ALMINE RECH

Ewa Juszkiewicz
The Grass divides as with a Comb

Jun 18 — Jul 31, 2020 | London

The Grass divides as with a Comb at Almine Rech London is Ewa Juszkiewicz's first exhibition at the gallery.

Through the deconstruction of traditional, historical portraits, Juszkiewicz enters into discussion with the visual conventions that they represent, and undermines their constant, indisputable character. The artist confronts the schematic representation of women in art history. She critically refers to the position and role of women in society and culture in the past, and to their insufficient presence in the official version of history.

As is well known, in previous centuries the absence of women was prevalent in many areas. Denying the role of women in the artistic landscape meant diminishing their existence by depriving them of the status of full artists and citizens, like Emily Dickinson, who had to publish her writing anonymously in 1850. The title of the exhibition is taken from one of her poems.

Juszkiewicz's portraits recall paintings by Élisabeth-Louise Vigée Le Brun, Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, Joseph Van Lerius, and Joseph Wright, sending us into a world that is both classical and surrealist. By covering female faces and displaying their transfiguration, Juszkiewicz revitalizes Art History through a unique language. In her paintings, the sitter's poses are familiar, but the intention is radically new. As the artist says:

"My gestures are the tools to break a cliché and overturn a well-known order. I replace what is classical and connected with the canon into what comes from nature and senses. Paradoxically, by covering these portraits I want to uncover individuality, character, emotions. I want to bring out the vitality."

Like the surrealist game of Exquisite Corpse, Juszkiewicz creates hybrid characters and experiments with the form of the female figure. The faces are replaced by a bouquet of flowers, a textile arrangement, or an extravagant headdress. The details, curves, and draped fabrics are formed as if a sculpture, bringing out ambiguous emotions and balancing on the border of what is human and inhuman. It is a radical and contemporary act, that accomplishes a kind of symbolic demolition of the canon that this genre represents.

- Milena Oldfield