

ARTISTS TALK: "WOMEN RISING", THE DRAWING ROOM, APRIL 5, 4-6:30PM

Title: See Through Us series: *Appear/Disappear*

Size: 36x 36-inch square, a dye-infused aluminum print, 2020

Hi - I'm SUSAN R. KIRSHENBAUM, a San Francisco-based artist with a studio in SOMA and a life-long art practice. I'm delighted to talk to you in person about my work. There's so much to say about this particular piece, and much of it has to do with the theme of this exhibition, "Women Rising". Let me tell you a bit about myself first:

My earliest influences come from growing up in my family's art school in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. From early childhood I made art, took classes, and worked at the school. This was where I first experienced the world of art happenings, performance art, abstraction, graffiti, and life drawing from live models. My family was unconventional – and proud of it. These powerful forces have always been an important way for me to express my activism – and – my feminism.

For the past several years I've been making my art digitally, on an iPad Pro in Procreate. This allows me to work fast, in multiple mediums, and to create a wide range of versions and iterations, which I can print on paper, fabric, metal, or any other substrate that appeals to me, at almost any size.

In my figurative work I try to capture human, personal moments. I hope that my work helps people overcome their discomfort with nudity – for as long as a nude female body remains controversial. I identify with my models, and they become our shared story. It's important to me to show who we are and to fight to remain uncensored. My subjects are often naked but are completely comfortable in their skins. The viewer might ask themselves:

Am I? Do I want to be?

There should be something liberating in seeing my work.

Nudity is not the issue. Body love is – feeling the presence of strong women.

At some point I became increasingly conscious of my invisibility as an older woman – which unfortunately no woman can avoid becoming – unless we die young. Invisibility is not always a bad thing, it can even be a "super power". If you talk to people about it, you'd discover that surprisingly everyone has a different take on what it is, and how it relates to their identity. I was thinking about this phenomenon at the beginning of the pandemic, so I launched a series of conversations about invisibility with several interested artist friends on the East and West Coasts. Over the course of several months, we founded the Invisibility Collective.

We continue to hold monthly conversations about topics that fall under the invisibility umbrella, while planning art projects and exhibitions to reach people, change perceptions and to create awareness about not seeing, being seen, and being marginalized. We invite guests regularly who are working on related topics to talk and occasionally exhibit with us. Invisibility turned out to have a wide range of interpretations that went far beyond any of our initial expectations. Covid gave us time and space to think. People had become more receptive to talking about real issues – even to near strangers, because of these unusual, universal circumstances. And people had become more invisible than ever, hidden away inside their homes and behind masks. Combined with the Black Lives Matters movement, this poignant moment in history added a powerful dimension to our deep discussions.

My work begins with a live model – which had always been in person – until that became impossible during the pandemic. During the lockdowns and out of necessity, many visual artists, models, and performing artists around

the world transitioned to participating in zoom drawing sessions. These became an increasingly powerful outlet for me and led me to combine my figurative work with an invisibility project for a show we were planning. At the end of our first year together the Invisibility Collective and invited guest artists put together our first group exhibition. This was in Dec 2020. The show consisted of a dozen interdisciplinary, intergenerational, bi-coastal, multi-gender artists, and it filled the entire space of Radian Gallery in San Francisco's SOMA. It's called "Seen x Unseen" and we hope it will travel. I created a site-specific, interactive installation for the gallery's second floor loft. An abstracted figurative series, the title is "See Through Us". It consists of large 2-dimensional pieces and colorful 9-foot tall, printed chiffon panels – all displayed together so that the colors combine. Viewers may touch, be touched by, and move through the sensuous fabric.

My goal for this series was to pull in the viewers so that they are literally touching the figures on the fabric – and are being touched by them. I created a feeling of figures shifting, dissolving, appearing, and disappearing, being blotted out, moving in, away, and through.

"Appear/Disappear" is one piece from this series, which I believe successfully stands alone and summarizes both our anguish and our emergence. When we rise, we break through surfaces, and we are seen and heard. I started this piece, in the summer of 2020 during a zoom session with the well-known Bay Area model Titania – who is a stunning, seemingly weightless, model and dancer. I tried to capture the motion of her illusive and impossible/improbable pose. Her figure is obfuscated, seen, yet unseen, turned upside down, and she's losing her head.

The red-hot palette ranges from pale pink, to coral, ruby red, deep plum, and finally black. These are universal shades of our inner and outer bodies. We're filled with blood, rage, passion, and unspoken words and motions. Headless (and standing on her head) she's abstracted, filling the page, in her underwear...or maybe a swimsuit...to protect her body from potential Zoom stalkers.

Hand-written word pairs about the topic of invisibility march down the page and overlap the drawing. Viewers can easily read what it says. Many of these words recurred during our collective's conversations and interviews and appeared in my notes and recordings. Obliterate / Dissolve / Transparent / Want to be seen / Don't want to be seen / Who are you? / What are you? / Here / Hear /

I can't see you / Erase / Blot out / Cover / Uncover / Conceal

The list is seemingly endless.

I love words as much as I love art. And I love to marry them.

Thank you. Any questions?

www.cherrypits.net <https://theinvisibilitycollective.com>