

## Linda Stojak

Interview with Mike Weiss - March 2022

### **Your paintings are of women—usually centered in the composition, there are lines crossing the figures plane, why is that?**

I want the isolated, central figure of a female to represent the interiority of the painting's focus. The plain background is also an indication that the painting is focused on the interior. I paint over anything that may have been painted in the background—implying that the exterior exists but complicates the focus and needs to be simplified. Hopefully I convey that by leaving traces of what had been there. The lines act in a similar way. In addition to grounding the image, the lines are emotional, acting as thread or wires extending from or going through the clothing acting either as a comfort or as a point of tension. But these are images of women and the implications socially and politically cannot be ignored. In the paintings the figures are dominant by default...no one can do anything to them. They are not being persuaded, manipulated or abused, which can be a social and political statement. They are in control.



Installation view: Linda Stojak, It's ok to do nothing

### **Who or what has been influential to your practice?**

Two teachers in undergraduate school in painting and drawing were influential. I would do the work but leave it in class to be evaluated without me. These teachers sought me out, not letting me miss what was being said about the work that I did. The ramifications of that lasted a long time. Moving to New York for graduate school at Pratt was an influence, as was adopting a baby. They both were huge personal changes that affected my painting because I had to confront a different version of the person and painter that I thought I was.

**What were the early days in New York like when you first started to exhibit your paintings? Was your work well received?**

I went to graduate school in New York in the early 1980's and I stayed in New York for 20 years. The proximity to galleries and museums was incredible. Around 1990 I participated in a 2-person show in Soho with 100 12" x 12" paintings and someone came in and bought a large group of them. Then someone else came in and bought more. Then a gallery owner came in and gave me a show. I quit my job and just painted—I had reviews, more shows, and received a Guggenheim Grant. I loved New York.



Installation view: Linda Stojak, *It's ok to do nothing*

**What books or music influence your works?**

Magda Szabo's book *The Door* was a recent influence. She uses haunting, visceral imagery yet the book is almost delicate and calm. Also *The Copenhagen Trilogy* by Tove Ditlevsen, she writes that "childhood is long and narrow, like a coffin"—she writes directly, almost coldly descriptive, in a calm voice, of harrowing things. These are the kind of books that influence me, difficult themes that are presented calmly and beautifully.

**The works seem to balance between thick layers paint and thin washes. Can you tell me more about your process?**

I start a painting with an oil stick to draw an image. I then use a plastic palette knife to build up layers of paint around that initial thin layer. I build up the surface with every further decision, and I change my mind often. I basically figure out the painting through the process and do not hesitate to change whatever is necessary, even if that means sanding the surface. It is a constant back and forth between applying paint and then taking it away, leaving a combination of thin layers, thick layers, colors seeping through, and drips that are left to be or wiped away.

**Yes, the surfaces are ripe with scars of past revisions.**

This is an essential part of my process. I scrape and scar the canvas not in order for it to look a particular way but in order to work through the ideas. I change the image, the color—anything that is keeping me from finding something that is of personal importance in the work. This inadvertently leads to the layering of paint. I can paint with intensity but then need to calm it all down...calm all that anxiety down. For example, there are many drips in the paintings, which I let happen while I paint, but then I go back and control them. I make specific decisions about which stay and which should be painted over so I control the emotion in the work. I think these are emotional paintings, but I need to be concise.



Linda Stojak, Untitled: Yellow with White Dress (detail), 2022

**How do you title your works?**

I do not think about directing the viewer in any particular direction so I think that more descriptive titles work best for my work.

**Some of the figures faces are obscured, can you tell me more about this decision?**

I sometimes paint a face and decide that it detracts from the image and so I wipe it away. It seems like a straightforward formal decision, but a face has emotional impact so an obscured face does take on deeper meaning. I think to obliterate the face is almost an aggressive or angry way to imply presence yet absence, or it may also be a sad way to take that most obvious connection to a person away.

I also often paint the clothing on the figure in a way in which it is almost falling off or just not quite lined up with the shoulders or arms. I also see this as being connected to absent but present. In obscuring the face, or the clothes, or the hands you get the sense that someone is there or was

there or will be there.

**Is the figure a real person, or a space to generate an abstract form, or both? Are they imaginary?**

They can be all three...separately or in combination. I will occasionally reference a real person, a real person that pictorially evolves into an imaginary person or a newspaper photo that generates an abstract form.



Installation view: Linda Stojak, *It's ok to do nothing*

**Do you see the figures as floating?**

I see them as being still. I feel too much anxiety in the work to see the figures as floating.

**How has your upbringing influenced your work?**

I was brought up in a large extended family of Polish Catholic immigrants. My father being the youngest of ten, I being the youngest of all. I was extremely quiet and observant and my temperament was perfect for being allowed to observe and participate in the many rituals of sickness and death. That imagery along with the imagery of the Catholic Church itself was probably the most influential on my work. Although rejecting the religious aspects at an early age, the rest would be with me always, both stylistically and emotionally.

**Tell me about the title of the exhibition?**

I was reading an article about the director Jane Campion where she is telling the actor that it is ok to do nothing. That sentence seemed so poignant. I thought it was a good title for a show where the images are doing nothing in the solemn moment they are in.

**What is the inspiration behind this new body of work?**

Aging and the consequences of aging are the inspiration—the inability to stop the passing of



time, not necessarily wanting to stop it, and the acceptance of its inevitability. My sister died recently from early Alzheimer's and my mother will probably die soon from old age and dementia. My sister and now my mother existed in a state that seemed still, unable to remember and unable to anticipate. These paintings deal with the moments in time where you cannot move forward and you cannot move backward. They are not about my sister or my mother precisely, but are about these deeply unsettling feelings of that particular space and time.