

RE: **History**

Contemporary Takes

By Lisa Ficarelli-Halpern





Front Cover:
Madelyn, (Detail) ©2022
Oil on canvas
28 x 28 inches

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Foreword by Dr. Lynette A. Zimmerman
Q&A with Donna Kessinger, Independent Curator

August 29 - December 8, 2023

Karl and Helen Burger Gallery
Kean University
Union, New Jersey



Madelyn, ©2022
Oil on canvas
28 x 28 inches

FOREWORD

There is always one moment, one work of art, one word that connects me to an artist. These “moments of experience,” as authors Dan and Chip Heath refer to them, are the instants I seek when connecting with creative minds. Each artist that works with the Galleries at Kean has achieved this rare phenomenon.

American figurative artist, Lisa Ficarelli-Halpern, reached out to me in April 2022 through social media in response to a call for show proposals. Her initial outreach included one image, brief introductory copy, and a link to her website. The image she attached was of an oil painting titled “Madelyn,” although she introduced the work in the email as “Magdalene,” the partial name of George de la Tour’s painting “Magdalene with the Smoking Flame,” 1640. Known to use the figure of Mary Magdalene in his paintings, in this work De la Tour captured her pondering life while staring into a flame, and passively holding a skull. Lisa’s interpretation of this work, “Madelyn,” brought the painting’s conversation out of the darkness, and blatantly into the light, keeping undertones of reflection at the forefront mixed with a vein of strength and optimism in her expression. I was intrigued. I had to learn more about this artist. This work was a moment of experience. There was a story embedded in Lisa’s painting and perchance I intuitively caught a glimpse of a secret conversation between artist and muse. As I explored Lisa’s work and watched her create new paintings for the exhibition, which would become known as *Re:History Contemporary Takes*, I found myself witnessing conversations between the artist and her muses as they took shape on the canvas.

She effortlessly blends symbolism, societal ideals, art-historical reference, and extraordinary detail into each work. One might even conclude that Lisa’s eye for detail is keen when they look closely at her embellishments of jewelry, tattoos, physical features, and expression. Her brush strokes are intentional, made with direction and foresight of what the work will become. She understands the complexity of human features. The work embodies each muse’s personality, waiting for a viewer to walk up and partake in the ritual of conversation.

Viewers will find pattern, comfort, and complexity in Lisa’s work. All intertwined with vibrant color resulting in beauty. She often states that her work is feminine in nature. Perhaps there is accuracy in her self-observation. However, feminine elements should not be underestimated, a truth that Lisa delivers through her newest installation titled *Robe of Resilience*. This piece brings her body of work into the future with a nod to the past by channeling frustration, anger, and disappointment with society including the senseless death of children in a school shooting, COVID-19 pandemic, and the dissolution of Roe v. Wade, a powerful piece of legislation that empowered women’s health rights. The majestic presence of the installation draws viewers into a world of absurd violence and chaos while delivering an elegant powerful elegy. Women are not to be trifled with nor undervalued. As Lisa’s work indicates, we rise with purpose, beauty, and strength.

One may find themselves listening to her cadence as they view her work and think “there is more to this story...where will the artist take me next?”

Dr. Lynette A. Zimmerman

THE ROBE OF RESILIENCE

“Robe of Resilience” is an installation of three parts: the silkscreen camouflage print “2022 Commemorative Brocade,” three-dimensional mannequin enrobed in the 2022 Color of the Year, and an accompanying video projected of the wall consisting of photo images mined from the Internet depicting social-political events from 2020-2022.

I am bringing together my skills in 2-D and 3-D design and construction techniques to create a powerful statement about what women have been dealing with over the past several years. Always feminist minded, but never this clear about the statement, I was completely fed up in 2022 with the politics, violence, and lingering issues surrounding the pandemic. The urgency to create this work



Slideshow Image:
AP/Jason DeCrow via NBC Bay Area News

was sparked when I saw the news footage of mothers pushing their small children in strollers out of the war zone in the Ukraine. I was appalled and saddened by how women seem to always be the clean-up spot: lives are negatively impacted or lost, yet we need to steer and keep the ship afloat. These contemporary travails have long existed: war, plague, violence, injustice towards other races and cultures, women and children. Women endure, adapt, and continue and are the reason we continue as a species on the Earth.

Resilience is defined as the ability to withstand and recover from adversity; it represents toughness and flexibility that is both a physical and mental state. The motifs in the printed design describing global events witnessed and endured are embedded within a Rococo inspired repeating pattern. The fabric chosen for the silkscreen print is dyed in the vibrant fuchsia 2022 Color of the Year, which serves to support the commemorative nature of the design and a “feminine” theme, since pink is traditionally associated with gender specific women and girls. The print is a cotton broadcloth, not silk or velvet, because I felt it was a more accessible fabric representing everyday attire.

All three portions of this installation were conceived simultaneously. I wanted to create a reciprocal relationship between the armature and printed cloth: a mannequin enrobed in fabric and construction meant to embody a more realistic human-sized figure.

The pattern used for the garment is based on the Robe à la Française, an 18th century gown where the cape is part of the garment, not a separate attachment. The garment is historic in construction because its installation is as much about contemporary issues as it is about repeating issues from the past. The gown is completely constructed by me and in many areas sewn entirely by hand. I envisioned a very long cape - the length represents the breadth of obstacles and challenges the figure is witnessing, absorbing, and dragging while moving forward in a gesture of fortitude and perseverance. War, gun violence, global warming, infant formula shortages, Covid-19 related stress and consequences, overturning Roe v. Wade: 2022 was a banner year for anti-humanistic decisions and situations. This cape is visual evidence of the superpowers women possess to bear these outrageous consequences and events.

The printing of the fabric occurred in early July 2022, right after the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade. I was galvanized as I attended my weeklong textile printing class at the Women’s Studio Workshop in New York State. The design is my largest and most ambitious hand painted film to date. The screen-printing workshop, led by WSW Director Erin Zona, helped me when I did not have the physical ability to handprint using the size of silkscreen required to create the yardage. So, the realization of this piece is a completed circle of women supporting women.

Lisa Ficarelli-Halpern, August 2023

ARTIST STATEMENT

This exhibition is as much about my past, present, and future as it is about my contemporary interpretations inspired by art historical documents. In addition to more than a dozen oil paintings on canvas created between 2013 and 2023, it reveals a large-scale multi-media installation titled "The Robe of Resilience," which features a feminist-themed piece titled "2022 Commemorative Brocade" that I printed and silkscreened by hand at the Women's Studio Workshop in New York.

Finished in 2023, "The Robe of Resilience" has taken over a year to complete—the longest period I've ever spent on a single work of art. It marks my return to design and construction using textiles and reflects the beginning of my career as an artist when I designed two-dimensional textile designs and three-dimensional presentations. Much of the material I looked to during that time was historical, or what many would call classical.

The paintings contain vestiges of well-known images: a sky, a pair of eyes, a landscape, the artfully tied neck-scarf. By retaining the art historical pre-existing images and combining them with what we see and experience now, the work delivers the unique sensation of seeing something familiar in a new setting. Also featured are many new portraits created especially for this exhibition. I see these personages as ageless entities, just as the people pictured in historical works could be living among us now. My models and muses embody a timeless quality that translates further as these people are presented within a classical environment.

I have somehow always approached understanding my own world and life by reflecting upon my past and trying to connect it to a present or future context. Looking back, I see that my visual vocabulary has evolved and portrays a decidedly feminine point of view. In the present, I am primarily known as a painter. And looking forward, I see myself creating new works across different media.

As you enjoy and reflect upon these works, I hope you will find a way to connect your own past, present, and future through my art.

Lisa Ficarelli-Halpern

Esta exhibición trata mucho acerca de mi pasado, presente y futuro así como de mis interpretaciones contemporáneas inspiradas en los documentos artísticos históricos. Además de una docena de pinturas creadas en lienzo entre 2013 y 2023, que contiene una instalación de multimedia de larga escala titulada "La Tunica de la Resiliencia" en el cual contene una pieza con temática feminista llamado "Brocado conmemorativo de 2022" que imprimí y he serigrafado a mano en el taller de estudio de la mujer en New York.

Terminada en 2023, "La Tunica de la Resiliencia" ha sido la obra que más tiempo he tardado en completar, y es el período más largo que he pasado en una sola obra de arte. Esto marca mi regreso al diseño y la construcción con textiles, el cual refleja el comienzo de mi carrera como artista cuando diseñaba textiles bidimensionales y presentaciones tridimensionales. Mucho del material que yo vi durante este tiempo es histórico y se podría llamar clásico.

Las pinturas contienen vestigios de imágenes conocidas como cielo, un par de ojos, paisajes y el pañuelo artísticamente anudado al cuello. Al retener las imágenes históricas preexistentes del arte y combinarlas con lo que vemos y experimentamos, el trabajo brinda la sensación única de ver algo familiar en un nuevo entorno. Además se presentan muchos retratos nuevos creados especialmente para esta exposición. Yo veo a estos personajes como entidades sin edad, tal como las personas representadas en obras históricas podrían estar viviendo entre nosotros ahora. Mis modelos y musas encarnan en una calidad atemporal que se trasladan aún más cuando estas personas se presentan en un entorno clásico.

Yo siempre me he acercado a comprender mi propio mundo y vida reflexionando sobre mi pasado y tratando de conectarlo con un contexto de mi presente o futuro. Mirando hacia atrás, veo que mi vocabulario visual ha podido evolucionar y retrata un punto de vista decididamente femenino. En el presente, se me conoce principalmente como una pintora. Y mirando hacia el futuro, me veo creando nuevos trabajos a través de diferentes medios.

Así que espero que disfrutes y pienses en este trabajo, y que encuentres una manera de conectarte con tu propio pasado, presente, y futuro en mi arte.



THE ROBE OF RESILIENCE

"Robe of Resilience" is an installation of three parts: the silkscreen camouflage print "2022 Commemorative Brocade," three-dimensional mannequin enrobed in the 2022 Color of the Year, and an accompanying video projected on the wall consisting of photo images mined from the Internet depicting social-political events from 2020-2022.

"La Tunica de Resiliencia" es una instalación de tres partes: El estampado de camuflaje "2022 Brocado conmemorativo", un maniquí tridimensional envuelto en el Color de la Año 2022, acompañado de un video proyectado en la pared que consiste en fotografías de internet representando eventos sociopolíticos de los años 2020-2022.

I am bringing together my skills in 2-D and 3-D design and construction techniques to create a powerful statement about what women have been dealing with over the past several years. Always feminist minded, but never this clear about the statement, I was completely inspired by 2022 with the politics, violence, and lingering issues surrounding the pandemic. The need to create this work was sparked when I saw the news footage of mothers pushing their children in strollers out of the war zone in the Ukraine. I was appalled and sad that women seem to always be the clean-up spot: lives are negatively impacted, we have to need to steer and keep the ship afloat. These contemporary travails have become a plague, violence, injustice towards other races and cultures, women are being asked to endure, adapt, and continue and are the reason we continue as a species.

Estoy uniendo mis experiencias en 2D y 3D en diseño y construcción para crear un poderoso declaración sobre lo que las mujeres han estado enfrentando en los últimos años. Siempre con mentalidad feminista, pero nunca tan clara sobre la declaración, estaba completamente inspirada en 2022 con la política, la violencia y los problemas persistentes que rodean la pandemia. La urgencia de crear este trabajo surgió cuando vi las imágenes de noticias de madres empujando a sus hijos pequeños en cochecitos fuera de la zona de guerra en Ucrania. Me horrorizó y me entristeció cómo las mujeres parecen ser siempre el lugar donde se ven afectadas negativamente o su pie, pero necesitamos seguir adelante. Estas tribulaciones contemporáneas han asido duras, violencia, injusticia hacia otras razas y culturas, mujeres y niñas están siendo pedradas y continúan porque son la razón por la que continuamos existiendo.

Resilience is defined as the ability to withstand and recover from adversity with toughness and flexibility that is both a physical and mental state. The design describing global events witnessed and endured are embodied in the inspired repeating pattern. The fabric chosen for the silkscreen print is a lush 2022 Color of the Year, which serves to support the commemorative design and a "feminine" theme, since pink is traditionally associated with women and girls. The print is a cotton broadcloth, not silk or velvet, a more accessible fabric representing everyday attire.

La resiliencia se define como la capacidad de resistir y recuperarse de la adversidad, representando tanto un estado físico como mental. Los motivos en el diseño que describen los eventos globales presenciados y soportados están incrustados en el patrón de repetición inspirado. La tela elegida para la serigrafía es un algodón que en el 2022 fue el año de este color, que sirve para apoyar el diseño conmemorativo y un tema "femenino", ya que el rosa es tradicionalmente asociado con el género específico mujeres y niñas. El estampado es un algodón más accesible que la seda o el terciopelo, porque sentí que era un tejido más accesible que el de la vida cotidiana.

All three portions of this installation were conceived simultaneously as a reciprocal relationship between the armature and printed fabric and construction meant to embody a more realistic figure.

Todas las partes de esta instalación fueron concebidas simultáneamente. Quería crear un maniquí y la tela estampada: un maniquí envuelto en tela y un vestido con una figura de tamaño humano más realista.

The pattern used for the garment is based on the Robe of the French Revolution where the cape is part of the garment, not a separate construction because its installation is as much about repeating issues from the past. The gown is completely hand sewn entirely by hand. I envisioned a very long cape that overcomes obstacles and challenges the figure is witnessing. The figure is moving forward in a gesture of fortitude and perseverance. The design is a formula shortages, Covid-19 related stress and anxiety, and 2022 was a banner year for anti-humanistic events.

El vestido está completamente construido a mano. Imaginé una capa muy larga que supera obstáculos y desafía que la figura está presenciando. La figura se mueve hacia adelante en un gesto de fortaleza y perseverancia. Cuando se trata tanto de temas contemporáneos como de los problemas persistentes de la fórmula infantil, estrés y consecuencias de la pandemia. 2022 fue un año excepcional para la humanidad, una evidencia visual de los superpoderosos consecuencias y eventos.

The printing of the fabric occurred in early 2022. I was galvanized as I saw the Roe v. Wade. I was galvanized as I saw the Women's Studio Workshop in New York. I hand painted film to date. The screen printing helped me when I did not have the resources required to create the yardage of fabric needed for women supporting women.

El 2022, justo después de que la Corte Suprema anuló mi clase de estampado textil en el estado de Nueva York. El diseño se imprimió hasta la fecha. El taller de serigrafía me ayudó cuando no tenía la capacidad física requerida para crear el yardaje de tela necesario para crear el vestido de mujeres apoyando a mujeres.

Lisa Ficarelli-Hull

The Robe of Resilience, ©2023
Installation with hand silkscreened fabric, mannequin, and slideshow
Dimensions variable
Installation image courtesy of the artist





Dutch Floral with Drapery, ©2014
Oil on canvas
50 x 38 inches



Daniel, ©2023
Oil on canvas
52 x 38 inches



Joy, ©2023
Oil on canvas
62 x 38 inches



Still Life with Floral and Landscape, ©2014
Oil on canvas
50 x 42 inches



King, after van Eyck, ©2016
Oil on canvas
36 x 32 inches



2022 Commemorative Brocade, ©2022

Silkscreen print

Dimensions variable

Q&A

with Lisa Ficarelli-Halpern and Donna Kessinger, Independent Curator, Director Chashama Gallery, Matawan, New Jersey

DK: Are you a painter? What colors speak to you?

LFH: I consider myself a painter, both in spirit and in technique, but embrace other media very readily. More and more, I am letting concepts drive my selection of media. I am not one to shy away from a technical challenge, so I try different materials and processes. The colors I choose are usually influenced by subject matter, so I don't really have "favorite" colors, per se.

DK: Who are your biggest artistic influences?

LFH: I am going to reference figurative contemporary artists to answer this question: I think Lisa Yuskavage's confidence in her concepts and presentation has inspired me to pursue my own visions of visual content. Will Cotton is also a big influence. He is a virtuoso of combining a nostalgic vibe with what is definitely "now," and presents it in a very visually pleasant way. It often takes a few minutes to figure out exactly where he's leading you, and I love portraying that in my own work. Both these artists are masters of color and painterly execution, an ongoing ambition in my practice.

DK: Where do you find inspiration?

LFH: As everyone is aware, I am drawn to art-historical works. However, I can be sitting in a restaurant and see someone wearing a certain color combination in their clothing or see a wallpaper design on television and that will also become cataloged in my mind and subsequently manifest itself in some manner in the work.

DK: How do you define success as an artist?

LFH: I think success as an artist is about feeling you've accomplished something within yourself and having empathically connected with others. It has less to do with sales; it's about getting up in the morning and looking forward to working on a piece of art, working on it, and seeing it come to life before your eyes. If you are fortunate enough to work on art for the love of working, you won't be disappointed if it doesn't sell. I have also found that if you believe in your work and yourself very strongly others will eventually follow

you. And I don't mean thousands of people on social media. I mean the core group of people who believe in you and your work.

DK: Have you done any good Art Fairs or been in community-based shows?

LFH: My work was selected for the prestigious New Jersey Arts Annual 2022-2023, which is a yearly exhibition comprised only of New Jersey artists. The inclusive and feminist-minded "Women's Werq" exhibition in 2021 at Studio Montclair that you curated was a highlight for me because I was able to show one of my more politically themed pieces. I was also fortunate to have one of my paintings represent the 14C ArtFair in 2020. This was the inaugural year for the fair, which has since become a major showcase for primarily New Jersey based artists. It was a great honor for me, and it has increased awareness for my work.

DK: Are you a feminist? What makes an artist a feminist?

LFH: I believe in gender equality in any form, which is the textbook definition of being a feminist. Any artist who matches this definition is inherently creating feminist art. But I also think what makes an artist a feminist is the ability to present visual material that touches humanity and teaches humanity, which doesn't always translate as "hit you over the head" imagery. Owning the feminist, or "feminine" part of the work is crucial, and sometimes you need to look past the "pretty" visual to understand the greater context.

DK: What other materials and processes are you employing in your current work (for this show)?

LFH: The main artwork for the "RE: History" exhibition at Kean University is the "Robe of Resilience" installation, which is a three-dimensional piece featuring a late 18th century woman's gown with a long cape. As with other ideas that reside in my mind, I had envisioned creating a piece like this several years ago. My undergraduate degree is in textiles – both two and three dimensional. I have sewn since I was a kid and have been experimenting with silkscreen printing off and on for about forty years. Winning the New Jersey State Council on the Arts monetary fellowship last year helped to fund the creation of this project.

DK: Have you made fabric work before this project?

LFH: I have made individual printed and un-printed textile constructions over the years but presented larger scale fabric ideas in 2020 for my solo show, "Attachment" at ArtHouse Productions Gallery in Jersey City. I created a large "pannier," woman's undergarment, as the centerpiece for the paintings and drawings in the show. This is what fueled my interest in creating more sensory experiential presentations, which has led to this more extensive installation in the current show at Kean.

DK: Is this show going to travel? Where? Where would you take the exhibition given the opportunity?

LFH: I certainly hope to show this work again, have reached out to several curators and venues and am waiting to hear back. 2024 is an extremely important year because we have a presidential election happening next November – we need to raise awareness and re-engage the feminist discourse now more than ever. Ideally, and if given the opportunity, I would like to show the "Robe of Resilience" in a highly visible museum or cultural center.



Spangle, after Vermeer, ©2019
Oil on canvas
52 x 38 inches



Plush, after DaVinci, ©2020

Oil on canvas
46 x 38 inches



Ships in the Tresses, ©2013
Oil on canvas
36 x 48 inches



Carla, ©2023
Oil on canvas
40 x 32 inches

ARTIST STATEMENT

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As you enjoy and reflect upon these works, I hope you will find a way to connect your own past, present, and future through my art.

Lisa Ficarelli-Halpern, August 2023



Shag, after Vigée LeBrun, ©2023

Oil on canvas

44 x 40 inches



ARTIST BIO

Lisa Ficarella-Halpern is an award-winning American figurative artist living and working in the New York metropolitan area. She is best known for re-contextualizing art-historical images within a contemporary setting. Her work has been shown extensively in galleries and museums, including the Wausau Museum of Contemporary Art, the Zhou B. Art Center in Chicago, and the Noyes Museum, New Jersey State Museum, Monmouth Museum, and the Visual Arts Center of New Jersey. She is a recipient of a New Jersey State Council on the Arts Fellowship for 2022. Her work has been featured in *Fine Art Connoisseur*, *Poets and Artists*, *FreshPaint* and *Studio Visit* Magazines. Lisa holds a BFA from Parsons The School for Design and MFA from New Jersey City University.

For a complete CV, please visit www.lisaficarella-halpern.com

The artist would like to thank Dr. Lynette Zimmerman and the galleries at Kean University for their kind and generous support.

Additional thanks to Donna Kessinger, The Womens Studio Workshop, Judy Buncher, Darren Fisher, and Lawrence Wright.

ABOUT KEAN UNIVERSITY

Kean University, New Jersey's urban research university, is a national institution of higher education recognized for its diversity, innovation and the social mobility of its graduates. Founded in 1855 as a teachers college, Kean has evolved into a thriving research university that supports students as they persist to graduation, give back to their communities and launch successful careers. Kean's six colleges offer more than 50 undergraduate programs, six doctoral degree programs and more than 70 options leading to master's degrees, professional diplomas or certifications, across a full range of academic subjects. With campuses in Union, Toms River and Manahawkin, New Jersey, and Wenzhou, China, as well as Kean Online, the University provides students of all backgrounds an affordable and accessible world-class education. Learn more at www.kean.edu.

ABOUT GALLERIES AT KEAN

The Galleries at Kean host over a dozen exhibitions each academic year by professional artists, traveling exhibitions, faculty shows, and student work across six galleries and one exhibition hall on Kean's main campus in Union, New Jersey. Known for its diverse array of artists and mediums, the Galleries mission is to build awareness of critical global issues through the visual arts. Visit galleries. kean.edu.

The Galleries at Kean University is committed to diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility in the visual arts, and demonstrates the importance of DEIA principles through its curatorial practice. All exhibition didactics, support materials, and social media are presented in both English and Spanish.

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Inside Back Cover:
2022 Commemorative Brocade, ©2022
Silkscreen Print
Dimensions variable

Back Cover:
Rococo Love, ©2022
Acrylic on canvas
Four panels, each 40 x 40 inches

