

Relcaptia Statement

Relcaptia explores how revisionism and appropriation can be used to reinterpret traditional narratives surrounding the patriarchal canon of Western Art. Schwartz's work engages many of the core tenets of postmodern art by challenging notions of authenticity and identity in modern art. This work re-identifies the semiotic relationship of part to whole through deliberate destruction of the past, evoking conversations about truth, bias, and the status quo while both literally and figuratively liberating art from the page.

Utilizing a 19th and 20th century modern art history book as her primary medium, Schwartz's process involves using solvent in a series of stages to slowly erase reproduction images from each of the pages, rendering the figurative abstract and releasing the once-static gallery-bound paintings into dynamic compositions that come to life with each turn of the page. Each page is a labor of personal narrative where the act of erasure renders once-static gallery-bound paintings into dynamic ephemera waiting to be revealed with each turn of the page. The resulting palimpsest of her work focuses the eye on the primacy of the unseen, and Schwartz's work reveals the subconscious of the original painting and expands the parameters of art-making.

The project was fully born the moment Schwartz's abrasion revealed a hole in one page and opened up a portal from a known past to an unknown future. This ferocious excavation of features was a process of re-discovery for both the artist herself and the canon of Western art, as the negative space now literally gleaned from the page revealed elements of paradox that, in Schwartz's words, "created a question and let it hang there." Her work directly challenges the viewer to renegotiate meaning in disembodied contexts.

After having smothered her darlings, Schwartz moved on to a form of collage by digitally inserting still lifes, landscapes, portraits, and patterns from 16th-19th century masterpieces into scans of the compositions of her 400-page refashioned book, resulting in atypical pairings of people, objects and specimens.. Schwartz's hybrid acts of erasure and insertion, destruction and creation chronologically disrupt the supposed linear progression of the mainstream modernist paradigm and create non-chronological works entirely from the Western canon, freeing the viewer from traditional ways of looking at art history. The layers upon layers of both brilliant and muted canvases acts to both obscure and reveal the images lying beneath, allowing traces of background to emerge in ghost-like forms, leading the viewer to consider their own suppositions about dominating factors in Western art. The presence of lack thereof of figurative information on each page retrains the eye, forcing the viewer to take a step back from knowing, opening up a conversation about unlearning through the process of reconsidering a book.

When Schwartz photographs the pages and scans them to create new digital canvases, she fuses the fixed and the malleable showing at once both the page's past and a path for its future through a flip of the page, revealing the mechanisms at work behind the page's history. In this way, the book simultaneously is and isn't both a fixed object, as the act of opening it reveals that it is no longer what it used to be, and flipping the abraded pages leads to new interpretations of what the viewer wants, knows, and sees. The moment the page turns, both a past and an undecided future are revealed both in terms of subject matter and physical deconstruction. In this way, the experience of the book is both a private event for the individual viewer as well as a public event fixed in the context of history through the chronological ordering of form in its pages.

The subversive strategy of appropriating canonical imagery to deconstruct singular notions of authorship, authenticity, and identity makes her book less finished product and more a point of research. The book as a whole and each page as an individual fuel different directions, directing the mind to ideas about the absences revealed by the solvent, creating new compositional focuses that reform art history's canonical content, but also retrain the viewer's eye to see both the familiar and the new without a guided focus, leading to the revelation of new intentions, and upending the hierarchy between finished originals and erased copies.

Schwartz reconstructs new images by creating space for the viewer's own social and political interpretations to fill the gaps like paint pooling on the page. Playing on this bias of interpretation, her work conceals chronological information, and within the pages are projections anticipating new contexts from the viewers. Many viewers will play nostalgic games of memory flipping through and feeling the pages, Schwartz's work reveals how it is the biases themselves that change in the context of the erased book. New tensions are manufactured both from the erasure and now the digital imprint, and these revised historical records examine the corpus of traditional art history, reading the images through a female lens that transcends the borders of genres and eras by disrupting both the classifications and the supposed linear progression of modern art to produce non-chronological works composed entirely from the Western canon.

Much like an archaeological site, the book has become an artifact over the last three years. By literally digging through the pages with a solvent, Schwartz has revealed four discrete levels to the work: the book itself, the photographs of the book containing the distressed pages in all their tears and defected glory, the digital manipulations of the original images that echo paintings, and finally the direct engraving on the print surface that resembles needlepoint work. Indeed, Schwartz has made a body of work that is both precise and confounding, mixing the ethereal with the quiescent, allowing the collected pages inside as well as the book as a whole to birth forth new complex narratives from multi-layered etchings that depict the fragility of both art-making and art consumption, as well as our own notions of distinction within larger art movements.

Through erasure, appropriation, and repurposing, Schwartz's new way of depicting and perceiving canonical Western art as an evanescent but still present memory. Within her newly created anachronistic worlds, the artist revisits classical modes of representation in Western art, as well as traditional genres and compositions to filter and compress art historical references with a contemporary sense of dismantlement and disintegration. Ultimately, by presenting images that are at once familiar yet unfamiliar, original yet facsimiles, she asks many questions but gives few definitive answers.