

# RIOT MATERIAL

ART. WORD. THOUGHT.

---

HOME THE MAGAZINE ART BOOKS FILM RECORDS RIOT SOUNDS CINEMA DISORDINAIRE

## Displaced Debutantes and Soluble Entities: The Vision of Linda Stojak

APRIL 21, 2017 BY JOHN BISCELLO — [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)

### Silent Voices

at LewAllen Galleries, Santa Fe NM

Reviewed by John Biscello

During a recent visit to Santa Fe, I chanced upon the artwork of Linda Stojak. Her show, *Silent Voices*, was being featured at LewAllen Galleries, and entering the shrine-like atmosphere of the nine-painting exhibition, I immediately felt as if I were holding sacred vigil or bearing witness to metamorphic elegies.

The female subjects comprising *Silent Voices* seem to exist in a haunted chrysalis state, or embryonic purgatory. Their faces, ashen swabs which are kin to Di Chirico's faceless enigmas, suggest not only the tragic obliteration of identity but also the potential for rebirth, i.e., a Bardo makeover. Who are these women? Who are they in the process of becoming? What is the nature of their shedding and reconstitution? Lyrical, understated, speculative, and lucidly incomplete, Stojak's artwork brings to mind a passage from the 14<sup>th</sup> century Japanese text *Essays in Idleness*, in which Kenkō writes: "In everything, no matter what it may be, uniformity is undesirable. Leaving something incomplete makes it interesting and gives one the feeling that there is room for growth."



Untitled

These women, with latent longing and coiled grace, demand that you participate in their mystery. Fashion also plays a significant role in their allure. Outfitted in period dresses and formal gowns, a sense of high style pervades. Yet it is this elegance, juxtaposed against backgrounds doubling as voids, monochromatic tones, and spectral moodiness, which thickens tension and endows these "portraits" with jarring disquiet. These women could be brides at their own funeral. Ballroom Ophelias in a fugue state. Or models in a *Vogue* photo shoot set in the *Twilight Zone*.

In Stojak's world, a symbiotic merger between stitch and flesh, fashion and form, seems to be taking place. The unspoken vocabulary of the interior is spelled out in slashes and smudges and hyphens, implying that psychic wounds run deep.

Figure 90 shows a woman whose hands are bracing either side of her face, an almost cinematic pose of terror, as if she's just received tragic news or is perhaps covering her ears so as to not hear something, while a dark stubby gash bi-sects her waist and extends snake-line down the length of her gown. The woman in *Untitled II*, dark hair like enfolded raven-wings screening her face, head bowed, seems to be stranded in a gauzy limbo, her right hand gloved in the stigmata of rose-blood. Figure 70, short ghost-bleached hair, bright yellow dress with hints of flowers, is poised off-center in an engulfing void. A faded horizontal slash, and a trail of lighted embers, are the only elements connecting her to the dark empty space that monopolizes the right half of the frame. The two women in Figure 73, perhaps mother and daughter, standing rigidly side by side, appear to be enveloped in pearlescent mist. An adagio in soft-focus, the picture's etheric quality is disturbed by the serpentine ravels of bright red winding around the "mother's" body, an umbilical blood-let which extends to her "daughter."



Figure 90



Figure 70

Stojak presently lives in Philadelphia, after having spent twenty years in Brooklyn (where she earned her master's degree from Pratt University). She is the recipient of a Guggenheim fellowship, and her work has found its way into over 300 private collections, as well as public ones, including Brown University, the University of Pennsylvania, and the Harn Museum of Art. When I asked her to cite some of her influences, she said, "One of my favorite artists is the Polish sculptor, Alina Szapocznikow (Stojak is second-generation Polish). I also love the paintings of Marlene Dumas. Chantal Joffe is a painter that I really like . . . I usually work from photos of myself or my daughter but also use images from fashion magazines or the newspaper and I appreciate how she uses similar images in such a different way. Jacqueline Humphries is an abstract painter that I always look for. I don't think of these artists so much as influencing my work but rather as almost reinforcing it or letting me allow it to exist."

Stojak also mentioned her love of Rainer Maria Rilke's poetry, and how some of his passages reflect back to her what she thinks her paintings are: "the caution of human gesture, "widowed skin," "the temptation to blossom," "barely measurable time between two moments," "the posture of someone going away," "the interval of being."

Her thickly layered compositions, painted with a palette knife, slowly materialize through diligence and revision. "In terms of working I tend to be pragmatic," Stojak said. "I can't wait for inspiration. Painting is hard work for me and I try to go to the studio every day even if I do nothing. I can only figure out a painting by making the painting. I don't always like the process but the finished product is extremely satisfying and the only way to get there is through the laborious process."

The women in *Silent Voices* all seem to be the offspring of a thematic trajectory, and I asked Stojak if she worked in terms of conceptual grouping: "I definitely work in series and the differences can be more obvious (clothes vs. no clothes . . . or black/white vs. color) or more subtle such as lines holding the figure in a space . . . I had show titled *Tethered* which I thought was about the idea that if the painted/collaged line around the figure was pulled off the figure would dissolve. I will sometimes have a series that uses a lot of paper glued to the canvas and then will do a series that has none."



Untitled II



Figure 73

I know that many artists have their bulletin-board pearls and nuggets, those guide-light mantras which serve as helpful refrains, and when I asked Stojak if she had any "talismans" of that sort, she said, "I can't think of any kind of personal mantra that I have . . . the only thing that I do continually go back to is the beginning of Nabokov's memoir *Speak, Memory* where he writes about life being 'a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness.' That is very reassuring to me, not depressing and I think of that often, that death will be the same as before being born, again I have that interest in that time between movement."

~

~

To see more of Linda's work, visit her website: [lindastojak.com](http://lindastojak.com).

John Biscello is originally from Brooklyn, writer, poet, playwright and performer, John Biscello has called Taos NM home since 2001. He is the author of two novels, *Broken Land*, a *Brooklyn Tale* and *Raking the Dust*, as well as a collection of stories. To see more of his work, visit [johnbiscello.com](http://johnbiscello.com)