

JoANNE ARTMAN GALLERY

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“Yes, Masters: A MANthology” - A Conversation with Michael Callas



JA: This exhibition, *Yes, Masters: A MANthology*, explores Old Master paintings being reframed in a contemporary context, in addition to the idea that the compositions and narratives still hold relevance in today’s art and society. Do you think of your works as portraits of figures at a particular time and place? Are your paintings set in the past, or are these figures that would exist only today?

CALLAS: I do not view the specific composition as what ultimately matters in regard to the individual paintings themselves. So, in that sense, I suppose that these figures could exist at any point, however, my paintings are set in the present. I am a student of what has come before me, but ultimately I am a creature of the times.

I work with the past to learn from it. I like to think of working with these pieces as a border conversation. When appropriating 600-year old paintings, I am studying every decision that was made on the canvas. This allows me to carry on a conversation into the present day. When a painting becomes timeless it becomes eternal. These conversations then take place over a series of centuries instead of minutes.

JA: Where did you get your imagery from for this series? What, if any, sources or particular artistic movements did you reference?

CALLAS: The majority of the work came from my collection of art books. I like to spend time going through many different books reading about the particular piece and artist that I am interested in. Once I settle on a couple different options, I then take to the Internet to do further research on that particular piece. I would say the most common artistic movement referenced would be The Renaissance.

JA: A large part of the construction of culture is how we depict each other. How do you select and then choose to portray the figures in your work?

CALLAS: The selection process of work initially has more to do with my filter and how the piece will aesthetically look. I might subconsciously draw attention to certain aspects of the painting, however, that would require psychoanalysis of my decisions and myself. Not sure I am ready to go there just yet. Some things are better left a mystery.

JA: How does this differ from your typical work? What challenges did you face creating this new body of work?

CALLAS: This work does not depart from my typical work. I have been working on appropriations of Old Master's paintings for some time. Workings with these pieces are among my favorite type of paintings to do.

JA: Is there a cultural experience that changed the way you see the world? How has this affected your artistic practice?

CALLAS: The current cultural climate has had an impact on me. As one who makes a living off of conscious and subconscious expression, often it can feel vulnerable to put yourself out there. I believe art should always speak truth to power. My paintings will exist not just for today, but also for many years to come. I do not want my work to be looked at as compromised through the lens of the future. When sufficient time passes the moment becomes more defined and understood. I would like the conversation I am having with a 600-year old painter to continue with another painter 600 years from now. That way, the thread of time is never lost and the conversation is ever evolving.