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Photo by Talia Page
Virginie Sommet, artist and curator of the Collective Gallery, poses in front of one of the drawings by Béatrice Kusiak

FLOTTEMENT ET PLANETE MO(N)DE

Béatrice Kusiak
Through May 6 by appointment only
Collective Gallery
171-173 Canal Street
(646-245-6072, virginiesommet.com)

Fashion first: a spectacular art

Fluidity through folds and movements

By Talia Page

“What a stark contrast,” noted an observer looking out the gallery windows at throngs of people who were packed together like sardines, shoving their way into Chinatown’s cubicle-like market stalls. “It’s color without clutter,” agreed art enthusiast Ramine Narimani as he took a deep breath and contemplated Béatrice Kusiak’s graceful figures fluttering elegantly across clean, spacious canvases.

The exhibition, entitled, “Flottement et Planete Mo(n)de” translates to “floating” and the “fashion planet/the entire planet” (the ‘n’ is a play on the French words for ‘fashion’ and ‘world’). Kusiak herself is a sort of floating, fashionable figure; she is a young artist who is well traveled and pays no heed to geopolitical borders. Kusiak also takes care not to impose borders on her artwork, which is hung without frames.

The artist grew up in France, where she will soon finish her studies in plastic arts at the University of Paris 8, Saint Denis. This year, however, Kusiak is participating in programs at the Institut of Design of Koszalin and the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts in Poland, where she has family roots.

“Flottement et Planete Mo(n)de” is her second show in New York; she was first featured at Ward-Nasse (Soho), where Virginie Sommet, artist and curator of the Collective Gallery, noticed her work. “I am not usually attracted to paintings,” said Sommet, “but Kusiak’s

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pieces are very contemporary, and I am drawn to the mixed-media aspect. The movement between the oil and the folds of fabric sewn on canvas gives it an interesting depth in terms of dimension...portraying a sort of game with elements.”

The fabric used in Kusiak’s work comes from excess material, cocktail dresses, embroidered shirts and mini-skirts. The material and garments were purchased by the artist in Poland, where they were imported from Asia. This is essential to Kusiak’s international focus, which plays a key role in each of the pieces. The oil-slick and trim figures that model the fabric on canvas stem from Kusiak’s interest in the fashion world. The artist endeavours to relate the eager distribution of fashionable features and fabrics that were contained regionally before the age of globalisation. Like the fluid style of her art, fashion has also become a fluid element of a global society. Due to demand, it has, to a large extent, developed the ability to cross many cultural, political, and geographical borders. Visually, Kusiak emphasizes that, “The key to my art is the use of this material: it expresses fluidity through its folds and movements and the stripes give the lines for my compositions.”

The notion of fluidity is not confined to the literal dimension of garments, but more importantly to the concept of the female identity (all of the figures in Kusiak’s exhibition are female). Simone de Beauvoir, the famous French thinker and feminist, provided some early commentaries on fashion in the mid-20th century. She didn’t consider fashion as existing independent of the wearer, but rather as a way to better understand a ‘woman of elegance.’ De Beauvoir explained: “What she treasures is herself adorned and not the objects that adorn her.” (“The Second Sex,” 1949).

Things have changed. In the first decade of the 21st century, fashion defines characters, from the leopard-skin prints of Joan Collins to the Manolo Blahnik shoes of Carrie Bradshaw. The fluidity of identity is directly linked to the spectacular characteristics of fashion, which is ever dynamic. Tongue-in-cheek, Kusiak is not only playing on words, but the gestures of the fashion world in its capitalistic floating of “femininity.” Cindy Sherman’s untitled film stills of the 1970s have made way for Kusiak’s ironic fabrics of today. Fashion, supposedly, is the treasured art that makes the woman.

“Flottement et Planete Mo (n)de can be viewed at the Collective Gallery until May 6, after which time it will float across the ocean from New York en route to Poland.

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