

miss led

Blazing a trail for female artists everywhere, Miss Led's beautiful depictions of sexual and empowered women have opened a huge amount of doors in the art world; from live painting, commissions for brands to her own stylised work, you can be sure Miss Led is no one-trick pony. A long-time friend of VNA, we finally took the chance to visit her new studio and find out what she's been up to for the past few years.

For those who don't know you, can we have some background on Miss Led, have you always pursued the art career path?

I'm a painter, illustrator and muralist working in a variety of styles and mediums, covering a good amount of surfaces. I've been lucky enough to part in front of thousands of people for some big brands and organisations, and travelling whilst doing so. I've always seen myself as an artist, though I did take eight years out, trying other careers and taking a break, but try as I might to deviate, it's the only thing that makes sense. It's my life and I'm less of a person without it.

What inspires you to draw the beautiful women we see in so much of your work?

Being exposed to Mucha, Alma-Tadema, the Pre-Raphaelite Movement and Beardsley at a young age was really big for me. Those artists really linked in with the whole indie/alternative scene in the early '90s, through fashion, drug culture and music of the time, which I totally identified with. It also went, for me, hand-in-hand with Marvel Comics, *Deadline* mags and Tank Girl attitudes. As a serious tomboy, I fought against my femininity for years. I guess through my work I'm celebrating female strength, empowerment, as well as beauty and vulnerability. And you've gotta love those curves!

Has your style always been this way, or is it something that has evolved over time?

It's totally evolved, but in a funny way, it's kind of now going full circle. I try and be as intuitive as I can with my work; I want to look at a wall or read a brief and jot down the first thing that comes into my head no matter what it is and follow that through. I can't be formulaic about my work, just putting the same thing down but in a different arrangement all the time, I find that uninspiring and boring. I'd rather make mistakes trying new things than tire of churning out the same old thing day after day. My paintings, in my early twenties were very real, to the point of being visceral, like Stanley Spencer and the fleshy nudes of Jenny Saville. Returning to that but with the experience, knowledge and inspiration

gained up 'til now, should be an interesting mix. I can't wait.

Where else do you draw inspiration from?

When I started creating as Miss Led, the inspiration came from the explosion of social networks, accessibility and community. I was celebrating the hipster scene and those in it, on the cusp of something exciting. Being able to capture all that was important to me then, it was immortalising a fragment in time, the quiet before the boom. Now, after a couple of years solely working in the studio, I think my work is more introspective and reflective. It is more intuitive, sometimes touching on my experiences, my views and observations. Moving into a territory where I want to not only create something arresting in its beauty but thought-provoking and sometimes confrontational through its narrative.

Whose work do you admire?

This constantly changes. When I was painting years ago it was Lucien Freud and Jenny Saville. Recently I find I admire female artists who are constantly trying new things, I guess it's ladies I can identify with and very much admire. Soey Milk is one. She does the craziest, cutesy character design with dark or sexual undertones and then alongside that produces some incredible fine art painting. Also, Kristina Collantes, whose work is just hyper-colour, hyper-energy, psychedelic, sometimes disturbed illustration, whilst always remaining beautiful and poignant. I adore Miss Van's honesty and appreciate how much she pours herself into her painting, she has a real emotive and sensory connection with her work. I admire that she has chosen a new cathartic way of painting after taking three years out.

Your work almost has a vintage feel to it; do you ever wish you had been born in a different era?

I'd probably have liked to grow up around the late '60s, early '70s but then I'd have to be born before then, which I'm not sure I'd dig. I'm happy where I am now. Life changes at such speed, it's a good time for someone who loves evolving, reinvention and development. The early '70s did seem

awesome. I would have loved to have been in London and experienced the UFO club scene. I'm still so in love with the psychedelic music and the trippy Art Nouveau revival poster design of that time.

How do you see your style progressing in the future?

Bigger and better. More painterly. More emotive.

Do you find that being a woman in a reasonably male-dominated world works to your advantage or disadvantage?

I've seen it as an advantage at times. In the days of old and Secret Wars it was positive, as being the first female in that London scene was pretty rad. People notice when you're kicking the guys' arses, especially at their own game. Hal! It was cool and I had a lot of fun with it. Now five years later there are plenty of girls with cans and doing it their own way, which is awesome. For me, when I have something to fight for is when I'm at my best. We are dealing with a new wave of sexism and female empowerment is very blurred and misinterpreted right now. This 'disadvantage' is inspiring my new body of work.

You mentioned painting for Secret Wars back in the early days, how do you find live drawing? A lot of pressure?

I do, yes. You're under scrutiny from, most of the time, thousands of people watching your every move, every mark. You can't really afford to make any mistakes, ponder, or take time, walk away... I don't at any other time work on a piece from start to finish without stopping, other than in front of a crowd of people, so that's different too. It's a solid stint; I've done some long sessions - sometimes 8 to 10 hours. But it's only when you stop you realise how spent you are. Once you start, you're in a zone of you and your work, nothing else matters.

You've worked with a lot of big brands including Red Bull and Ted Baker; what's been your favourite project so far?

I've been very lucky, I've had so many ace jobs. My first 'proper' job was working with Sketch City on the Diesel

Walls tour, alongside some great painters and illustrators. Just months into live painting and I was travelling to Manchester to meet and paint with Guy McKinley in the day and paint live with an amazing crew at night. It was a pretty rad time. Travelling with Designersblock to paint in Milan, a crazy week of adventure with product designers, graffiti artists... painting live at a huge party for Design Week there.

Whilst most artists have to do these kinds of jobs to ensure they can continue doing what they do, you seem to prefer working on your own stuff rather than commissions...

I love that I can do both, of course working on your own stuff is great – not having to worry about making

collaborations and good vibes. All else will follow, I'm pretty much living the dream as it is. I've just got to keep it alive!

What have you been up to recently that you'd like to tell us about?

I've been saying 'no' a lot the last year. It's been really great to keep myself challenged and happy. Working more as an artist than I have done in at least three years. Stepping off the client treadmill has been so rewarding. I thought I'd work less, but I'm actually working more. From talking to galleries about representation, sponsorship offers with material companies, to directing photo shoots at the studio for some very exciting painting work. Feeling very inspired and loving life.

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anyone other than yourself happy. But I enjoy client work as it drives me to think in a completely different way. More often than not I'm drawing or depicting something I'll not have considered on self-directed projects. If I can use what I've learnt from each mode of working and feed into the other then that is great for me, as I always need to move forward.

What's 'the dream' for you and your career?

More painting. I've said this for some time but I'm luckily in a position to do this now. I have the materials and an incredible space to fulfil this. And more travel. I'm ready to get jet-setting again. Excited about painting with new and exciting talent all over. Generally good connections,

What's coming up in the future?

Lots of exciting stuff. After a three-year break, I'm returning to live painting again. It's exciting and I need that challenge. I'll be painting with some incredible artists and I'm looking forward to getting out of the studio more, as I've been getting far too cozy there. Collaborations on the horizon, one with the incredible Aida Prints, so keep your eyes peeled for some Aida/Led paste-ups around East and North London soon. And just in case I haven't got enough to keep me occupied, as I mentioned I've moved to a new studio with space to paint and direct photo shoots, which are informing a body of work for my first solo show.