

March 13, 2017

Isabella Huffington on the The Art of the Everyday

Interviews



New York artist and Siren Creative Advisor Isabella Huffington

Isabella Huffington is a New York-based artist interested in exploring the question of art and accessibility. A graduate of Yale University in art history, she's always been drawn to everyday materials and processes—sharpies, stamps, stencils, hole punching, and embossing—and inspired by everyday life. It is this interest in the art of the everyday that makes her a perfect creative advisor for Siren, a capacity she has served in since 2015.

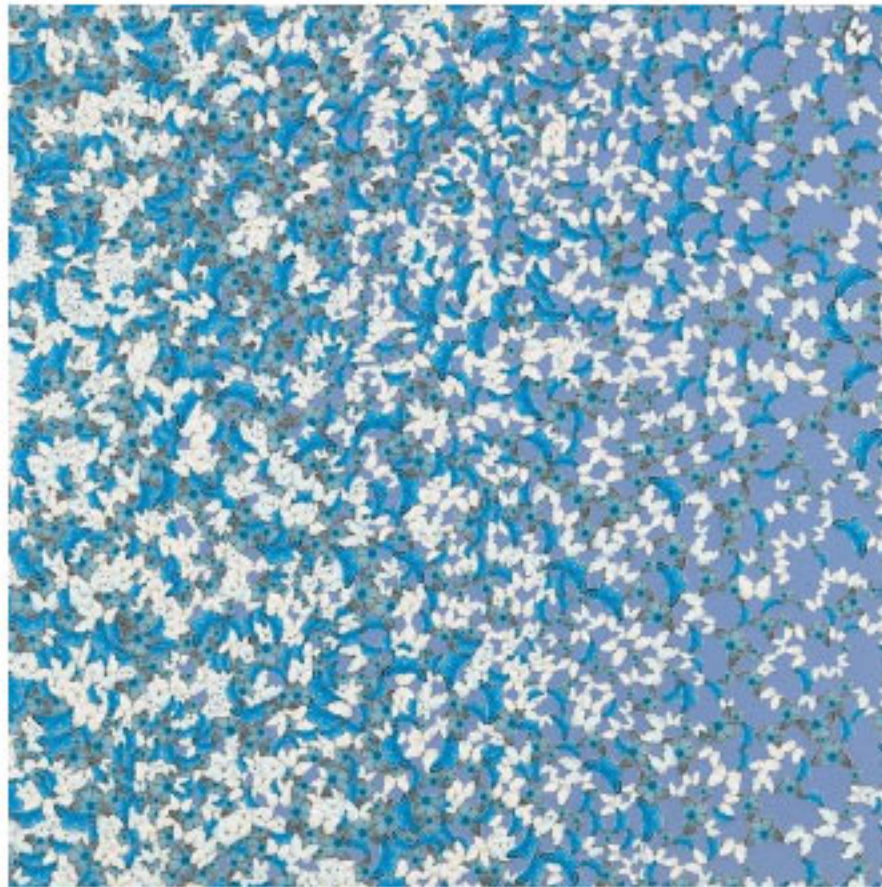
We asked Isabella some questions about her creative process, politics, and dating as an introvert as part of our #WomenMakeHistoryMonth series of conversations. Enjoy!

How did you get into art-making — what were your inspirations?

I was a really lucky kid. My mom let me turn my bedroom walls into giant canvases. I painted them, collaged them, drew on them, glued objects to them. And as soon as I had completely covered the them, I would start all over again. I was really able to mess up and experiment over and over again. And it was never about the final product but about the process to get there. And that was really lucky because so much of my art today centers around deadlines and finished pieces. So there isn't as much time for experimentation.

How would you describe your art practice now? How has it evolved since school?

My art practice now is a lot more disciplined. I'm really type-A, so I thrive on schedule and routine. I'm a morning person, which is endearing to no one. So I like to start work by eight. That way I can take lots of breaks in between and still feel like I had a productive day. At school my practice was much more haphazard. I had to work around my classes and other commitments so it was sometimes hard to make the time. But I've found that if I don't do at least a little art each day I get a bit irritable/anxious. Art centers me.



Isabella Huffington, "Queen." Collage and paint on wood, 2017. Via isabellahuffington.com

There is an unabashed feminist perspective in your recent work. How do you approach this? Is the feminism distilled from your daily life, or something else?

I'm really interested in making work that undeniably and, at times, stereotypically feminine. I was raised by three incredible women: my mom, aunt, and grandmother. So the feminine has always signaled strength and perseverance for me. Because of them I've never questioned whether I can't do something because I'm a woman. That idea is completely foreign to me. I typically select a stereotypical feminine thing—flower, pearl, ladybug—and repeat it over and over again. Until there's an incredible strength and intensity to it.

Has recent politics and social movements affected how you think of the art world? If so, in what ways?

I feel like Trump's win really changed the way I look at things. He's essentially an amalgamation of everything parents teach their children not to be. I feel like you either get to be an idiot or an asshole. You don't get to be both. But specifically in terms of my work, I have a show in May that centers on women in politics. We decided on the theme before the election. So it was meant to be a celebration now it feels a bit more like a wake. And it's honestly been hard to strike a balance between pessimism and optimism, when I feel really pessimistic. But the way I look at it every time one glass ceiling holds another one breaks and visa versa. Progress will always be a slog not a sprint.

We've spoken at length about introversion and the challenge of meeting people (both in dating and the art world) — what are your suggestions in navigating these worlds as an introvert?

I would say don't feel like you need to jump in head first. Start with baby steps. And once you get comfortable with those push yourself to go a little farther. Some people can go to a few events or dates a week. But for me that'd be totally exhausting. If you push yourself too hard to be social, you'll end up like Boo Radley not wanting to leave your house. Set a reasonable goal for yourself and once you reach it don't judge yourself for saying no to everything else. Life is meant to be enjoyed. And if I'm constantly judging myself for not being social, well that's not enjoyable.

As one of Siren's creative advisors, what drew you into the Siren model?

I love that it's conversation based. And even more importantly the conversations are genuinely interesting. I think the reason people are so fed up with dating apps is because they're boring. The conversation feels repetitious and canned. You get asked the same things over and over again and you give the same stock answers. So it's really hard to actually learn anything substantive about the other person.

And what's next for Isabella? And what's one of your "Reach for the Sky" dreams?

I'm really interested in art and accessibility. So I want to combine fine art and everyday objects. Essentially putting my art on the most mundane things. I think it would be really magical if everything around us could be seen as art. I think the barrier between art and people is so steep that a lot of people never cross over it. And that's such a shame.

"I think the barrier between art and people is so steep that a lot of people never cross over it."