

British female artist Kate Groobey paints the body as we feel it, and not see.



Materiality and abstraction, spontaneity and steady reconstruction: The British artist Kate Groobey invents with her work a new level of reality - and herself Her work is part of the Berlin group exhibition "Surreal".. We met for an interview before the opening.

**Zsuzsanna Toth: What is the story behind the figures and their postures that often seem “complicated“, distorted?**

Kate Groobey: They appear that way because I use collage to construct my images. I make drawings then cut them up and rearrange them, they develop distortions during this process. I like the word, "complicated", that you use. I like that the bodies become complicated. Most people I know have a complicated relationship with their bodies, so I feel these distorted bodies are more reflective of the way we relate to our own bodies. I like the idea of painting the body from the inside out, as it is felt and experienced.

**ZT: What topics have you been lately processed within your artistic work?**

KG: My dad was diagnosed with cancer, which has brought a lot of my focus to my family. My recent "perfect" series was based on a song my dad and my niece made up, it went "there's nothing quite so perfect as potatoes, there's nothing quite so perfect as potatoes, there's nothing quite so perfect as potatoes, potatoes, perfect potatoes potatoes potatoes". The potato in my paintings becomes symbolic of the cancer. In my current series I have turned my family into superheroes. I read somewhere that we like superheroes because 'they provide models of coping with adversity, finding meaning in loss and trauma, discovering our strengths and using them for good purpose'. My dad has become 'I hate everything man'. My mum is 'unfoxy lady' (inspired this Christmas during a game of scrabble when a dispute about whether or not 'unfoxy' is a word led my mum to proclaim that "I'm an unfoxy lady, I always have been an unfoxy lady"), my niece is 'kick ass' ( she just passed her black belt Karate )

The potato motif continues in the "superhero" series. I introduce the theme of 'hot potato' (inspired by the actual hot baked potatoes my mum made us this Christmas to take with us on our hike) and 'under the cosh' ( I did martial arts when I was younger and we used to use cosh's quite a lot when training) - both are sayings (in the UK at least) that signify troublesome situations.

**ZT: Can you describe the actual working process - from first draft/drawing to the finished painting? You do a lot of reconstruction and recreating?**

KG: Yes, I draw, I cut, I rearrange, I re-draw, cut, rearrange.

**ZT: And then... when do you know/see a piece is done?**

KG: It's instinctive, you feel it.

**ZT: How spontaneous would you describe yourself when it comes to your work?**

KG: Very spontaneous. The collage techniques I use are a kind of automatism, which is one of the cornerstone practices of the surrealists. I like to work this way, it allows me to dig around in my own head.

**ZT: Can you tell us a bit about your background? When did you start drawing & painting, when did you know you will do it as your profession?**

KG: I remember when I was about 15/16 getting a really strong feeling of ecstasy when I painted a self portrait with unrealistic bright colours, that feeling was kind of addictive. And my friends older sister went to London to study painting, so I figured I would do that too.

**ZT: How does a typical day at work in your London base look like?**

KG: At the moment I'm based in Paris. It takes me an hour to get to my studio, which is outside of Paris. I set up my studio in the car park, near to the edge, so I'm almost painting "en plein air" but without getting wet when it rains (although I do sometimes end up standing in a puddle ). I do this because I paint on the floor and use a lot of solvents, which evaporate right in my face. So working outside makes it a little less poisonous. I use a gas mask too which is semi-effective, it's still pretty toxic. At the moment I do a painting in one day. It's fast and intense. Then it takes me an hour and a half to clean up the mess. Et voila. Then I need at least a couple of days to physically recover from the fumes. So I have a studio set up at home to draw.



**ZT: How much “Kate“ is in your paintings? And who are the figures? Are you referring to personas from your real life or do you play a lot with fiction as well?**

KG: The characters in my paintings are all me and not me at the same time. So even if they are portraits of other people, on some level, they are also self portraits. I also make my paintings come alive, by painting costumes and dressing up as my characters. So when I do this there is 100%

"Kate" in the paintings. Entering into the paintings in this way brings another layer of self-identification to my painting process. However, although they may be me or about my experiences, my characters also function as stock characters - so they'll have an exaggerated characteristic, like 'don't panic!', 'militant', 'I hate everything man', 'unfoxy lady', 'grab it', and in this way they become less about me and more about universal personas or emotions that everyone can recognise in themselves.

**ZT: Did you ever make the conscious decision to focus on female bodies, and if so, why?**

KG: I paint both male and female figures. However, my bodies don't always have body parts that strictly subscribe to their own gender. Again, the same way I paint the body as it is experienced, I think I paint gender how it is experienced. At any given time we can all behave in a more stereotypically male or female way. Or we can engage in more stereotypically male or female tasks. We can also wear more male or female clothing.

But, yes, coming back to your question, I think it's an important one. I am conscious of what it means for a woman to be painting female bodies. For centuries it's been mostly men painting women. So I do think it's important for us to see more of what womens bodies painted by women look like.