

Gallery Girls



In Conversation with Kelly Reemtsen: Discussing her Daring New Exhibit 'Smashing'

By jasmin hernandez

LA-based artist Kelly Reemtsen returns for a second solo exhibit at the De Buck Gallery with the aptly titled show *Smashing*, further delving into the metaphor of modern women 'breaking the glass ceiling'. In *Smashing*, a follow-up to her 2013 show *America's Sweetheart*, Reemtsen continues to explore the theme of exquisitely dressed women in

albertz benda

515 w 26th st | new york, ny | 10001
tel 212.244.2579 | www.albertzbenda.com

ladylike frocks wielding destructive objects. The anonymous subjects are elevated on chairs and ladders ascending to professional and personal heights, a universal theme all contemporary women can aspire and relate to. With a nod to Wayne Thiebaud's sunny color palette and combined with daring titles for each piece, Reemtsen creates an enticing mix of cheery visuals layered with slightly sinister undertones. **Gallery Gurls** talks to Kelly Reemtsen for a deeper and engaging discussion about female empowerment, fashion, and more. *Smashing* will be on view at the De Buck Gallery from October 8th through November 14th. Reemtsen is also currently in the group show *First Show: Detroit* at the David Klein Gallery through October 31st.

Gallery Gurls: There are so many powerful messages about feminism and femininity present in your work. You've created these female archetypes who are perfectly manicured and impeccably dressed while handling these very aggressive objects - what are you wishing to communicate to the viewer?

Kelly Reemtsen: Empowerment, emphasizing on the message of success through hard work. Tools are metaphors for working as hard as you can. Using every tool to really drive home the message. Go out and get it. It's a simple message.

Fashion design was a part of your education and it takes center stage in your work. I see Old Hollywood style echoed throughout and I can't help but think of the famed costume designer Edith Head and the sophisticated films of Stanley Donen. Where do you draw your fashion inspiration from?

I studied fashion design, I took a lot of fashion and printmaking classes. There are no exact decade references. I try to make the subjects very feminine with a cinched waist, emphasizing that this is a lovely women. The women are kept anonymous, usually mid-tone complexion, sometimes I am the model. I use all kinds of female subjects from very pale women to biracial women. I like to keep the tone neutral so everyone can see themselves in the work.

Have you ever thought of partnering with a designer brand or luxury retailer on a special project or collaboration?

It would great, some things are possibly in the works. Maybe down the line.

Talk to me about your new show *Smashing*, it's a continuation of the vintage female standard but with a deeper dialogue concerning women 'breaking the glass ceiling'. What was the thought process and direction for this series?

This is my sophomore show with De Buck, and I asked myself how do I evolve without changing? We all face the glass ceiling, but how do you move above and beyond it? The subjects are on chairs and ladders. The titles contain social commentary. The theme is my personal evolution and women in general. How do you see yourself? Everyone has the same story but our paths are different.

albertz benda

515 w 26th st | new york, ny | 10001
tel 212.244.2579 | www.albertzbenda.com



Fuck the System, 2015, Siren Red, Frosted Pink, Hot Pink, 39 x 15 x 12 in each, edition 3 of 5.

In *Smashing*, you're also introducing these incredibly bold lipstick sculptures titled *Fuck the System*, are you in a way rebelling against society's beauty ideals for women?

I work with fabricators which is a male-dominated environment and in tool shops as well. I've realized that I've had it, the system is rigged, there are so many inequalities for women, even more so for women of color. It's like we're ridiculous until deemed otherwise. We're constantly having to prove ourselves and I've had it. Basically it's like why?? Lipstick is a female product that is phallic, and with these sculptures I wanted to make them nasty looking and large-sized. I started working on a prototype about a year and half ago. I used an actual lipstick and burned it in an oven to get a certain degree, then smashed it for the effect. I bought several lipsticks to experiment with and have continued with the progress. I consulted with my neighbor who is a fabricator to help me. I used a stainless steel foundation to cast it for the high end look of chrome, but it's not chrome. They're polishable and I made them about 40 inches tall. I spent a full year cooking the lipsticks and smashing them to achieve the look they have today.

albertz benda

515 w 26th st | new york, ny | 10001
tel 212.244.2579 | www.albertzbenda.com

"I've realized that I've had it, the system is rigged, there are so many inequalities for women, even more so for women of color. It's like we're ridiculous until deemed otherwise."

Your paintings are so female-centric and serve as metaphors for women's independence and empowerment. I'm curious how have men have responded to your paintings?

I get a wide range of comments from men such as "wow these are fantastic" or "I like strong women" to bordering on the more pervy to everything in between. Men have covered their genitals with their hands and have said "I must really hate men". I have three nephews, I love men, I am boy crazy! Ultimately this is not about you (men). Don't be gross. They either get it or they don't. It's usually the more conservative guys who can appreciate it, but they don't get it. I have a huge gay following, they totally get it and they get a hoot out of it.



Shear Pleasure, 2015, oil on panel, 44 in x 44 in.

albertz benda

515 w 26th st | new york, ny | 10001
tel 212.244.2579 | www.albertzbenda.com