

Sides Unseen: A Remoralization of Contemporary Portraiture

Portraiture is an ancient practice of representing the individual and their personality or mood through painting, photography or sculpture. Historically, portraits were used to depict individuals of the ruling elite, while contemporary usage of the practice has shifted focus from the noble to draw attention to all classes. The age of social media, further, has redefined much for the art world, but within the relationship between the individual and portraiture, it has exacerbated the human desire to control and curate perception. This phenomena is quite a drastic deviation from the original intent of portraits. Rather than showcasing the truth of who we are, we portray what we want to be, and this, sadly, has come to limit the breadth of the human experience we expose ourselves to. *Sides Unseen: A Remoralization of Contemporary Portraiture* focuses on the works of **Gustavo Fernandes, Malgorzata Jablonska, Norio Shiraishi, Tanya Solonyka** and **Rania Rangou**. It is a visual effort to revive the beauty found in the honesty of emotion and experience embodied through an individual. The exhibition is bolstered by the belief that the more nuanced, indiscernible, emotionally charged and even shameful moments of existing are where we find the most color.

Born in Porto, Portugal, **Gustavo Fernandes** uses his chosen disciplines of painting and printmaking to shed light on the disfavored, providing it space to be accepted. He pours as much emotional charge into his ghoulish figures as they'll allow, elevating them to "intuitive places of expression" that any person can identify with. The ambiguity of the faces mimic the ambiguity of the human experience, as nothing is ever really certain. Though heavily composed of tones of black, his works also feature the usage of bright yellows, pinks and reds, highlighting the vitality and power that emotions color our experiences with: He brings beauty out of despair.

Enamored by the human usage of masks, polish artist **Malgorzata Jablonska** uses her revolutionary technique of embossing with barks and fabrics to invite us all back home to truth. Fueled by a desire to challenge the way we see art, and effectively ourselves, **Jablonska's** use of natural materials highlights the fact that we are inseparable from nature. Though primitively used to simply cover or adorn the face, masks have evolved to be more metaphorical coverings, hiding the

ego. Her pieces venerate moments of alignment between mind and body--moments of peace. The true power of her work lies in its transparency, granted by her unique process of embossing, which allows it to "create different realities" depending on its location. Much like with the work of **Fernandes**, the viewer is urged to confront the uncomfortable, yet beautiful reality that no one and no thing can ever be truly defined.

Japanese artist **Norio Shiraishi** creates from the section of society where individuals chose to live out of free will. This freedom of thought is what births his violently colored portraits, where he explores the beauty within craziness, chaos, silence, and elegance. Anchored by the usage of black, his figures are allowed to float in a sea of color, bringing attention once again to the power emotion has to shade our experiences.

Self taught artist **Tanya Solonyka** works out of Canada where she uses photography to capture the soul of her subjects. Paramount to her portraits are explorations of mental health and the intrinsic inner strength of women. Similarly to **Shiraishi**, her black and white subjects are swaddled in bright blue and orange, further depicting the notion of beauty in despair.

Working out of Athens, artist **Rania Rangou** uses her paintings as offerings of her own perceptions of the world. Heavily influenced by the fact that we perceive all life through our perception of ourselves, **Rangou** invites us to assume her's until it clashes with our own, creating a psychedelic-like experience. Her portraits, coupled with their titles, provided visceral understandings of the inability to define a person or a scene. **Rangou** challenges us to see the beauty present in the ever changing by making us first uncomfortable with it.

In its totality, **Sides Unseen** is a simple offering of a genuine experience of the individual--one characterized by raw pain, confusion, and awareness. Whether represented through painting, sculpture, or photography, each artist provides the viewer a chance to have an honest conversation with an individual and with him/herself. While often provoking darker emotions, the works secure our sensibilities with the truth that emotion is vitality. To live is to suffer, and not only is that beautiful, it is universal.

