

ALLISON ZUCKERMAN: TO CREATE FROM A CLOUD

Curator: Tami Katz-Freiman

1 Felicity Carter, "Allison Zuckerman Rewrites Art History to Reclaim Famous Females," *Forbes*, August 9, 2018, available at www.forbes.com/sites/felicitycarter/2018/08/09/allison-zuckerman-rewrites-art-history-to-reclaim-famous-females/#619c498170ba (accessed June 24, 2019).

Allison Zuckerman, a New York artist born in 1990, has been dubbed the "DJ of the Art World."¹ In her paintings, she samples elements from past masterpieces of Western culture – always by male artists – and creates a new remix that combines layers of history with a hyperactive, up-to-date, contemporary presence. Like a brazen robber in broad daylight, she grafts modern and contemporary artists with Old Masters – Lucien Freud with Bronzino, George Condo with Rossetti, Rogier van der Weyden with Rubens, and many others – alongside images from pop culture and social media. In this way, she creates a disrupted arrangement of vocabularies, genres and periods, interweaving vividly-colored forms and images like a post-postmodern pastiche on steroids, a motley collage that the viewer is invited to decipher as a secret code.

The unique nature of postmodern quotation and appropriation has been discussed as far back as the last decades of the twentieth century. Unlike the familiar conventional gestures of "influence" or "homage" in art history – which were characterized by transformation and assimilation of the influencing source into the influenced one – quotation takes the glimmer of the aura of the original work and displaces it into a new context while deliberately revealing the seams, often with a knowing wink at the viewer. In the no-man's-land of intellectual property rights, it has become apparent that if a quoted work takes on a new lease of life in its new context, then the appropriation is legitimate. In Zuckerman's case, there is no doubt that her depictions of women have undergone a deliberate transformation. She is therefore part of a lineage of female artists whose work challenges the conventions of representation of women in the history of art.

In previous series, Zuckerman focused on "reclining women" in hedonistic and pastoral scenes. In the new

body of works presented here, the emphasis is on the representation of women in scenes of violence, either directly – as in works on art-historical themes, such as the Rape of the Sabine Women, Judith and Holofernes, and St. Sebastian (who, in Zuckerman’s rendition, is a woman) – or indirectly, as in a scene based on Susanna and the Elders. Her women – in almost all of them the artist’s own facial features are discernible – demand their place in the world. They are large-limbed, with gaping eyes and mouths, extroverted and grotesque, vulnerable and damaged, yet also powerful and strong. Many have a crown, and pass the torch of victory like heroines in a tragicomic drama of the history of Western culture. They all share the flickering gleam of the aura of the original, but instead of a passive, unsullied, and desirable body that is presented to the viewer as an object whose ownership provides pleasure, Zuckerman’s women are absurd and exaggerated hybrids, whose body parts are not only disproportionate, but form a wild assemblage of body details in diverse genres and styles, as a statement of presence and activism in the world.

Thus, for example, the image of Susanna and Her Suitors (2019) is an iconographic cross between Jupiter and Antiope (1616) by the Dutch painter Hendrik Goltzius, which depicts Jupiter as a satyr seeking to have his way with the sleeping woman, and the biblical story of Shoshana (one of the additions to the Book of Daniel), better known in art history as Susanna and the Elders – a rare instance of a woman who is sexually assaulted, resists, fights for her rights, and wins (albeit with the help of Daniel). In the #MeToo era, it is no surprise that Zuckerman chose to rescue Antiope from her mythological image as a passive victim of Jupiter, and transformed her into Susanna, whose monumental presence is defiant and unapologetic. Zuckerman sources Susanna’s enormous palms from a painting by Richard Prince, and her crossed, veined legs are from a work by Lucian Freud. While the tears on her cheek attest to her distress, she is no longer a prisoner, nor does she belong to anyone. The two lecherous old men have turned into indistinct silhouettes that merge into the background next to Picasso’s doves, symbolizing freedom, which hover above a Van Gogh sky. Celebratory flags and banderoles of Latin text from medieval manuscripts serve as an age-old equivalent of texting.

In the work Vanity (2019), the mix of quotations and mash-up of historical periods is even busier. The composition as a whole is based on a painting by Cornelis van Haarlem, with the head of a man from Picasso, a posture from Caravaggio, the woman's face from a Botticelli painting, the nipples from Carroll Dunham, the girdle from Lucas Cranach, and the hair from Google Images. As if that were not enough, in the background is a Cézanne bathing figure in front of a Matisse window, next to a pattern from a Stuart Davis mural. In the lower part of the painting are depictions of still life in various degrees of realism: Caravaggio glass goblets, Cézanne apples, and a Lichtenstein flower vase. This absurd hodgepodge of high and low expressions, so typical of the intense energy of Zuckerman's works, offers an appropriate reflection of millennial culture.

Certain recurring motifs appear in almost all the works: Cézanne's apples and Lichtenstein's fruit bowl symbolize abundance, eroticism, and seduction. The awkwardly painted black-and-white hands are taken from Richard Prince, quoting Picasso – that is, a hand quoting a hand, quoting a hand, which is how Zuckerman casts herself as a link in a chain of quotations. The famous image of Mickey Mouse's drawn hand holding a marker pen adds a critical reference to the commodification of the art world. Other elements – a brushstroke by Lichtenstein, a paper cutout by Matisse, a plant by Picasso, Disney birds, emojis of tears and sparkles – crop up repeatedly, serving as hyperlinks. In the present series there is also a new motif: square pixels, which Zuckerman sees as "portals" that hint at technological glitches, as if the artistic samples are forever being processed and downloaded, updated and reconfigured.

Zuckerman, who was discovered by a New York gallery through Instagram, represents a new generation of artists who have grown up in a digital culture driven by cloud-dependent devices. Accordingly, she builds her compositions in Photoshop from parts of images that she imports, on an "outsourced" basis, through Google. After printing the new composition on canvas (archival CMYK), she goes over many parts with brushstrokes, which further compounds the illusion (for instance, Cézanne-like brushstrokes over a woman's body painted by Rubens). Through such "random cannibalization of all the styles of the past,"² she speaks in all languages at the same time

2 Fredric Jameson, Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism [1984] (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 15.

and treats history as an inexhaustible data repository from which she draws samples to create a new collage-like entity in a virtual universe.

Allison Zuckerman,
detail from **The Letter**,
2019, acrylic paint and
archival CMYK ink on
canvas, 147.3×243.8,
courtesy of the artist
and Kravets Wehby
Gallery, New York

אליסון צוקרמן, פרט מתוך
המכתב, 2019, אקריליק
ודיו ארכיבי צבעוני על בד,
147.3×243.8, באדיבות
האמנית וגלריה קרביץ וובי,
ניו יורק

أليسون تسوركمان، تفصيل
من **رسالة**، 2019، أكريلك وحت
أرشيفي ملون على قماش،
147.3×243.8، بلطف من
الفنانة وجاليري كرافيتس
وبي، نيويورك

