

EXPLORING MODERN LIFE STRESS

NOMI SILVERMAN'S PALPABLE PROGRESS AT CCP NORWALK

TEN FOR 2024

NOMI SILVERMAN

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NOMI SILVERMAN:
PALPABLE PROCESS

CENTER FOR
CONTEMPORARY
PRINTMAKING

MATHEWS PARK

299 WEST AVENUE

NORWALK, CONNECTICUT

THROUGH FEBRUARY 18



How refreshing to review the artwork of someone who actually knows how to draw and is not afraid to use that skill to express strong emotions and political opinions! Francisco Goya did it! Pablo Picasso did it! Theodore Gericault did it! Nomi Silverman does it!

Silverman's exhibition, "Palpable Process," at the Center for Contemporary Printmaking, is a small sampling of her artistic output which includes sculpture, painting, pastels and bookmaking, in addition to her prints.

The theme uniting all Silverman's works is an exploration of the stress of modern life and the extreme stress of peoples' migrations from one locale to another. She uses the human figure again and again to depict this stress. For her, immigration is embedded in her personal history. She writes, "My family, like so many others, left the home they knew in Minsk, Belarus for a better life in America, the land of opportunity. The pogroms — foreshadowing the horrors of the Holocaust that would take the lives of so many of my family members who stayed behind — was one of many reasons my grandmother, grandfather and uncle boarded a boat in 1930 and landed in New York, where my mother, and eventually I, was born."

This personal history appears to be the inspiration behind almost all of Silverman's artwork. The pain and dislocation of immigration is artistically expressed in her leather-bound artist-book, "I Had a Home once, Syria; I Live in Berlin," unfortunately not part of this exhibition. The accordion book won the CCP First Prize juried award that resulted in Silverman's solo exhibition. The book may be viewed on her website. Her written story of Abdullah's forced migration from Damascus to Berlin demonstrates that she is an excellent writer as well as a printmaker.

"Diaspora IV," an intaglio etching, is one of Silverman's bleakest images, appropriately created in black ink on white paper. A foreground group of figures, people almost reduced to broken tree stumps, face a white gap of space (a river? an open field?) Will they cross the space to a gloomy "forest" beyond which a row of lights seems to beckon? Their chance of survival seems slim. Technically, the print uses a wide variety of etching techniques:

TOP: Nomi Silverman, *Tattoo*, 2020, Intaglio, 11" x 23 1/2".

BOTTOM: Nomi Silverman, *Diaspora IV*, 2019, Intaglio 12" x 17 3/4".



stylus, aquatint, wax crayon, drypoint and many others. It would be fascinating to watch a video of Silverman creating this plate.

"Tattoo," a smaller 11" x 23" intaglio etching, depicts a nude recumbent woman, far from young, sprawled on a bed, her hand behind her head. Her downturned mouth, sagging breasts and frazzled hair display a person well acquainted with pain and life's problems. The "tattoo" is irrelevant. Here, Silverman's drawing ability is on full display. A firm outline defines the leg, breast and sharp chin with great accuracy. Then she changes techniques to employ Renaissance cross-hatching. By squeezing the horizontal figure into an elongated rectangle, she turns the human figure into a pattern of lines and outlines. No one searches for the "tattoo."

"January Sixth I," a small lithograph, displays Silverman's originality in composition and drawing technique. For a political-insurrection statement such as this, a title is necessary. Without it, the image would merely be ten vague torsos and heads, one with a fist. Two horizontal bands of red/orange, the symbolic color for violence, could be the American flag fluttering over the surging crowd. The problem with protest art tied to a specific time and event is that it quickly ages, especially in our modern era, where crisis after crisis fills the daily news.

"Model at Rest," another intaglio etching, puts all Silverman's drawing techniques on display. She captures the form, shape and features of a tired man with his large broken nose and swept back hair. What I most admire about her art technique is the way she manipulates the background with brushes of lines, solid black patches and skeins of lines. How interesting it would be to see her create a plate; to find out how long it takes and in how many stages she works on the plate. Does the plate go in the acid bath many times? Only once? Symbolically the model figure is in a curious position, and I believe he was hunched over the etching press! His arm appears to rest on the metal roller with the flat bed of the press underneath him. But to one unfamiliar with a print studio the figure could be in a prison cell, iron bars to left and right, a wary, threatened look on his face.

Examining Silverman's website, as well as the prints in the exhibit, one discerns an artist well acquainted with the long history of drawing and printmaking. Her liberal arts education at Barnard combined with an early interest in drawing and painting must have encouraged her to perfect her drawing skills, and to be influenced by the great artists of the past. Her excellent writing ability puts her in a unique position to know what human problems she wants to address and get her ideas across with pen and brush.

Käthe Kollwitz is the most obvious influence on Silverman's symbol system, and she often depicts bent women cradling a child in their arms. The screaming open-mouthed person in "Rage," a small 9" x 6" lithograph, harks back to Edvard Munch's "Scream." Another influence is Rembrandt's use of dark black patches of shadow hovering around human figures drawn with cross-hatching lines. The use of black ink also ties her prints to the long tradition of printmaking before the use of colored inks became popular. All these influences only enhance her work, making her prints richer because of their references to historic antecedents. So many contemporary artists seem to work in the hollow vacuum of their own emotions and artistic preferences. This reviewer is not interested in another artist emptying out the cluttered attic of their mind nor viewing their aggrieved self-pity of emotions. Silverman has a dense and rich background, both in art training and in her generational life, and she explores this background with great skill, and social and historical awareness.

Beth Neville



Nomi Silverman, *January Sixth I*, 2021, lithograph, 18" x 21".

NESTO GALLERY

Kim Bernard | *One Woman's Trash*



February 29 - April 18, 2024

Art & Media Center (lower level) | 9:00-4:00pm

Opening Reception: Thursday, February 29

Art & Media Center (lower level) | 5:30-7:00pm

image: Kim Bernard, *One Woman's Trash*, upcycled plastic, 5"x36"x2", 2023

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