

WHAT IF INSTAGRAM HAD ALWAYS EXISTED?:

A PROFILE ON ARTIST LAURENCE DE VALMY

BY ZOË GOETZMANN

STATEMENT • My work on the POST series, is based on the life and work of some major artists through fictional Instagram posts from the past. I appropriate a famous artwork, that I recreate using acrylics, and I combine it with imagined dialogues between the artists and their friends, all historically accurate and based on my research.

My goals are to share about the personal stories behind the artworks, the connections between these artists either through time or because they were contemporaries, and to make my viewers consider these iconic artworks with a renewed interest by replacing them in the context of their creation.

Art history is a continuum

The POST series also takes place in a reflection about the importance of social media for artists nowadays, the fact that art is more often seen through a screen than in real life and the relativity of fame at one moment in time.



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JULY 8, 1908



That is the question that artist Laurence de Valmy strives to answer through her painting series entitled POST, a project that she started at the end of 2016 through which she imagines what it would be like if famous artists from history used Instagram to promote their artwork as well as to connect with other notable artist friends and colleagues.

As Laurence explains, “The base of my work is to share stories. I also realized that a lot of people who might enjoy art, don’t necessarily know a lot about it. But, when you tell them stories, they usually enjoy it [and want] to learn more [about them].”

Through her POST series, Laurence creates small to large-scale paintings in the style of an actual Instagram post. Each work includes the artist’s Instagram handle, the Instagram image, the date of the post, the captions and comments – which the artist refers to as “dialogs” – and the “like” symbol.

Since completing her artist residency in 2017, Laurence has expanded her POST series to include other versions entitled Duos, Trios as well as another series, HER & HISStory which explores the working relationship between historic male and female artists.

Currently, Laurence is represented by Azart Gallery and Michele Mariaud Gallery in New York, Kahn gallery in London and Range of Arts in Honfleur, France – all of whom discovered her work via Instagram, online as well as through the art fair circuit. Her collectors are based in the United States, Europe and Asia. She also runs an acclaimed blog, The Curious Frenchy, a website that she started in 2016, dedicated to sharing stories and interviews from artists and entrepreneurs of today.

Laurence describes her process as “fairly traditional,” using acrylic as her predominant medium.

First, she will begin her process by sourcing an image that she desires to work with from either books or online research. Second, she will tape a printed version of this image onto her canvas, so that she can copy this work as accurately as possible. Third, she will use, as Laurence says, “a special paper” to transfer her “dialogs” onto her canvas, applying a layer of “varnish” for a “glossy finish.”

With each finished painting, she will include a “certificate of authenticity,” or, as she refers to it, “#story.behind.the.art,” containing a more detailed anecdote on that specific artist or artwork. These summaries can also be found on her website: laurencevalmy.com.

It is important to note that she does not merely copy these famous artists and artworks. Rather, Laurence explains that she “appropriates” such pieces, attempting to convey a new “message” framed in a literal (and figurative) social media context.

She also makes the point that this act of “copying” reflects a long-standing artistic tradition – similar to the Académie des Beaux Arts – where an artist would learn how to paint by studying another artist’s work. Laurence admits that, “between [the ages of] 15 and 22,” she would often visit museums to understand how to work in oil, watercolor and acrylic mediums.

“It’s part of my challenge to reproduce a medium like pastel for Degas with acrylics or [Pollock’s] spontaneous dripping through non-spontaneous brushstrokes,” she says.

Although she appropriates another artist’s work, Laurence personalizes each of her paintings through her own recreations.



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JULY 29, 1969

“Art is a continuum. Artists nowadays do what they do because artists before them came and created other things. So, we could not have gone from The Bust of Nefertiti [by 14th century sculptor, Thutmose] to Campbell’s Soup Cans [by Andy Warhol]. There were many steps in between and that’s what my work is about,” she explains.

Laurence’s focus on art history has allowed her to gain entry into this artistic continuum, attracting the attention from Tiphaine-Annabelle Besnard, a PhD candidate who teaches an Art History course at the Aix-Marseille Université in France.

“I’m happy to share that my work will be included in an art history class [at] a French University, I still can’t believe it!” she exclaims.

When it comes to writing her “dialogs,” every word (and emoji) is integral to the painting’s story.

As she notes, “The other challenge that I like is [that] I have to sum up [an artist’s entire life and story] in two lines. Every word [and] every emoji is there for a reason.”

Laurence prefers to write positive rather than negative “dialogs” in her work. However, she also admits that she will write negative captions and comments in order to emphasize a specific critic or piece of criticism from history.

“Sometimes I’ll write negative comments, because it reflects a critic of the time. It’s part of my goal to show the relativity of fame and opinions at [this historical juncture]. What seems true at one point, might be seen differently later on,” she says.

For example, although the artistic collaboration between Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat in the 1980’s “was not well reviewed,” by critics at the time, as Laurence explains, these comments had little impact on the artists’ ongoing friendship and future careers.

Interestingly, through her series HER & HIStory, Laurence also explores this mutually-beneficial artistic relationship, using notable artist pairs such as Berthe Morisot and Édouard Manet, Mary Cassatt and Edgar Degas, Lee Krasner and Jackson Pollock to illustrate this specific pattern.

“Reading about art, I noticed that many women [throughout history] were left in the dark. I wanted to show that for a long time, [male artists have] been presented as the mentor [but as we look more precisely into their work], we realize that it [has always been] a two-way relationship and [that] they would influence each other equally,” she notes.

At present, Laurence operates her own Instagram @laurencedevalmy which now has a little over 2,000 followers.

Although she does not actively sell her work via Instagram, Laurence credits both Instagram and Facebook with helping to build her initial artistic community.

“Before social media existed, it was harder to [connect with] other people [in the art world]. To create your community, it was much [more] local. Thanks to social media, I [was able to connect] through [Instagram] [and] Facebook with artists whose work I enjoyed,” she says. Instagram also plays an important role in showcasing the authenticity behind Laurence’s work and overall process.

As she notes, “I started to show behind the [scenes] images [of my work] [through stories and posts] so [that] people [could] realize that [my work] is hand-painted.”

Despite referring to Instagram as a “fake partial reality,” Laurence recognizes the platform’s utility as well as its ability to appeal to humans’ innate desires for communication and connection.

“People are not isolated human beings living on an island. All artists are connected, either because [they are] contemporaries who know each other or [because] they’ve been influenced by one another through[out] [time],” she remarks.

In addition, due to the rapid pace at which some artists have been able to achieve success through Instagram, Laurence comments on the way in which this platform has allowed artists to redefine their own personal goals and versions of success in this digital landscape.

As Laurence says, “It’s not Instagram that will make you famous. Not everyone has to be in a gallery to succeed as an artist. It depends on what you want to achieve and convey as a message.”

This way of thinking serves as an explanation behind Laurence’s more traditional process, which encourages audiences to meditate on her work rather than to consume it all at once at a rapid pace.

“We tend to consume art very quickly and in a fast paced environment [through Instagram]. I wanted to invite the viewer to take a short pause. This is also a reason that I work in such a traditional way, I paint art so that can become a long-lasting object, rather than merely an image that can be seen onscreen for only a few seconds,” she explains.

If you would like to see Laurence’s paintings in the near future, she plans to exhibit her work with Kahn Gallery at SCOPE Art Show at this year’s Art Basel Miami Beach in December. If you are in the area and have a chance to visit, definitely check out her work!

In the more long-term future, she is also excited to announce that her works have been recently selected to appear in a new HBO series, starring a list of A-list actors, set to come out next year.



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MAY 1, 1907