

DESPINA STOKOU

SHOUT!

October 14 - November 13, 2016

OPENING RECEPTION: Friday, October 14, 6-8pm

Derek Eller Gallery is proud to present *SHOUT!*, an exhibition of paintings by Despina Stokou.



Despina Stokou, *Shout!*, 2016, marker, acrylic, chalk and collage on linen, 40 x 30 inches

writer, Stokou's work is concerned primarily with the expression of language in its myriad forms, from blog posts and Twitter comments to press releases and drug prescriptions. Probing the depths (or shallows) of the Internet, Stokou critically examines the conflation of history with trending topics, and the effects of these shifting forms of communication in the physical world. Online conversations dominate the public narrative, yet large swathes of the population still struggle to have their voices heard in meaningful ways.

*We asked 10 years ago. We was asking with the (Black) Panthers, we was asking with the Civil Rights Movement. Now all these people who was asking is dead and in jail. Now what do you think we are gonna do... Ask?*²

At the center of *SHOUT!* is a swirling diptych re-imagining the American flag and sourcing campaign slogans from Lincoln through to the present day. Stokou intervenes in the source material, replacing the most repeated words (People, Future, Prosperity, Change) – with terms that have, for better or worse, come to dominate the current political cycle. She provides the following lexicon:

People – Super Delegates
 Future – Rigged
 Prosperity – Second Amendment

Change – Pokémon Go
 Again – Black Lives Matter
 Believe – Titties³

¹ Jesse Williams 2016 BET award speech <http://www.bet.com/video/betawards/2016/acceptance-speeches/jesse-williams-receives-humanitarian-award.html>

² Tupac Shakur's interview 1994 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aMXzLhbWtmk>

³ Trump speech in Detroit Economy Club 2016 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJgwEikRwY>

The slogans go through a political make-over; the results are sometimes realistic - Bill Clinton's "America for Super Delegates", or sometimes absurd - Bernie Sanders' "Rigged to Titties", or then, sometimes just hopeful, as when authoritarian slogans like Trump's (and Reagan's) turn into a call for social justice, "Make America(n) Black Lives Matter."

You know you make me wanna (Shout!)

Kick my heels up and (Shout!)

Throw my hands up and (Shout!)

Throw my head back and (Shout!)

Stokou's flag version is surrounded by a series of large-scale works that quote from Jesse Williams's powerful speech at the BET Awards earlier this year, in which the actor lambasted the irony of mainstream America profiting from widespread cultural appropriation of black culture, while black Americans continue to struggle against segregation, injustice and even murder at the hands of their own government and public servants; to Tupac Shakur's prescient lyrics; or currently Colin Kaepernick's call for greater awareness of the complex histories threaded through in mainstream culture experiences, as mainstream in fact as the National Anthem.

Shout a little bit softer now...

Structural biases in American culture take form in *The Microfarts of Sexism*, a commentary on the pervasive issue of sexism in the art world and mainstream media, in which male artists are often glorified for possessing certain traits that just as often stifle women, a pattern that is transferable into the larger workforce and that now, extends up through to the presidency and the current political media coverage. Similarly, *SuppressWomenThroughPregnancy.com* chronicles websites that turn the do's and don'ts of women's bodies into linkable subject matter and in *Baby Drug Cocktail(Old Fashioned)* Stokou winks at the (outdated) notion of a female diaristic work in the age of advanced reproductive technology.

Mainstream media plays a major role in reaffirming the "Male = Value" stereotype. There are many different value systems in the arts. Aesthetical factors of course, rarity, historical context, technique, hell even scale. But not the penis⁴

(Shooby-doo-wop-do-wop-wop-wop-wop)

SHOUT! is a call to action, a new form of call-and-response to the reality of anger sweeping through the United States and the world right now. What will come out on the other side; at a time when everybody is paying attention and the chorus of voices is growing louder, each day?

Shout, shout, shout, shout (oh-whoa-yeah)

Everybody shout now!

Text by: Melissa Passman and Despina Stokou

SHOUT! will be Stokou's third solo exhibition at Derek Eller Gallery. She is also represented by Galerie Eigen + Art in Berlin/Leipzig, and her work has been featured in exhibitions at The KW Art Institute, Berlin, The Pit, Los Angeles, Gagosian Gallery, Athens, Ibid, Los Angeles, Nathalie Karg Gallery, New York, and Krinzinger Projekte, Vienna. Stokou's work will be included in an upcoming exhibition at Kunstverein Gera, Gera.

Derek Eller Gallery is located at 300 Broome Street between Eldridge Street and Forsyth Street. Hours are Wednesday-Sunday from 11am to 6pm and Tuesday by appointment. For further information please contact the gallery at 212.206.6411 or visit www.derekeller.com

⁴ Despina Stokou <http://hyperallergic.com/312225/art-is-genderful-an-artists-notes-on-navigating-a-sexist-system/>