

In *Love Poems for Infidels*, Ellina Kevorkian presents seductively idiosyncratic mixed-media representations that courageously and ingeniously map personal history, intertwining it with references to Shakespeare, Greek mythology, cinema, and the painting of the Pre-Raphaelites and the Pictorialists. Her paintings, video, and sculpture embody complex and poetic oppositions that question the way history is presented, how beauty and goodness are depicted, and how each is perceived by viewers. She combines mediums, painting upon digital photographs that are printed onto canvas, defying easy categorization. The colors and textures of each medium mimic and inform the other, and the amount of photography or painting varies from work to work. Painting (a traditional medium of fictionalization and representation) and photography (a historical arbiter of truth), as well as her multifaceted identity as a twin offer pictorial challenges to the notions of history versus myth. The fun begins when the viewer attempts to locate the infidelity in this work. Is it the irreverence toward modernist purity? An unfaithfulness to history? To the stereotypes and expectations bestowed upon women? To personal identity? To the cultural expectations of goodness in women and the female subconscious desire for deviance?

All the rhetoric and metaphor of twinhood is embedded in each step of the journey, and Kevorkian presents the intriguing archetype of a heroine who is a Freudian fusion of cowboy and pin-up girl. She plays with traditional notions of gender and history, freeing herself of established codes of behavior. Journeying with the viewer through art history, she also perverts authorship, playing with her own roles in the paintings as she morphs from protagonist to victim to perpetrator to muse. The infidels in history and pop culture alike tend to be the characters that we love to hate and hate to love. Kevorkian reminds us that it is not so simple to become a female icon.

Dichotomies that characterize her work are first evident in *The Wildwood Flower Graves*, an anti-painting heavily laden with sickly sweet sculptural castings of butterflies, flowers, and perfume bottles. Signifying an end, *Graves*, nonetheless begins this body of work, offering memento mori, an elegiac homage to appease the deceased and a garish farewell to the certainty of our perceptions of history and identity. This piece complicates notions of beauty and painting. Distracting us with an arresting gaudiness that reminds us (as she will throughout the exhibition) that she is interrupting and reexamining art history.

In the show's eponymous video, *Love Poems for Infidels*, Kevorkian and her fraternal twin Soseh ride enthusiastically on unseen horses, or perhaps a train. The girls rise and fall in rhythmic succession as they look back over their shoulder at their off-screen pursuers with sly smiles, implying that perhaps it is the sisters who are being ridden. The video provides a metonymic reference to old Western films with outlaws and cowboys, featuring the rough-and-tumble heroes and antiheroes of the great frontier. This concretely locates Kevorkian's identity in history, as the twin heroines are enacting the imagined follies of their ancestral male cousins who were train robbers—and the only other twins in the family's history. In Kevorkian's case, there's strength in numbers, and her twin Soseh is not only her partner in crime, but also a means of empowerment.

The series of *Kissing Bubbs*, *Twins Slaying Holofernes*, and *Someone's Coming* is inspired by the famous Artemesia Gentileschi compositions of Judith beheading the general Holofernes. The bravado of these twin infidels crystallizes as Kevorkian wears the victim's blood as a bracelet (handcuff?) of jewels, an irreverent trophy that cockily boasts of her position as infidel or prisoner. The twins-as-prisoners theme recurs in *Final Bow, or the Death Portrait* and *Gather Ye Rosebuds While Ye May*, as Ellina and Soseh rest coolly behind prison bars. In *I Am Half Sick of Shadows*, Ellina lies like an odalisque on her studio floor, simultaneously imprisoned and sanctioned by the walls of her studio, trapped between representation and reality. The painting on the studio wall is the very same one that opposes the viewer in the gallery. The viewer is suddenly implicated within the site of the entire madness, and as such is victimized by Kevorkian's piercing, expectant gaze. She invites the viewer to question his or her own position in this history.

In *John Millei and the Nymphs*, an emulation of the famous John Williams Waterhouse painting *Hylas and the Nymphs* (1896), painter John Millei (a homophonic reference to Pre-Raphaelite painter Sir John Everett Millais) reaches out to a bevy of muses, among whom are the siren twins. As in the original painting, it's not clear whether he reaches out to help them or because he desires them. The painting alludes to Narcissus, as the artist yearns for both himself and his other, in his reflection. An unseen moment imaginatively transits between this painting and *Twins Finding the Head of John Millei*, where the nymphs seem to have pulled Millei into the water and, from the shore, are laughing, as trickster twins, at his floating face. Genders are reversed, the male now placed in a subordinate position. The position of author is complicated by the reference to the head of Holofernes, whom the twins/the artist have killed on the other side of the gallery.

The role of the subject undergoes another permutation. In *Ophelia*, one of the twins lies entombed in an overflowing tub, replacing the male visage once again. This painting echoes the death motif of *Graves* but is formally antithetical. Here the deceased is clearly revealed, visible under a transparent veil of water.

Backing up from the paintings on the walls, the viewer bumps into two satin gowns in the middle of the room. The gowns that the twins wore in each painting are positioned back-to-back, as if ready for a gun draw, a climactic duel of identities as well as a defensive stance against the viewer. They are cinched on small-sized mannequins, and the flounced petticoats, which are absent in the work, are poised for public display, simultaneously idealizing the memory and representation of their former wearers and diminishing their stature. The double image of the gowns evokes the attendant stereotypes that twin mythology carries: the fantasy of having sex with twins; the ability to shift identities as a form of trickery; the creation of a secret language; the expression of the dichotomies of good and evil, as well as the yin and yang of any singular identity.

The theme of display or exhibitionism is eloquently executed in *Shoot-Out at the OK Corral*. Here Ellina and Soseh insert themselves into an actual museum diorama where nothing—including history—is as it seems. Infiltrating the tableau vivant, which was shot at the Museum of the American West in Los Angeles, the troublesome twins have their way with the now disarmed cowboy dummies. With this piece Kevorkian gracefully appropriates both history and the museum as her battlefield and reminds us that culture itself is a performance.

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