

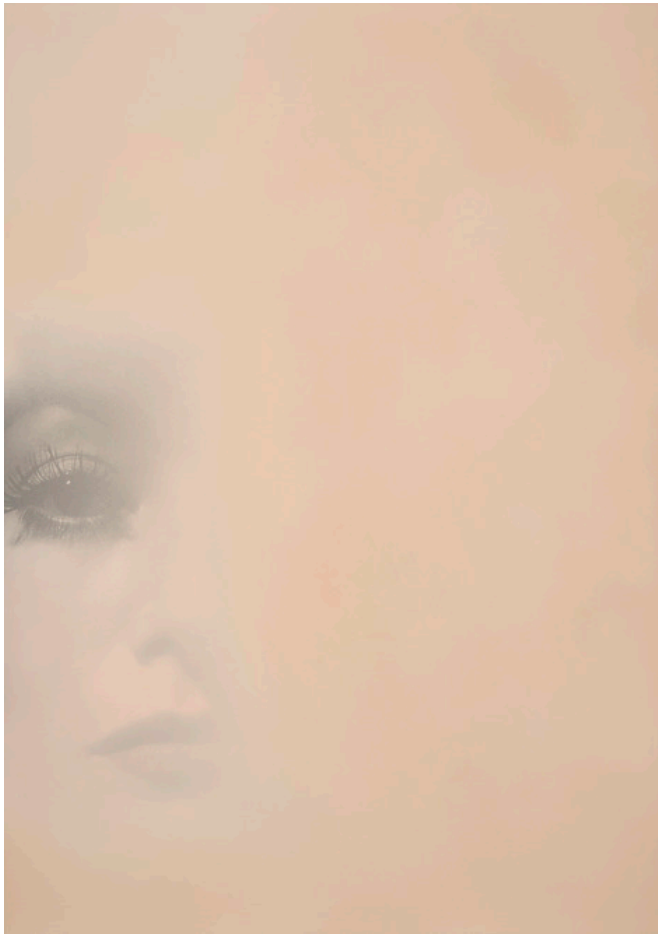
BRIDGETTE **MAYER** GALLERY

GEIST – MAGAZINE: “BEGUILED BY SIRENS: STUART NETSKY AT BRIDGETTE MAYER GALLERY”

January 24, 2015 · by michael carroll · in Reviews ·

Sirens is a stimulating, vibrant exhibition featuring the artwork of Stuart Netsky, on display at Bridgette Mayer Gallery. The artist experiments with alternative media in an eclectic mix of portraits, sculptures and installations that comment on the female gaze, gendered cultural practices and gender polarization.

Netsky's series of powdered women challenges stereotypes of women during the early 20th century with pop culture references to films starring Joan Crawford, Bette Davis and Dita Parlo. His female subjects emerge out of dusty, monochromatic expanses of hairspray, spray foundation and body shimmer that accent the coming-of-age nature of their characters' respective stories.



Stuart Netsky
Mildred Pierce, 2014
Spray Foundation on Archival Inkjet Print. Courtesy of Bridgette Mayer Gallery.

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In 1945, Joan Crawford starred in the film adaptation of James M. Cain's 1941 novel, "Mildred Pierce." Crawford's character divorces her husband during the Great Depression and ultimately establishes herself financially. Netsky's portrait of Crawford, called "Mildred Pierce," breaks out of a mass of spray foundation partially revealing her face, paralleling Mildred Pierce's rejection of the societal pressures to adhere to restrictive gender roles.



Stuart Netsky
The Grand Illusion, 2014
White Hairspray on Archival Digital Print. Courtesy of Bridgette Mayer Gallery.

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A 1937 French War Film called "La Grande Illusion" inspired the title for Netsky's portrait of Dita Parlo called "The Grand Illusion." In the film, Parlo plays Elsa, a woman who shelters and hides two men from the German army patrol during World War I. Stuart Netsky veils Parlo in white hairspray creating a cloud that subtly blurs the woman's face in and out of focus making it difficult to decipher her true features from underneath the hazy mask.



Stuart Netsky

Let's Not Ask for the Moon, We Have the Stars, 2014

Spray Foundation and Body Shimmer on Archival Inkjet Print. Courtesy of Bridgette Mayer Gallery.

The artist rounds out his series of actors with "Let's Not Ask for the Moon, We Have the Stars," a quote from the film "Now Voyager" that came out in 1942 starring Bette Davis. Davis plays Charlotte Vale, a self-conscious woman who is belittled by her mother and subsequently admitted to a sanitarium where she flourishes after leaving the vice of her demeaning mother. These three "sirens" are hidden underneath layers of makeup that shroud the actors' bodies and subsequently accentuate their faces.

The narratives unearthed in the powders and sprays tell tales of virtuous, empowered women who are timeless icons that are meticulously scrutinized by sets of tightly cropped eyes and brows from famous paintings and pop culture references on the opposing wall. In doing so, Netsky orchestrates a grand jury of historical masterpieces

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and monumental actors as an ode to his predecessors and, more accurately, strokes his own ego by elevating his artwork to be of comparable importance and grandeur.



Stuart Netsky
The Three Muses: Infinite Curse of a Lonely Heart, 2014
Mixed Media. Courtesy of Bridgette Mayer Gallery.

Connecting the front and rear gallery spaces are a series of eclectic sculptures that are devoid of discernible sex and spewing with a gender fluidity in a conglomerate of art historical works, religious totems and plastic elements that mix and match the male and female anatomy.

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Stuart Netsky

AphroditeNaomiLindaChristyFayeGarboSophiaLizDeneuve, 1/7, 2014
Archival Inkjet Print. Courtesy of Bridgette Mayer Gallery.

Stuart Netsky embraces queer elements and sexual innuendo within his artwork, especially in his layered print "AphroditeNaomiLindaChristyFayeGarboSophiaLizDeneuve," an overcrowded portrait that superimposes multiple women overtop one another and effectively obscures their features. What remains is a series of disembodied eyes and mouths within a sea of flesh that feels both clandestine and sexual.

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Stuart Netsky
Love Affair, 1/7, 2014
Archival Inkjet Print. Courtesy of Bridgette Mayer Gallery.

Netsky's most successful superimposed image is "Love Affair," a composite image of a hyper-sexualized Marilyn Monroe who stares outward, mouth agape, underneath Brancusi's phallic, golden "Princess X." This is his most overtly sexual piece made up of many of the same elements of the rest of the exhibition – again he reduces the female portrait to a set eyes and a mouth.

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Stuart Netsky
Apollo Does Not Always Keep His Bow Strung, 2014
Porcelain Flowers on Archival Inkjet Print. Courtesy of Bridgette Mayer Gallery.

There is a consistent sexual hum throughout the entire exhibition that marches to a freeform beat, inclusive of all forms of gender expression. Stuart Netsky plays with female representation in media and presents it in a satirical manner in order to draw attention to society's antiquated notions of gender roles. *Sirens* is a series of predominantly female subjects, as Netsky limits the number of male representations to challenge our binary concepts of male and female identities. Netsky courts viewers with his sirens, be it Bette Davis or Apollo, and inspires a reevaluation of our societal norms.

Sirens is on display at Bridgette Mayer Gallery until January 30th, 2015, at 709 Walnut Street Philadelphia, PA 19106.