

## The Inspirational Barbara Rachko

Barbara Rachko's career as an artist, resembles that of a master inventor. After nearly four decades of committed creation to the visual arts, attempts to categorize her work or group her methodology and concepts with other artists, are futile. Barbara Rachko is her own category.

Her subject matter is highly symbolic yet autobiographical; familiar and playful yet deeply disturbing at the same time. Barbara's style is as distinctive as the way she has expanded the tradition of soft pastel painting by introducing new methods and materials to the field, such as creating her pieces on large sheets of rough sandpaper. New York critic Peter Delloio remarks:

"It is undeniable that, like de Chirico, Barbara Rachko has created a unique, original, and very private landscape."

In her early experimentations, Barbara initially mastered photorealism in her drawings but quickly became disenchanted by the superficial photographic effect and the lack of space it provided for the imagination. Since the early 1990's, beginning with the series "Domestic Threats", the viewer is led to step in between reality and fantasy, where nothing is as it seems at first glance. Her muses and models are found objects and folk-art pieces that she meticulously directs to portray narratives, employing sharp cinematic angles and complex colour patterns.

She invites us into her creative playground, a mirror world filled with extraordinary inhabitants gathered over the span of the artist's life and extensive travels. Collected from Mexico, Guatemala, Bolivia, Rapa Nui (Easter Island) and other places, her living and working quarters are full of carved wooden animals, toys, dolls, papier-mâché figures, masks, effigies, totems and amulets belonging to distant times and civilizations. A large part of her exotic collection includes ceremonial pieces previously used in religious or celebratory festivals, making them found objects with a unique past. Barbara explains:

"How, why, when and where these objects come into my life is an important part of my creative process"

Embracing this history and giving it a second life in a new setting, is part of the artist's drive behind a consistent exploration on the nature of metamorphosis, the enduring power of archetypal figures, and the distillation and exchange of our inner worlds into our perceived outer realities. Change is an unavoidable part of life and devoid of all decoration, change consists of death and rebirth, a concept that Barbara is all too familiar with, having endured the tragic loss of her husband and soulmate during the events of 9/11. Her profound grief poured itself into her next series, titled "Black Paintings".

" I viewed the black background as literally, the very dark place that I was emerging from, exactly like the figures emerging in these paintings. The figures themselves were wildly colorful and full of life, but that black background is always there."

Compared to her previous compositions, the "Black Paintings" series are stripped down to the bare essentials of structural arrangement. Like a sculptor who removes all that is excess to reveal the artwork from within a marble stone, Barbara fearlessly reaches into the darkness and highlights our individual shadows. Left in solitude with the viewer, her folkloric figurines or actors as she calls them, are left with the responsibility of transmitting the suspense of being observed and staring back with the same vivid curiosity. First and foremost, her work is an experience, and its true essence cannot be easily put in to writing.

Arts writer Ann Landi, who has extensively researched Barbara's career, has authored the book: "From Pilot to Painter: An Interview with Barbara Rachko". Her conclusion is that the artist's antecedents are not in the folk-art traditions, but rather in the sophisticated manner of Henry Matisse and Edgar Degas.

Her latest series "Bolivianos" begun in 2017, is arguably her strongest and most striking work to date. Her background in the US Navy has disciplined her studio practice into working 6 to 7 hours a day, 4 or 5 days a week, and brought her in close proximity with the guardians, shamans, warriors and archetypal figures that exist in the spirit world she has been exploring for decades.

Barbara's creative process relies heavily on her photographic references, which influence her sense of composition and colour and have led her to explore photography as a separate form of expression altogether. In 2009 she had her first solo photography exhibition in New York. However, she also allows the subconscious to take hold and guide her hand.

"The first day I get to spend blocking in a new painting is the most exhilarating part of my whole creative process. It's when I feel the free-est! I select the pastel colors quickly, without thinking too much about them, first imagining them, then feeling, looking, and reacting intuitively, always correcting and trying to make the painting look better and better!"

Although Barbara is undoubtedly a master in her field, she is an unassuming lifelong student of the arts. Her morning routine consists of reading about creatives and the nature of creativity throughout art history. In this way she reconnects with temporarily forgotten parts of herself, and is reminded of what she loves about being an artist, especially in light of the business side that is nowadays becoming so complex. Barbara Rachko's influence in the art world is still in its very beginning, as her timeless and universal representations speak to all ages and nations in a language of her own creation, in a resonance beyond words brought to us from beyond the veil.

"When you are an artist there is always work to do and for some of it, no one else can do it because no one else knows the work from the inside the way the maker does."

- Curatorial text by Alexandra Kadinopoulou

*Vedica Art Studios and Gallery*