

WOMEN STREET ARTISTS

24 Contemporary Graffiti and
Mural Artists from Around the World

Photo karnaval2018 for Shutterstock

WOMEN STREET ARTISTS

24 Contemporary Graffiti and
Mural Artists from Around the World

in collaboration with

muca

museum of
urban and
contemporary
art

PRESTEL

MUNICH · LONDON · NEW YORK

ALESSANDRA MATTANZA

FOREWORD BY STEPHANIE UTZ

CONTENTS



AIKO
10



**CHRISTINA
ANGELINA** 20



ANNATOMIX
50



KRUELLA D'ENFER
58



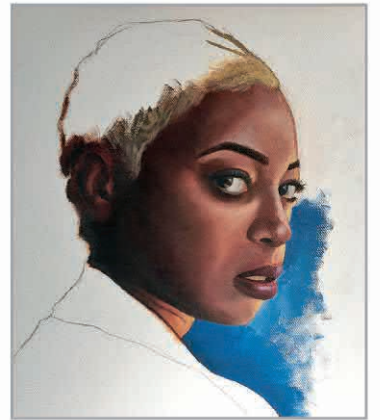
ELLE
46



FAITH47
56



CAMILLA FALSINI
66



**TATYANA
FAZLALIZADEH** 76



LULA GOCE
88



MAYA HAYUK
98



SHAMSIA HASSANI
108



HERA
118

STREET ART IS FEMALE by Stephanie Utz

6

POWER TO WOMEN, POWER TO ART by Alessandra Mattanza

8



KASHINK

128



LADY PINK

138



#LEDIESIS

146



MEDIANERAS

154



MINA MANIA

164



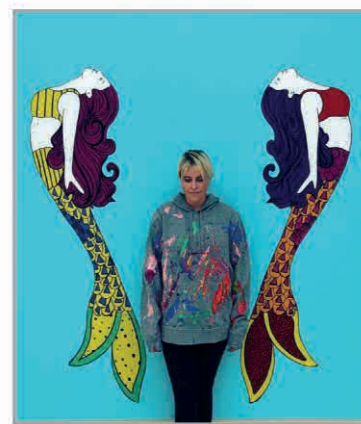
MISS VAN

172



ALICE MIZRACHI

180



**KELSEY
MONTAGUE**



OLEK

198



GIO PISTONE

208



SWOON

218



ZABOU

250

STREET ART IS FEMALE

by Stephanie Utz

Do we have a clear idea of how many talented female artists are out there? Is there really a different unconscious perception when it comes to female art? Or has this discussion already become obsolete?

There is a sharp drop in the proportion of female art graduates versus the number of women represented in galleries and museums. According to the National Museum of Women in the Arts, over half of all visual artists in the US are women, yet only thirty percent of artworks displayed in galleries are by women. Statistics indicate that the problem lies less in a supposed lack of qualified women and more in the need for museums and galleries to reflect on their own curatorial practices, taking active measures to ensure a more balanced representation in collections.

This underlines the importance of exhibiting female street artists. Not only does it dissolve the exclusionary ideal of the male street artist, but it also diversifies the perspectives and techniques to which audiences are exposed.

However, even when women are recognized as talented street artists by established institutions, they face an additional challenge: the art they make is often labeled "feminine." Paradoxically, this risks essentializing a highly diverse cluster of individuals, carving a divide that implies patronizing comparisons: women's success is often defined only relative to their existing male counterparts.

Like many other female street artists, SWOON, for instance, resists gendered interpretations of her work. She is acclaimed

as a role model because of her solo career, recognized the world over for her life-sized paper cutouts. Maya Hayuk, known for her large-scale colorful murals, works only with galleries who exhibit a certain percentage of female artists. Faith47's artwork is inspired by social realities translated through a feminine way of painting. AIKO playfully addresses female sexuality in the context of Manga elements, infiltrating male-dominated spaces with recognizably feminine color and content. With her bare-breasted figures, Miss Van shows off the power of femininity in the artistic act.

So, where do we stand today? A lot has changed over the last years. Working in diverse styles, some women consciously advocate feminine elements in street art, while others go beyond gender. They deliberately question and weaponize femininity, neglecting any form of social convention or boundaries. Many artists openly play with their feminine identity, publicly revealing their alias, which has thankfully led to Street Art becoming more and more taken over by women claiming their position in the art scene.

Street Art is no longer an exclusive boys' club. It took some time, but the time has come. Nevertheless, we are still only scratching the surface. There are many more talented female artists out there, paving their way to the front line.

It's about time for women to be recognized for their contributions. The more that women find a platform upon which to exhibit, the more other women will be inspired to paint and find their own identity.



POWER TO WOMEN, POWER TO ART

by Alessandra Mattanza

There are women who remain engraved lifelong in your memory and meeting them becomes fundamental to your existence. Journalist, writer, and activist Gloria Steinem has always been at the forefront of the fight for equality. Getting to know her was a thrill for me, not only because of her vision and thought, but also because of her warm intimacy, her femininity and fervent intellect that transcends the boundaries of gender, space, and time with ideas that intersect the past, present, and future, her leonine grit and courage, and her fearlessness. Gloria is a friend to women, and it is this that touched me profoundly.

"I really admire Gloria for the magnificent human being that she is. She represents all women in their complexity, and is the woman we all want to be. She is endowed with incredible sensitivity and perseverance, as well as inexhaustible patience and an extraordinary will never to give up, to constantly push forward, even when the goal to be reached seems impossible," admits Julianne Moore, who starred in the movie *The Glorias*, directed by another amazing woman, Julie Taymor, who also directed *Frida*. And it was precisely that movie, which skillfully delineated Gloria Steinem's personal path and her struggle for independence and the recognition of fundamental human rights, that prompted me to publish a book dedicated to women street artists, women who operate in a sector that until recently

was regarded as purely male, due in part to the free and wild lifestyle with which it is associated, in part to the physical labor it entails, and in part to the dangers that its protagonists sometimes face, especially when working at night, in secrecy. As a street photographer, I feel quite close to them, often sharing their hardships, dangers, and discrimination. Too often, even in my job as journalist, I have found myself in the position of being the only woman at a men's table. Each time, I have asked myself: Why?

All the artists whom I have met in my life have inspired me in some way or another, and I feel honored to have gotten to know these incredible women, who, with perseverance and courage, have sought their place in the world, a place from which they now make their voices heard.

I have been fascinated by extraordinary women ever since my childhood. I have always had the impression that their power unleashed a cathartic energy, one capable of changing the world, precisely because they were often solitary and poorly understood souls, yet always fierce fighters, capable of shining with their light, despite the social canons that tried to keep them invisible. Women who went beyond what was deemed an ordinary life. Women who rebelled and struggled against the rules of quotidian thought while trying to assert their own. Women who did jobs that were usually recognized

"Any woman who chooses to behave like a full human being should be warned that the armies of the status quo will treat her as something of a dirty joke; that's their natural and first weapon. She will need her sisterhood."

—Gloria Steinem

as male prerogatives. Women who, at times, decided not to be women anymore, who went beyond gender and chose to live life in their own way. Women who had undergone all sorts of abuse but were able to start over, possibly even to help others. Or women who, on their own, had the determination to take over New York City, painting its walls or putting up portraits along its streets.

Lady Pink may have been the first female artist to succeed in an environment that is still largely male, namely that of graffiti, and she used her success to promote everyone's right to equality and equal opportunity, as well as to speak to young people and tell them that dreams must be chased. An attention to the social function of art—as admonition, to denounce injustice—is central to the work of all the street artists I have met.

This is clearly demonstrated by all of Tatyana Fazlalizadeh's works, which address, above all, the condition of women and, in particular, those of African descent. To this end, she conducted the Stop Telling Women to Smile campaign, collecting testimony of women's lived experiences, often of a dramatic and profoundly painful nature. But all the artists who appear in this book are extraordinary, with something special about them. They will make a deep impression on you, touch the depths of your soul, move you with their stories of their myriad experiences, adventures, innovative visions, wild and futuristic activism, and with

their art, which will captivate and inspire you. They will speak to you of their difficult lives, of the inhumane conditions to which many women in the world are subjected, and where they are abused, regarded as little more than animals, without rights, without aspirations, without dreams, to this day. Shamsia Hassani is well acquainted with this harsh reality and can personally testify to the dramatic situation that Afghan women are now experiencing and which, through her art, she can hurl like a boulder at the rest of the world.

This book also aims to be a journey and a wonderful adventure through the infinite universes of these women, these artists, who represent humanity itself as the unstoppable cycle of nature, like the charming spell of shamans that recalls certain aspects represented in the characters of the street artist Swoon, in the primordial instinct of animals and the incessant power of the ocean's waves.

And, as you will discover, thanks to them, new communities of women are arising all over the world, of people who are tired of being invisible, who are no longer afraid to make their voices heard, who support each other in what can only be described as the principle of a true female renaissance. You will also find that women are learning, more and more, that together they will become stronger: *United We Stand*. And remember, this is just the beginning.





AIKO

THE EXPRESSIONIST OF EASTERN AND WESTERN SENSUALITY

"What I learned from the outset was that it's hard for a young, foreign woman to enjoy instant success in any society, and certainly in an industry like the art world."

She is a very rare traditional stencil artist. Her stencils are cut and painted by hand, even for large scale walls. Her art stands out from everyone else's because it is a magnificent and seductive encounter of East and West, as well as for its sexy, provocative women, strong in their magnetic instinct, who, like her, are capable of a piercing preliminary gaze. Her murals are unique, often very large, always unforgettable, and able to penetrate deep into the soul. AIKO, aka LADY AIKO, was born in Japan; but from the start, the sexist culture of her native land was too restrictive for her and the reason why she came to New York, which immediately inspired her. "I was born and raised in the middle of the capital city of Tokyo surrounded by a rich culture and beautiful ancient traditions. My childhood was quite fortunate where I had the opportunity to learn a variety of skills such as singing, dancing, writing, painting, and playing music. I spent most of the time expressing my own version of things to entertain the people around me," she recalls with a certain melancholy. "At age three, I was already climbing ladders and happily painting murals alongside my friends in kindergarten, and somehow deep inside I knew this was going to be my purpose in life. To this very day, I have the same joy, passion, and attitude. My family encouraged my eclectic pursuits and were very patient with me as I challenged myself to learn as much as I could about the world. By the time I became a teen in the '80s-'90s, I was fascinated by foreign underground culture, pop art, punk fashion, electro music, and independent films from the West; but due to our limited access I couldn't get enough. I found myself craving more and more. Also, with my interests and attitude, I realized that I didn't fit into the stereotypical Japanese male-dominated society. It was very disappointing. I knew even as a schoolgirl that the patriarchal culture was going to be an obstacle to me becoming a successful artist," she admits.

BOWERY HOUSTON WALL, New York City, New York, USA, 2012, Photo Martha Cooper



So AIKO left for the United States to pursue her dream: "After finishing art school, where I studied graphic design and filmmaking, I decided to move to New York and seek out my own version of an artist's life in the '90s."

However, things did not go smoothly at first: "It was very difficult for me to begin anew in the US. This was a time before the Internet. I didn't know anyone and I wasn't able to speak English. I only had one suitcase with some clothes, a travel guidebook, and a dictionary. I had absolutely no idea what to expect. So I had to let everything go and start my life in America like a newborn. All of the people I met and places I went were pretty much found by accident. It was a serendipitous

time. But inside of me, I knew there was an underlying destiny. I trusted my instincts and listened to my internal voice, which guided my pursuits since childhood," she relates.

She succeeded at finding a job in New York, which allowed her to remain in America. "Not long after arriving, I found a position to assist Takashi Murakami for his first international solo exhibition, *Superflat*, in SoHo in 1998. We had a very small team in a lowly Williamsburg space in Brooklyn with only one work table. I helped by painting his canvases, documenting his process and subsequent exhibitions. Takashi was still very new to the contemporary art world, and I was able to witness the beginning of his career," she recalls.



In the meantime, AIKO was busy developing her own personal style: "I spent two years assisting Takashi in his studio while I was applying for graduate school. It was a great way to get to know people, the city, and the larger art world, but I soon realized that I didn't fit into the clean white box spaces with their nicely dressed crowds. I also didn't come to New York to be a studio assistant, and my small salary wasn't enough to live on. I imagined a much grander journey. Meanwhile, I met new local friends who introduced me to graffiti and street art. It was such a rough-and-tumble underground scene with mind-blowing energy. It was far removed from my Japanese home. Takashi once warned me that graffiti was second-class art and didn't

make any money: it was not a real art career. But I disagreed, and my passion moved me unbridledly toward creating art in public with my new friends. The adventure was beginning to unfold."

That was a memorable period for AIKO and her development. "What I learned during these early days was that it's hard for a young, foreign woman to enjoy instant success in any society, and certainly in an industry like the art world. To do it alone is even more of an undertaking. The Japanese artist Yayoi

CONEY ART WALL, New York City, New York, USA, 2015, Photo AIKO STUDIO



Kusama first came to New York City in 1958 and struggled to draw any crowds. My experience has taken a similar path, and I totally empathize with her. I started the FAILE collective with Patrick McNeil and Patrick Miller around 2000. We were art students in our mid-twenties, living and working together everyday and chasing after every opportunity. We held a lot of shows and did projects for five years until we became very popular. I especially enjoyed making art anonymously and entertaining random audiences on the street with my fellow artist friends like BAST, Banksy, Ben Eine, and Shepard Fairey. We went on numerous missions and traveled like a family," she recalls.

Her collaboration with Banksy took a particularly historical turn: "In 2005, Banksy took me to the major museums in NYC such as The Met, MoMA, and the Brooklyn Museum to install his paintings anonymously. I documented these missions and watched how long they would last (watch *Exit Through the Gift Shop*). It then came out in a huge article on the front page of *The New York Times* and Banksy's name became recognized internationally. I made him into a star, and we created our art market without traditional white boxes. This was a historical moment. It was the beginning of the big

graffiti and street art industry for a new generation, and it still continues to grow."

Despite achieving international success, AIKO continued to find the road ahead difficult for a long time: "I barely earned any money or got any credit during this period, but I was able to sleep, eat, and travel all over the world. I spent my time with everyone as a creative free spirit. To discover a variety of intense art styles and strong voices was absolutely inspiring and priceless. But sadly, I had sexual-relationship and business issues with FAILE. I refused to let them become my boss as they insisted on making street art for our crew only. I was told to go back to Japan for using different forms and styles. I was finding my own voice. But I was the girl in their boys' club, and there was simply no room for a woman. I was a threat to their masculinity. It was nonsense, and it left me depressed and angry. But through this grief I had a breakthrough. I decided to continue silently and use my work to exemplify beauty, sexuality, love, freedom, and truth," she confesses with an open heart and complete sincerity.

"With very little support, I had to start again in my thirties. My famous *Bunny with Spray Can* was a symbol of art and freedom. The first bunny stencil was cut and painted at Banksy's

Commissioned work for THE W BELLEVUE, Washington, USA, 2016,
Photo AIKO STUDIO

COMMUNITY WALL, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2019, Photo AIKO STUDIO



A I K O
♠ ♥ ♦ ♣

Brandyvej
Parkering
Forbudt
Kæretøjet
Fjernes

Commissioned work for the WTC (detail), New York City, New York, USA, 2020, Photo AIKO STUDIO





studio in London, and ever since then the Bunny became my calling card. I have been painting it all over the world for the last seventeen years. Combining the Western 'Wild Style' of my young days with my Japanese ancestors' zen spirit created the foundation of AIKO, and I am very thankful to everything and everyone no matter what," she admits.

In the end, AIKO found her own path in New York: "In 2006, I met Martha Cooper and Jeffrey Deitch. They became powerful mentors to me. Martha and I traveled to many different countries for shows and projects. We became great partners in crime. They also introduced me to some old-school subway and street artists like Lady Pink, Crash, Daze, Kenny Scharf, and Futura. I was invited to work on massive shows and other events together. I painted the Wynwood Walls in 2009 and Keith Haring's Bowery Wall in 2012 as the first female artist. I felt I became part of history and my obstacles were finally easing," she explains.

In 2013, she was commissioned by Louis Vuitton to produce a line of limited-edition goods: "I was happy to hear that I was the third Japanese artist to collaborate after Murakami and Kusama. To complete the production, I was invited to the factory in Italy to work with Louis Vuitton's creative team and craftsmen. For me, it was a next-level experience to work alongside a range of talents, high-end skill sets, and extraordinarily beautiful materials. We produced sixty-two color printed silk scarves, which were the most colorful printed products that I and LV had ever made. The scarves sold out immediately, I am very proud of this success, and it brought great satisfaction. Whether it's a commercial or non-commercial project, I prefer working with a variety of talents. It is a challenge to create something that we have never done and seen before," she explains.

How does she envision the future? "The world is heading in a very uncertain direction, and everyone seems to be confused right now. During the pandemic, I had to postpone all of my travels. Instead, I am spending most of my time at my studio in NYC working on canvases and prints. I left 'home' a long time ago, and I've been living like an art monk. As an artist, I would like to spend all of my creative energy for something positive and beautiful at the end of the day. My art is coming from a place of pure love and prayer for the universe and to those who are seeking to heal, to smile, and are wishing for a better future," she concludes.



東京
BROOKLYN
アiko

Aiko

Aiko

2018..



CHRISTINA ANGELINA

THE READER OF THE SOUL
AND SHAMAN OF EMOTIONS

"I'm proud of myself for not having been seduced by the idea that I need to adapt to others' perception of me; I feel that not being possessed by this notion is a success in itself. I'll never know what others think of me; worrying about it would mean preparing myself for a brutal and painful failure. I'm a woman; whether you think I've made it is up to you."

"Fortunate the wayfarer who is briefed by those rare pioneers who chart the uncharted, who brave the depths and spaces of being, and offer future generations the topology of internal states and further spheres."

With this quote by Hazrat Inayat Khan, Christina Angelina begins to speak of herself and to reveal, with the same intensity, her soul as an artist and woman. Also known as "Starfighter," and possessed with the same ardent spirit and a feverish passion for art coursing through her veins, Christina wanders the streets of Venice in Los Angeles, where she grew up and where she feels incredibly part of everything, even if her fame has by now taken her all over the world. "Venice is a palimpsest of opportunities. A collection, a patchwork, of creative expression. Venice has always been and will always be my home. It's a paradise that nurtures my mind, body, and soul," she discloses.

Christina's passion for art emerged when she was quite young. "I began painting while I was a teenager. It was from that point on that I remember letting my instinct take control of my creative process, which in this sense was similar to Jackson Pollock's 'action painting,' though on a far smaller scale. Today I would destroy most of that work, which I regard essentially as a beautiful exercise. It was exhilarating; the results were very different from any of my previous work. The thrill of this purely





automatic-abstract process, as well as its unexpected myriad results, steered me toward other ideas," she says. "At first I was extremely shy, a slow and precise realist: my work lacked voice, power, scope, and passion," she says, reflecting.

"Human beings can come up with an infinite number of rules: I wanted to be free of the cages that come with submitting or adapting to others. I felt that to endow my art with life, I had to intuit my path. I began by following my feelings and using them as gauges for understanding my work and the boundless nature of the creative process. For example, I would let my hand move automatically, practically by itself, while trying to avoid any thought that might precede or guide its action. This was not an easy road to follow, and it took me a long time to train and transform myself," she recalls.

Location and ambience have made a deep mark on her artistic development. "I observed the art painted on the walls of Venice and everywhere around me, and drew immense inspiration from it. And so, little by little and with care, I began adding my own creations anonymously to these 'conversations.' I still don't sign my work. I don't understand why I should; to me, it seems ridiculous. However, I do understand that writing out their name is extremely important to some people, and I do not intend to take anything away from their experience; it's simply of no value to me. I participate for the sake of collective creation, for the sake of the process," she admits.

As for the essence of street art, Christina follows her own idea, a profoundly philosophical one that she expresses as follows: "A man asked Gautama Buddha, 'I want happiness.' Buddha said, 'First remove *I*; that's Ego. Then remove *want*; that's Desire. See, now you are left with *happiness*.'"

Los Angeles, California, USA, 2016

