

The “Happy” Homemaker

Gender disparity between men and women is an issue which I feel extremely strongly about, and, in my IB Visual Arts body of work, I have decided to explore one of the most plastic images of women: the housewife. By employing instruments such as irony, humour and storytelling, I have been able to explore the veil of ridiculousness that makes the 1950s inspired stereotype of the joyful, perennially well-dressed and smiling woman nothing but a “self-made hell”. In this condition women are unable to fully develop their own person and tailor the roles of housewife, professional, mother and so on to their own vision of their own lives.

In my body of work, despite the housewife being the central figure, the husband is also introduced in some pieces to aim to identify the potential source of her oppression and discomfort. Martha Rosler, whose *Semiotics of the Kitchen* was influential for my work, considers the relationship between these two characters as rather shallow and troubled: it is not romantic, it is not sexual, it is not forced, but only of instrumental value for the man, who is able to receive all the attention and gratification that he requires. I have tried to incorporate this idea in my work while also watering down the severity of her claims, as ultimately I believe that even the husbands 'dominant' role is not completely uncoerced.

I have committed myself to always include a female perspective in all my pieces, and to try and employ art-making techniques which utilize unconventional mediums, such as stitching, embroidery and innovative sculpture forms. Although feminist artists such as Rosler, Rebecca Horn and Cindy Sherman have been inspirational to me in terms of conceptual values, other artists such as Man Ray, Egon Schiele and William Kentridge have impacted my work both conceptually and formally. This has allowed me to develop a drawing and painting style which I hope I can call my own. I have always enjoyed exploring and experimenting with techniques and mediums, mixing and combining to create something personal. For this body of work I have embraced stereotypical female craft forms such as dressmaking, embroidering and stitching and combined these with printing, drawing and painting. Materials have also derived from the domestic environment. Soap bars, vinyl embossed tablecloths used in frottage, fabric and wallpaper from my own designs, combined with traditional charcoal, ink, acrylic and gouache characterize my work. Digital imagery has also played an important role and photography, video and animation allowed me to portray my subject in action, allowing for the smooth development of a storyline.

Popular culture and literature have also influenced my work. 1950s advertisements helped me create a convincing image of housewives, and other sources, such as Lady Gaga's music video *Telephone*, have conceptually informed my work. I have chosen to connect each of my pieces to a quote from Carol Ann Duffy's *The World's Wife*, an anthology of feminist poetry that gives voice to all the silenced women who accompanied the most important men of history. Duffy's boiling anger towards men and their pretentiousness, which is expressed in her compositions through humour, satire and popular contemporary imagery, reflects much of my own portrayal of gender disparity.

I would like the viewer to engage with my work according not to the aesthetic qualities but the conceptual grounding and the ideas explored. The triptych *American Dream* introduces the 1950s stereotype of the Happy Homemaker, and presents the historically grounded expectations that a housewife is expected to fulfill. The next pieces, which include the short film *The Last Supper* and the towering *The Big Lady* all portray the housewife seeking revenge for all the 'abuses' she has experienced in the home. As the viewer approaches the end of my body of work, my subject is required to pay the price for the freedom she has so desired and *Brava! Brava! Come Sono Brava!* aims to reflect the dilemma of Italian women nowadays. This contrastingly small photograph at the end of my work acts both as a full stop and a question mark hinting at the complexity of holding total freedom as a woman in contemporary society.



Enrico Giori, April 2016