

AMERICA MARTIN: "YES"

FOREWORD

The world is fierce. Filled with chaos and collision, serenity and silence, it tumults along, offering those bold enough to reach into it a chance to withdraw a bounty of heat and light and sentience. It is spectacular in its simplicity and alluring in its anarchy. It is into this world that America Martin propels herself, where she seizes, with delicate hand and bullish acumen, scraps of humanity to weave into tapestry; where she collects shadows of street musicians and card players and plucks spirits from forest pagans and fisherwomen, and transforms them through brash strokes and brilliant chroma into amplified enlightenment and blueprints of the soul.

The first gathering of these souls appeared in Martin's debut publication, *Insouciance*, a word synonymous with "carefreeness" and a term she felt characterized that early body of work. *Insouciance* can also mean a lack of concern, however, even indifference, and while these attitudes are certainly found in abundance in the outside world, there is absolutely nothing indifferent about America Martin. In fact, she seems about as engaged as any soul could attempt to be.

This is keenly apparent in the work presented here in her second book, *Yes*. The sojourn Martin has made over the course of the last five years was no easy pilgrimage, but it was clearly undertaken with focused urgency and fervor, and thus, the collection is aptly titled. "Yes," although a much shorter word than "insouciance" is no small word. While we idiomatically know that "yes men" are the sort to be avoided, when saying yes is instead applied to propulsion and obstacle hurdling, to discarding facades and masks and to facing brilliant lights and blinding darkness, "yes" becomes a most powerful word – it becomes the word of a warrior.

Martin is that warrior. Not one who glares or gloats or rails, but who instead pads softly along, allowing life to fill her porous soul and spill into the pools of her mind. She attacks with her curiosity and captures with her respect. Her greatest tool is reflection, and through intense observation she finds enrichment in the common, fulfillment in the flawed and joy in complexity – all of which is transmuted onto canvas and paper where it lives in human figure and form.

Among these representations, you will find an abundance of women. Women with large hands and big feet and broad shoulders – with things real women aren't supposed to have. Martin's women are hyper-real, however. They are solid, immovable, inerasable; they are present. They cannot be dominated, but not because they are angry or violent or ugly, but because they are stoic and centered and complete. They have a peace – a peace about their pointed breasts and their knobby knees and their thick thighs, because they are built to be alive, and that makes them both beautiful and perfect.

Men, too, are collected among Martin's bodies and are also defined by realities instead of ideals. While Martin's women often sit or recline, immersed in thought, her men make things – like music – because men, too, must act, must *make*, in order to experience life (one pass by a group of males tooting horns and strumming guitars on a street corner can offer even the most cynical observer a flash of sudden understanding of the universe). Martin's bands of musicians are those flashes, and like the free-styling notes that they play, are cohesive in their spontaneity, beating out black lines and blocks of color and jiving together, layer upon layer until it's no longer clear where the musician begins and the instrument ends, each becoming an augmentation and appendage of the other.

All of these entities say “yes.” Yes to life, yes to being, yes to participating in the world – and *yes* is no easy word to say. Ultimately, *yes* is an agreement between parties: yes, I will go; yes, I will do; yes, I will try; yes, I will listen. Sometimes that party is another person, but *yes* is the most effective and produces the grandest results when it is an agreement with oneself. Yes, I will hold on. Yes, I will continue. Yes, I will seek further. Yes, I will weather the storm, the failure, and the ridicule – even if it is only coming from me. *Yes* is engagement on all levels, and in America Martin’s case (as is true of all great artists), that engagement goes beyond merely unlocking the door: it’s flinging the door open so hard that it leaves a dent in the wall, especially when you don’t know what’s on the other side of it.

This is the type of fearless action that produces art that truly makes impact, and a bold approach to life is clearly America Martin’s mantra. Her work, past and present, is a welcome assault on our senses, and with each new piece she seems determined to raise the stakes, blitzkrieging any assumptions we might impose or any containment we might devise. She advances quickly, and within these pages you will find a multitude of narratives on what it means to be human and what it means to be alive. Their beauty will stun you like a blow, their intelligence awe you like a guru, and all the while, you’ll undoubtedly find yourself responding to their unrelenting refrain in kind – with an unequivocal, resounding *yes*.

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