

by R.C. Baker

## Art

**Despina Stokou: 'Bulletproof'**

**T**here is violence in these colorful, energetic paintings. A Greek artist who lives and works in Berlin, Despina Stokou crams her canvases with photos clipped from skin magazines, collaged texts, bursts of spray-paint, and scabby abrasions. QR codes pasted on the walls guide your smartphone to source materials, blog posts, and other digital scat. The paintings aren't hung but are propped atop slabs of wood or rest on angle irons buttressed with C-clamps. Jagged text in one painting squawks, "I LOVE YOUR DRESS!" the compliment belied by the porn shot forming the dot of the exclamation point.

Words get nasty here. In a nearly eight-foot-high canvas with a smeared gray ground, black letters snarl, "How is an oil painting going to protect your family when the Muslims come?" Stokou found the phrase amid reader comments appended to a CNN article about the devastation of Hurricane Sandy on the Chelsea gallery district. This philistinism recalls a quote from Sotheby's bigwig Tobias Meyer: "The best art is the most expensive because the market is so smart." There you have it—art is only worthwhile if it can provide a shield against terrorist bullets or a hedge against inflation.

The 34-year-old Stokou wrestles with her own place in the market, scrawling currency conversions of the price of her creations directly onto the walls, artist as naked commodity. Still, her harsh themes are often at odds with lovely passages of paint, such as a gold, phallic slash hovering over plummy depths. Grabbing the eyes while poking the cortex, Stokou's canvases offer one antidote to the surfeit of decorative painting currently colonizing too many galleries.

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