



● GINA BEAVERS' EVOCATIVE acrylic paintings shine an uncanny spotlight on the clichés of our virtual lives, from memes to makeup tutorials. We spoke to the New Jersey-based artist about her influences, what inspires her and the humanity that lies beneath the veneer of the selfie.

Your works portray social media imagery that, at first glance, seems beautiful but often takes on another characteristic entirely. What does beauty mean to you?

I'm hugely interested in beauty, especially as portrayed on platforms like TikTok, but I'm much more interested in the idea of trying to be beautiful and failing. I don't make beautiful paintings. I am battling with the dimensionality of heavy acrylic and installation foam, so I end up with an ugly image that reveals more about the subject's humanity. The close-ups become abstractions, revealing the flaws and absurdity of the subject. I try to embody the anxieties, pieties, shamelessness, pompousness of our online lives. Can bodies, or a painting of a body, represent these interior states?

So much of social media is focused on consumption, but artists like Claes Oldenburg and Andy Warhol were tapping into that same notion decades ago. For you, is art about consumption?

I always related to the idea of art and consumerism being linked, because it's about reality and the lives that we lead. I can't not talk about consumption, because as an American that defines a lot of my identity. Social media is about looking at yourself as much as you look at other people—you're broadcasting yourself while also consuming other people's identities. I'm reflecting that back. It's a documentarian impulse.

INTERVIEW BY SHIRINE SAAD

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you're *people + ideas* broadcasting yourself while also consuming other people's identities."

Your pieces are inspired by digital images and videos, yet they're three-dimensional, jumping off the canvas. What's the rationale behind your medium?

People have often said they see photographs from social media as flat, but I feel like they have such an embodied presence, screaming out the subject's identity. So I try to capture that with the three-dimensionality of my work and the reliefs. Relief is historically connected to narrative. With ancient reliefs, there's always a story told in there. My works are also legible in this way.

Describe your process.

I draw the painting from a photograph on my iPad. The photo directs me in terms of colour palette. Then I build up acrylic without pigment for several layers, and later add the colour. For paintings larger than four feet, I use installation foam to build the initial layers and then add acrylic over that. I work on many pieces at the same time, and they often have to dry lying down for at least four weeks. The process is step by step, similar to the tutorials I'm inspired by. I'd say each painting takes around 50 hours.

What female artists have inspired you?

The artist Elizabeth Murray was really wonderful. She experimented with the form of the canvas, and that had a huge influence on me in terms of creating 3D works. Underground comics from the 1970s to the '90s have inspired me too. A lot of comic book artists who are women, like Julie Doucet, had this total freedom of expression and confession about their lives.

How does the perception of womanhood influence your work?

My work is an honest description of how women exist online and within culture and



Above: *Pink Lip Tutorial*, 2022
Previous page: *Applying Lipstick on Heart Shape Lips*, 2022



Above: *Smoky Eye Tutorial*, 2014

consumer culture without feeling conflicted about it. So much of our identity is wrapped up in advertising and movies, and it's been so exploited. How do you then take that and repurpose it into something that's useful? A lot of my work is about self-determination.

How do you select your subjects?

I save things to a folder on my phone called "more ideals." I meant for it to be called "more ideas," but I like the typo. There's lots of cake, cake art and different kinds of tutorials, as well as jokes on political statements and memes. I'm always looking for both a narrative and composition or colour.

Your cake paintings in particular are so decadent. They seem to take the concept of #foodporn to the next level.

They are based on food as a marker of success—an aspiration in our culture whereby sharing a plate image is a status symbol, whether you made the dish or ate at a hip restaurant. The more visceral food photos work really well in 3D. People refer to the thick impasto paint I use as cake frosting; the lusciousness makes you almost want to eat it. The food stands in for a certain shamelessness and indulgence online.

What's next for you?

This fall at Carl Kostyál's Hospitalet in Stockholm, I have a show titled "MoMA Bra," after a sports bra I bought in New York's MoMA Design Store. The show is in part a reference to famous works from the MoMA collection that I painted on my lips and body, part beauty tutorials, and part paintings of hearts and brains that appear on lips and nails. It will also feature two large murals made up of smaller works that I've created in homage to the Niki de Saint Phalle sculptures at Stockholm's Moderna Museet.

What about your art brings you joy?

There are lots of moments of joy when I get lost in a painting. When I'm putting a show together, because my process dictates that everything needs to be made at once, I love the wrangling of a big, messy vision.

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