do self-portraits because I never had enough money to get models, and I was scared to go up and ask strangers to pose for me. But now I have a bunch of friends and models to come pose. But I do find that I am drawn to models that have features similar to mine, so someone may say, *Oh this is a self-portrait*, and I say no that's a friend that we look like we could be in the same broccoli cauliflower family.

*So we love that you say "yes is the word of a warrior," what do you say "hell no" to?*

The only time that you're gonna ever say hell no is when that little gray line of crossing one's integrity comes up. That's the only time I think when hell no would fit, and it's sometimes hard to say that and that could happen in small ways. When you're gonna say yes to a show or participate in an outing that isn't going to be making anything happen, I think it's great to say no. Yes has been my mantra for the past three years because three years ago I purchased this big studio in Silver Lake, and I said yes to a mortgage and yes to rebuilding it and yes to all these things and it's really exciting to say yes. You do end up being very tired and not getting enough sleep when you say yes, but the places and the people you meet when you say yes—that you wouldn't have seen or gone to if you had said no—it's really great.

*Who are you a fan of in the fine art world?*

There is a sculptor named Thomas Houseago—he's from England or somewhere around there but he lives in LA—and his sculptures, they are like pop rocks! It's just awesome, it's fantastic. He does such bold, big, figurative work and I'm a huge fan of his. I'm friends with Alex Prager and I'm a big fan of her photography; she's awesome. It's continuous—it's music, it's literature. I just got finished reading all of Tennessee Williams plays. That's the fun part of art, so many people have made it and you can learn so much if you go act like a nerd and read everything and listen to everything.

*What's next for you, after the release of YES!?*

I have a couple shows coming up, one in Laguna Beach and one on the East Coast, then I'm gonna be working on a show about Los Angeles. It's actually the people of Los Angeles. It's gonna be a multimedia show, paintings, photography and video, which I've never exhibited before. It's gonna be about honoring all the voiceless people of Los Angeles. People that make the clock tick. So you go the garbage man, the people that clean up the subway when no one is there, and also the people who are of Los Angeles that you might think of when you think of LA, but mostly it's about honoring the story of people and going back to my love of anthropology, basically the story of groups of people. Los Angeles is such an amazing pot, a rich quilt of different colors and people and foods and I think those stories are awesome, so I'm super excited.

*Written by Branden Janese*

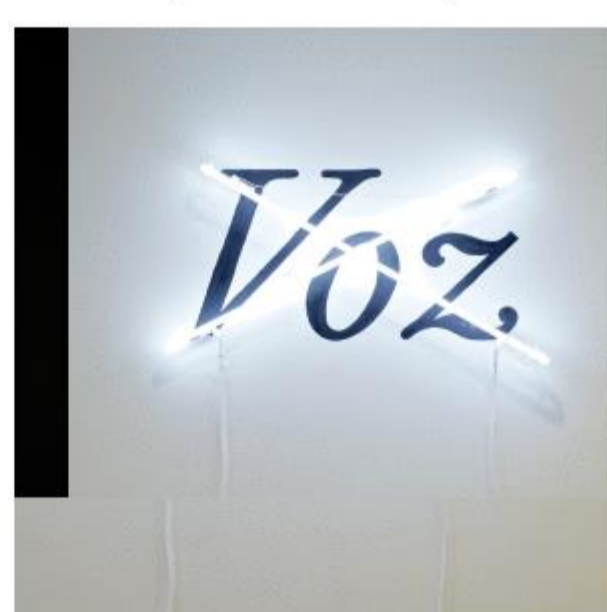
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FLAUNT

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08 JANUARY 2014

