

# HORROR VACUI

**Artist : Marguerite Wibaux**  
**Curator : Susan Nelly**

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Our contemporary culture of instantaneity is fueled by fear of missing out, the impulse to document every single moment of our lives, our love for crowds and noise, our fear of silence, disconnection and emptiness... We live in Horror Vacui. In visual art, the term means the filling the entire surface of a place or piece of art with detail. Here we refer in particular to its association with the Medieval aesthetic of manuscripts, which were filled with texts, patterns, illuminations and miniature images. No space was ever left empty.

Horror Vacui, a solo presentation of the paintings of Marguerite Wibaux, features content that questions the representation of female identity in an age of superficiality, selfies and shared hearsay. It plays with the conflicting injunctions that are laid upon women -- how readily the female user is slut-shamed even though the algorithm rewards hyper-sexualized imagery. It underlines the difficulty of defining one's own identity when it comes to incorporating and integrating both a woman's social and intimate images of herself. In doing so, it also uses paint to play with the pathways from historic iconic imagery to today's mediasphere.

Horror Vacui pivots on 4 larger paintings -- amidst a "cloud" of smaller imagery -- that underscore the theme. « The Ladies Gang Of New York » is a direct revisit of Picasso's "Les Femmes d'Alger", in the identical pose, Naomi@GoneGonzo is a reference to Botticelli's Venus, Whitney@SleepingBooty references the odalisques of Ingres, with a revealing twist. "Not a Virgin" is a contemporary interpretation of multiple paintings of the Madonna -- one that defies and questions how we separate the mother from the woman.

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How can women figure themselves out when society demands that they act and live within the limits of assigned role-play? Who are they in public, who are they alone? A painter of portraits, Wibaux juxtaposes these works with her paintings of the Instagram feeds of her models so that the viewer can experience this contrast and decide which, if either, is more truthful in representing women.

“I want people to look at other people. It’s about empathy and I want people to feel connected as if the emotion on the painting could be their emotion,” says Wibaux. “All together, these paintings explore women’s path to owning their narrative, owning their body, or the contrasts between the private and the public self or the impossible path towards emancipation, as women are their own oppressors...I refuse to judge or simplify, to put women in one single box where they only get to be a mother, a lover, a daughter, a friend, an object of desire or the master of their narrative.” Thus, *Horror Vacui* is a tribute to the complexity and variety of expressions of the female identity.

*Horror Vacui* is in form the heretical antithesis to the current “less is more” aesthetic. It elevates the unfiltered, sensory tsunami that is social media and overwhelms the viewer with redundant exhibitionism - and as such it’s the pulse of our times -- messy, alive and kicking.

# ABOUT THE CURATOR

## SUSAN NELLY

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Susan Nelly is a Fine Art Consultant, Curator and Owner of The Villa America Fine Art.

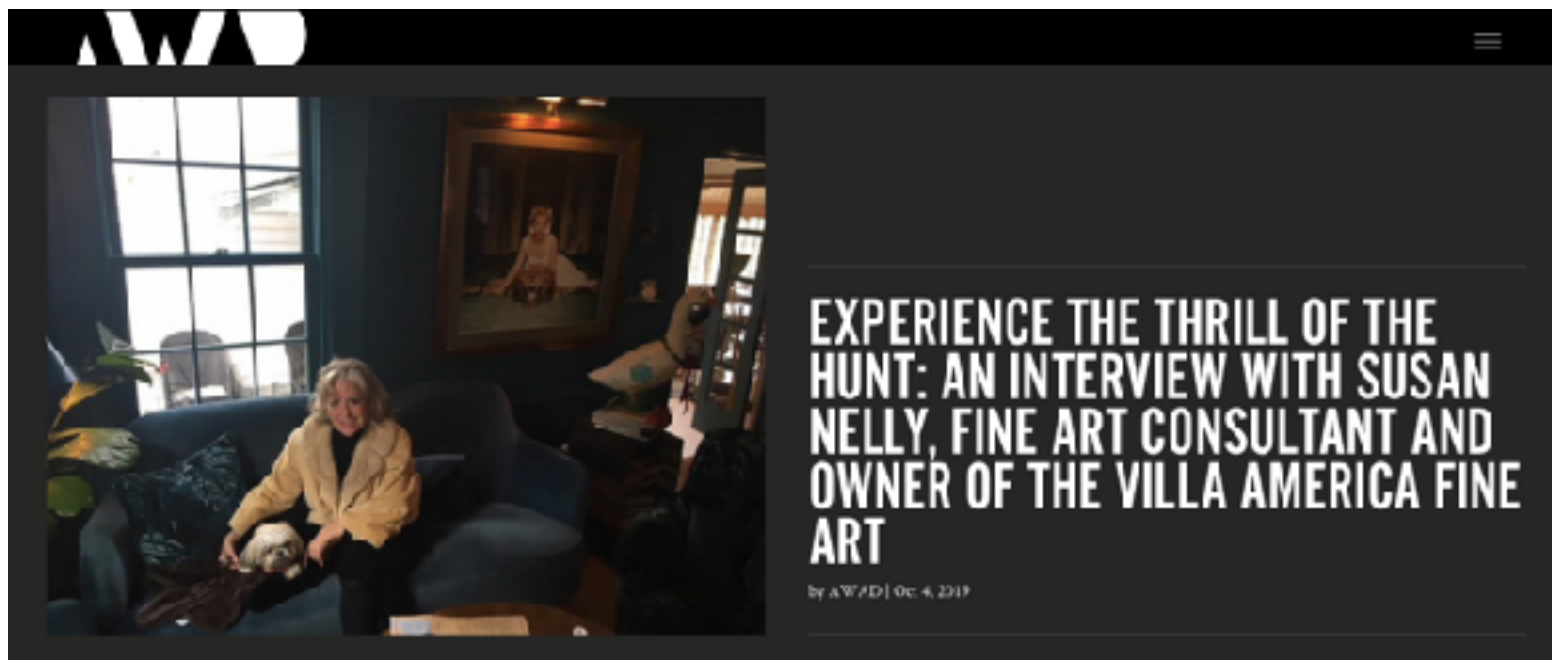
She began her career in the art world at Sotheby's and has since held notable positions in prominent galleries and auction houses including Spanierman Gallery and Bonham's Auctioneers & Appraisers.

A recognized expert in secondary market sales and acquisitions, Susan also engages the fine art community as a member of ArtTABLE , a founding member of the Association of Women Art Dealers (AWAD) and ART SHE SAYS Collector Club.

On the contemporary side, Susan maintains strong relationships with artists from New York and around the world, curates collaborative exhibitions with prominent galleries, and participates in major art fairs. Recent curatorial projects include Anthony Haden-Guest "The Further Chronicles of Now" at Anderson Contemporary, Beatriz Elorza "Blooming Emotions" at Rafael Galleries, and the group shows the "Rites of Spring" at Art 345 East Harlem, and "Muse" (New York on Paper) at Anderson Contemporary.

# INTERVIEW BY AWAD

october, 4th 2019



Susan Nelly is a Fine Art Consultant and Owner of The Villa America Fine Art. She began her career in the art world at Sotheby's and has since held notable positions in prominent galleries and auction houses including Spanierman Gallery and Bonham's Auctioneers & Appraisers. A recognized expert in secondary market sales and acquisitions, Susan also engages the fine art community as a member of ArtTABLE and a founding member of the Association of Women Art Dealers (AWAD). On the contemporary side, Susan maintains strong relationships with artists from New York and around the world, curates collaborative exhibitions with prominent galleries, and participates in major art fairs.

Established in 2014, The Villa America Fine Art was inspired by the French Riviera salon of Sara and Gerald Murphy. The Murphys' commune attracted cultural luminaries of the 1920s — Picasso, Hemingway, Fernand Leger, and many more — and it is this passion for art, adventure, and community-building that The Villa America evokes. Dedicated to promoting a spirit of adventure towards collecting, Susan presents a bold selection of emerging and mid-career artists in the mix with Modern and Contemporary painting, sculpture, and photography from America and Europe. [www.thevillaamerica.com](http://www.thevillaamerica.com)

Services offered include: Private and auction sales and acquisitions; acquisition/curatorial collaboration for dealers, interior designers, architects, cultural and corporate institutions, hotels and hospitality groups; market research and vetting of works of art for authenticity, quality, value and condition; negotiation of payment terms, including coordination of shipping, framing and installation; and collection maintenance.

*Stephanie Yeap spoke with Susan Nelly between London and New York City via video call...*

## **1. Describe your business in 5 words:**

Adventure, curiosity, wonderment, creativity and community-building.

## **2. What inspired you to pursue this career?**

I grew up wholly immersed in the arts in Southampton Long Island. I studied art since kindergarten and had this wonderfully eccentric art teacher who lived in a grand old house by the water. She was brilliant and illuminated my fascination with oddities and interesting objects, which inspired me to become a Surrealist painter. Then, from grammar school through high school, I studied ballet and theatre. I went on to study art history, film and television at New York University and landed my first job at Sotheby's.

After that, I worked at several NYC galleries, with my years at Vorpal Gallery being a highlight. I worked directly with the owner purchasing art at the top auctions in New York and internationally—it was so exciting getting up at 4 AM to bid on a piece in Europe!—and placing works with notable museums, especially in Japan. When I joined the Spanierman Gallery as Associate Director, I wore many hats: I was closely involved with secondary market transactions and also experienced working at art fairs and show houses, as well as curating many exhibitions with the Gallery's contemporary artists. All of this fed my passion to open The Villa America in 2014, where I draw on the wealth of experience gained in my earlier career.

## **3. What's the most wonderful thing about the profession?**

Definitely the people! Artists, collectors, dealers, curators — the art world is filled with amazing creative energy. Introducing new work to emerging and seasoned collectors is especially rewarding; it feeds their curiosity and enhances their lifestyle. I truly have a lot of fun with it. It's bound to inspire people to enhance their spaces with quality art. All of this elevates my brand, my resources and my artists, while engaging with new audiences to foster sales.

**4. And let's get real... What's the most challenging aspect of the profession?**

The market keeps shifting, and to keep making sales, and matching people with art they love, I have to shift with it. It's a true collaboration, the artists use their talent to create work, and I have to use all my creativity to get it placed. Not having my own gallery space, I really have to think outside the box, so I take advantage of the flexibility that not having that expense offers, and collaborate with many other dealers. Hosting creative events and panels is a great and non-costly way of bringing new people to the table. Right now, I'm working on a very exciting panel with art, interior design and real estate experience.

**5. What's the best piece of professional advice you've been given?**

My mentors have always told me to choose a career that you love and you will excel at it. I recommend people find their passion and do their best to pursue it. Another thing to remember is TTT: Things Take Time. Know that anything you get involved with doesn't happen overnight and that you have to be patient. Patience is the key to success.

**6. What do you now say to someone who is just starting out? (Maybe it's that one thing you wish someone had told you!)**

I'd definitely recommend joining an auction house and learning as much as you can. I started at an auction house, working in Client Services, and got involved with all sectors of the company, from Bidding to Finance and the specialist departments. It's a lot more varied than working in a gallery or a museum, I was immersed in everything and that helped me decide which art spoke to me.

**7. What challenge is the industry facing that art dealers need to address?**

The art world is constantly changing and everyone, especially small business owners, is trying to find the best location for their brand. The answer is definitely not brick and mortar anymore, so collaborating, attending art fairs, and making use of online services is crucial. It's all about taking risks, having thick skin, and being careful about who you work with.

Contracts are imperative, the more comprehensive the better. Regardless of how friendly you are with people, there can be a lot of miscommunication, so I suggest making this a priority to prevent any misunderstandings.

**8. If you had to be one work of art, what would you be – and why?**

*'The Garden of Earthly Delights' (between 1490 and 1510) by Hieronymus Bosch. (image from Wikipedia)*



This came to my mind right away — 'The Garden of Earthly Delights' by Hieronymus Bosch. I chose this because it conjures up a deep curiosity and a sense of intrigue. The painting is so otherworldly and embodies the good, the bad and the ugly. It features such interesting symbolism and fills the viewer with curiosity and wonderment. To me, this piece is pure joy and never fails to fascinate me. It's a really easily recognizable painting if you have any art history knowledge, but one that also remains thought-provoking and accessible to people who don't. These feelings really form the backbone of what I strive to achieve in my business and bring to my collectors at The Villa America.

**. What do you personally believe are the best advantages of being part of an association like AWAD, and how have you benefited?**

AWAD's been extremely good to me and I was thrilled to join it the first week I opened my gallery. I met [Susan Eley](#) who introduced me to the Association, and realized immediately that meeting other professionals in the industry was a great way to start a business. I've collaborated with other members and really enjoyed learning about being a private art dealer. Susan Mumford, the Founder and CEO of AWAD, has a great mind for all aspects of the business of art.

My favourite things about AWAD are the camaraderie, the ability to share and communicate with other professionals, and the forums, which I find really rewarding. It's been a great organization for learning and bonding, and it's interesting to hear about the ups and downs of working as dealers so we can commiserate as well as celebrate each other's achievements. The networking is a tremendous tool because as a dealer, you spend a lot of time on your own. AWAD is my "family" in the business that I can trust and attend events with. You can always just call up another member for suggestions, and that's been such a big help!

**10. How can you make the most out of being a member of a professional network?**

Get involved as much as you can. Attend, participate, and add your value to meetings if you think there's something others can learn from. Engage yourself and network as much with other members, even those from other countries and chapters. I'm based in New York so while I've collaborated with other local members, I've also worked with colleagues from London. I've made such great friends at AWAD – we even have meals and celebrate together. It's amazing to be around other people who love the arts as much as you do, and it truly makes you feel like you belong in this niche industry when someone else understands what you're going through.

[www.thevillaamerica.com](http://www.thevillaamerica.com)

Instagram: [@thevillaamerica](#) // Facebook [@The Villa America Fine Art](#)

# ABOUT THE ARTIST

## MARGUERITE WIBAUX

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Marguerite Wibaux was immersed into fine art from the earliest age, surrounded by an art historian grandmother and an artist mother. Nevertheless, she first chose a conventional path : a brilliant student, she graduated from HEC Paris, and then worked at Mazarine, the leading communication agency for luxury and fashion brands. It's only when arriving in the US that she turned a life-long passion into a full-time occupation.

Born In Argentina, raised in Peru and Italy, Marguerite Wibaux has spent a great deal of her life abroad meeting new people and exploring new environments. Now living in New York City, Wibaux often exists as a stranger. While the endearing quality of her work is very much apparent, Wibaux's approach to encountering and eventually capturing her subjects borders on social experimentation. It is existential documentation of the human condition, and an invitation to challenge our preconceived representations.

Marguerite Wibaux had her first solo show at The French Cultural Center in Boston in 2019, and a two-person show Spring 2021 in New York City presented by QuietLunch Magazine. She participates in various shows in Paris, Milan, Boston and New York. She is a member of Art She Says Club, and part of Coccozza Advisory emerging artist roster. She has an upcoming solo show with Galerie Heimat in Saint Remy de Provence in July 2022.

# ART SHE SAYS - interview by Shameka Jones

April 9th, 2021

## French Painter Marguerite Wibaux Explores Empathy One Person at a Time

APRIL 9, 2021



“Not all those who wander are lost.”

New York-based French painter Marguerite Wibaux allows her intuition to guide her in life and her art. She has spent much of her life traveling across the world to embrace people and their experiences. Gathering cultural influences from South America to China and now the United States, Wibaux’s art shares an explorative theme that focuses on everyday people through portraiture. In her current show TOGETHER (curated by Akeem Duncan) at The Yard in New York, Wibaux and fellow artist, Dhanashree Gadiyar, highlight the commonalities that connect us all. Wibaux’s *Will You Listen to Cassandra?* uses vertical textured symbols in the background: giving Cassandra a supportive parallel to standing tall in her truth. Her companion is kneeling beside her, but you can tell his encouragement is also unwavering. In other pieces like *Ume’s Secret* and *Their Look*, a narrative is stunningly formed with blends of sultry blues, purples, and variant shades of brown. They give way to the state of peace that meets us whenever we decide to move past fear and uncertainty. Throughout Wibaux’s artworks, she beautifully creates a contrast between each figure and bold patterns. These two elements strategically co-exist to tell stories of every human emotion.

### Can you tell me more about the show?

The show is a two people show named Together. It kind of started with the portraits. The original idea of the curator was the power of portrait and connection. The word he always uses to describe my work is endearing. In the show, each portrait has a story. It’s a lot about empathy with other people’s lives. My work is really about meeting other people and stepping into their shoes. I paint from life. I get their stories and I try to document these stories through painting. I did a SoundCloud album of each of the stories I recorded. So, you get the painting and the story of the person through what I’ve learnt. This is very much part of my work practice.

Dhanashree was a great match for this show because she does two things: First, she’s crazy about patterns like I am. She also paints places, but not random places. She’s an immigrant from India and she records immigrants’ stories. She asks them about home, and she paints the places of how she imagines their home. It is very much about documenting people’s stories in a poetic way. So, it’s not so narrative, it’s really more like the nostalgia of where you come from. Our art practices are very connected. So, there’s this dialogue in the show that’s very interesting.



## From the beginning of your art practice, were you always interested in painting from other people's perspectives?

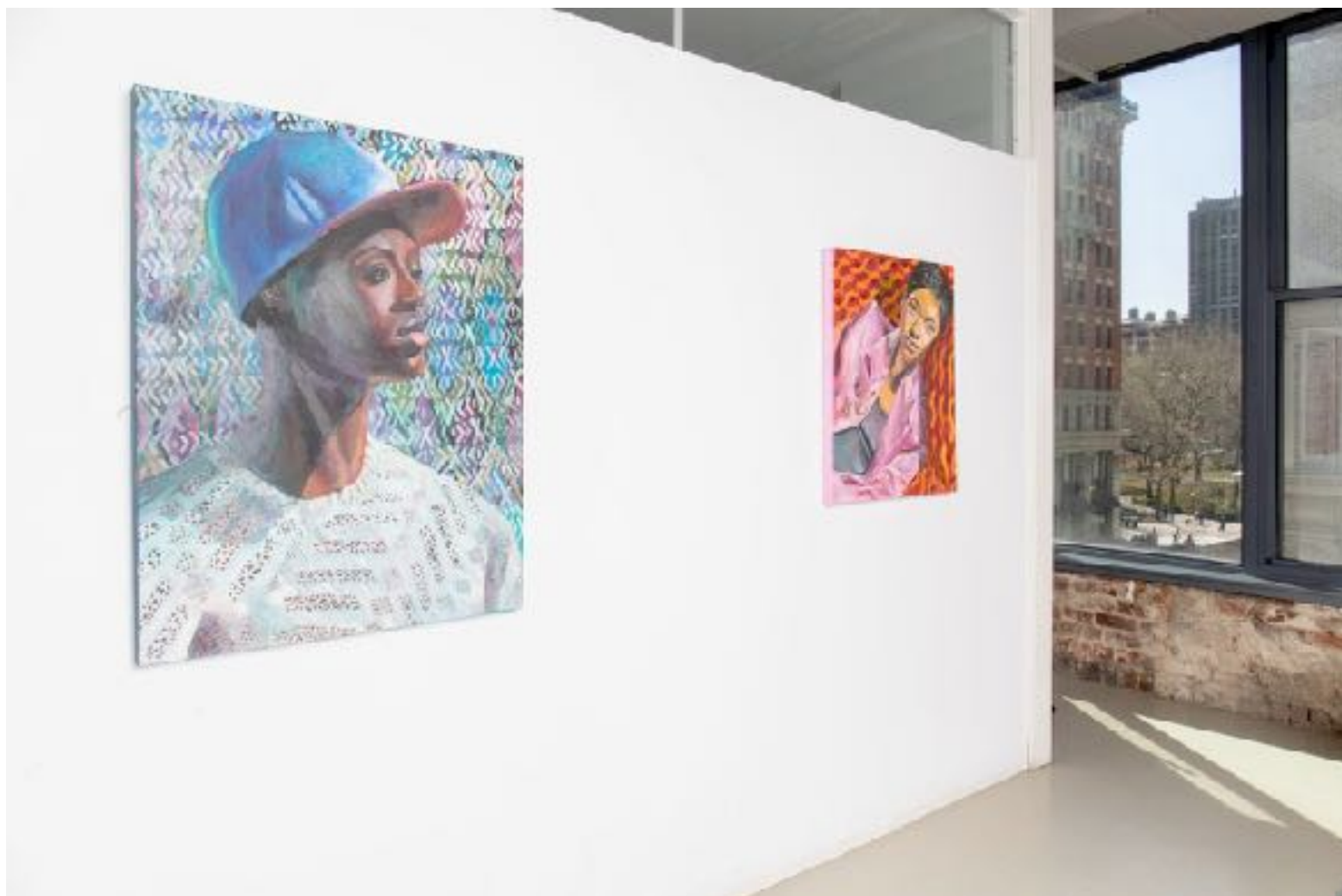
I started with portraiture and wanted to paint from life. First, I'm not a good photographer (laughter). I cannot paint from a picture I've taken because I really suck at it. I'd rather paint from other people's pictures. But this body of work started in 2018. Portrait is something I always do whenever I meet someone nice. But I also have many other series and topics that I'm exploring. I'm re-enacting mythological stories and other stories with actual people from now. My other body of work is mixing actual people that I meet and paint with my own storytelling of feminist stories I want to put forward. So, the portrait is like the base and foundation for all of it.

## Did you use acrylic paint?

No, only oil paint because I feel it is much more forgiving and it is way more sensual. And I like my paintings to feel sensual.

## For Their Look, how did you choose the pattern on his shirt and in the background?

This was the only portrait where I didn't paint from person. I painted from a picture I cut out from a magazine. I had forgotten all about it until one day I thought no models would come during the times of lockdown. I found the picture and I didn't know if it was a boy or girl. So, I wanted to play with that ambiguity. I added the cap and lace in the shirt to play with masculinity and femininity. In the features, I added light colors to suggest femininity and a bad ass mood to show masculinity. It's called Their look. When I did this piece, I had no idea about the show. So, it was very much a painterly exploration about what makes a difference in a man's face or in a woman's face. For the pattern in the background, it was more plain colors. But then it was struggling with the painting so then I decided to add layers and layers of patterns until I could find the right balance between the figure and the background.



## **Which do you paint first, the person in the foreground or the pattern in the background?**

I always paint the person first. When the figure is done, then I decide about the pattern. It's like adding music to a scene, it gives the mood. Like music, patterns are universal. I'm inspired by African patterns, Indian patterns, Malaysian patterns, French patterns, etc. Every country has its patterns and style that I like. Patterns are like music in which they have rhythm, repetition, baselines, and high notes. So, I'm always on the lookout for patterns. Once I'm finished the painting, I look into my references and I create something with the colors and mood I feel will enhance the painting.

## **Do you listen to music while you paint each pattern?**

Not so much, I have a plan when I start a pattern. I do sketches and I know where I'm going. So, it's not like a freehand-inspired-by-music product. Music is very important in the sitting session. It's very interesting when I'm asking all these people, "how was the painting experience?" and all of them say "your music is really cool!" And it's unexpected because I lived abroad for a long time in many different countries, and I speak many different languages. So, I listen to French, Italian, Indian, South American, African, and Chinese music. My playlist is all around the world.

## **What do you hope people take away from the show and your artwork in general?**

I think everybody takes away something different. It's my first show here and people are impressed with the quantity. It's a lot of artwork. The models say that I paint quite fast. I know where I want to go and when I do something I'm sure about what I want to do. If I don't like something, I erase it and start over. But I don't hesitate much; very straightforward. Many people have been amazed with my technique because they're oil paintings and my technique has evolved, which you can see as they're not all painted the same. I'm self-taught and have been reading and absorbing a lot of techniques in addition to working a lot. What's also stood out is my social experimentation part of it. I paint diversity and I move through different social groups. I like different environments. Nowadays in New York, we have a lot of black artists that are bringing back the topic of figuration and portraiture. I like it because I'm very inspired by their work. I also like people under their 30s because it's a part of your life where you have to figure out everything and it can be very intense.

I don't do any commission portraits. After the show I had 3 orders for commission portraits, and I said no to all of them because part of my practice is that I don't want people to look at themselves. I want people to look at other people. It's about empathy and I want people to feel connected as if the emotion on the painting could be their emotion. Another artist said, "I want my painting to be so singular, so precise about someone that they become universal." There's a point where you really dig into the human condition and it becomes for everyone. I really like this approach.

# PRICE LIST

**Artist : Marguerite Wibaux**  
**Curator : Susan Nelly**

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NOT A VIRGIN  
oil on canvas  
H 60 x W 48 inches  
2020

\$10,000



LADY' S GANG OF NEW YORK  
oil on canvas  
H 80 x W 78 inches  
2021

\$15,000



WHITNEY@SLEEPINGBOOTY  
oil on canvas  
H 36 x W 48 inches  
2021

\$ 7,000



NAOMI@GONEGONZZO  
oil on canvas  
H 30 x W 40 inches  
2021

\$ 5,000

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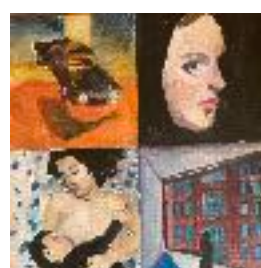
ACROBAT  
oil on canvas . 2021  
H 4 x W 4 inches  
\$ 200



DISTANCING  
oil on canvas . 2021  
H 4 x W 4 inches  
\$ 200



LOVE AMERICA  
oil on canvas . 2021  
H 6 x W 12 inches  
\$500



DYSTOPIA  
oil on canvas . 2021  
H 8 x W 8 inches  
\$ 200



ANONYMOUS  
oil on canvas . 2021  
H 4 x W 4 inches  
\$200



DANGER  
oil on canvas . 2021  
H 5 x W 10 inches  
\$ 400



APPEARANCE  
oil on canvas . 2021  
H 8 x W 8 inches  
\$ 600



FEARS  
oil on canvas . 2021  
H 8 x W 8 inches  
\$ 500



BLUES  
oil on canvas . 2021  
H 6 x W 4 inches  
\$ 200



FLESH  
oil on canvas . 2021  
H 8 x W 8 inches  
\$ 500



CHRISTIAN  
oil on canvas . 2021  
H 10 x W 5 inches  
\$ 400



GOD'S MORNING  
oil on canvas . 2021  
H 4 x W 4 inches  
\$ 200



HAMPTONS  
oil on canvas . 2021  
H 6 x W 4 inches  
\$ 200



PINK  
oil on canvas . 2021  
H 6 x W 4 inches  
\$ 200

# PRICE LIST

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JUST A KISS  
oil on canvas . 2021  
H 4 x W 4 inches  
\$ 200



THREAT  
oil on canvas . 2021  
H 5 x W 5 inches  
\$ 250



LIFE  
oil on canvas . 2021  
H 8 x W 8 inches  
\$600



TOLERANCE  
oil on canvas . 2021  
H 6 x W 4 inches  
\$ 200



LIKE A VIRGIN  
oil on canvas . 2021  
H 5 x W 5 inches  
\$250



WITCHES  
oil on canvas . 2021  
H 8 x W 8 inches  
\$ 500



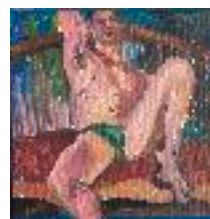
OPTIMISM  
oil on canvas . 2021  
H 4 x W 4 inches  
\$ 200



PIRATE  
oil on canvas . 2021  
H 5 x W 5 inches  
\$ 200



PAWNSHOP  
oil on canvas . 2021  
H 5 x W 5 inches  
\$ 250



O BOY  
oil on canvas . 2021  
H 5 x W 5 inches  
\$ 250



PROTECT  
oil on canvas . 2021  
H 12 x W 6 inches  
\$ 500



COWGIRL  
oil on canvas . 2021  
H 5 x W 5 inches  
\$ 200



THE WORLD IS A STAGE  
oil on canvas . 2021  
H 5 x W 5 inches  
\$ 200



QUEST  
oil on canvas . 2021  
H 8 x W 8 inches  
\$ 500



HOPE  
oil on canvas . 2021  
H 4 x W 6 inches  
\$ 200