

## **Nomi Tannhauser – The Maidens in Blue (Using Picasso For My Own Needs)**

The "Maidens in Blue" series of paintings summarizes a deliberate and intensive project executed over the past year, although its beginnings lie a few decades earlier, during the process of the formulation of Nomi Tannhauser's identity. Picasso, the iconic painter of "Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J.)" is by far the most famous artist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, whose name is uttered by every child. With this giant and in his garden, facing his infamous "Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J.)" painting, Nomi Tannhauser chose to contend. This seemingly surprising choice appears to contain the key to its failure: If an iconic painting exists, any competition with it may turn pale, if there is such a famous artist – surely no one can beat his fame. But Nomi – the woman and artist, consciously selects Picasso – a high branch familiar to all. Through him she is able to reformulate the validity of her work as an artist, a painter, a woman, a feminist.

The famous painting from 1907 describes five women, prostitutes in a brothel, standing in various seductive poses in front of the artist in a typical cubist style. A table's angle is directed towards them as a phallic object from the center of the painting, exemplifying the male gaze. The viewer watching their nudity becomes aware of the painter's male gaze and seems to switch roles with him, being activated into additional layers of observation.

Nomi makes a choice to paint five nude women. Each one of them is sought out for the project with precision. They (Neta, Nomi B., Vered and Yana) are all connected to Nomi and the art world in different ways - some of them have been her friends for many years. The women aren't necessarily experienced models, but women whose nudity in front of the artist is not obvious. For these women this is a new experience with the feminine gaze observing their body, with making their bodies present on the canvas. The outcome of this painted female nudity isn't disturbing. They appear at ease, devoid of sexual tension, different from one another. Their nakedness is the center of the painting but it is surrounded by a rich and colorful composition that nearly "steals the show": clothes, textiles, patterns, furniture - a feminine studio environment with colorful richness, painted in detail. The structure of the composition, perceiving and containing the painted figure simultaneously also conveys a feminine perspective on female nudity. This setting - with its rounded perspective and its extremely rich details - enables the viewer a tender investigation of the painted woman, of feminine nudity, and of the difference between the women. (This may be due to their body structure, to their sitting position or to what is hidden or exposed).

Through painting Nomi asks questions concerning femininity, age, the observation of nudity, the experience of the painter and the model, the painted friend, and what happens during the meeting between the model invited to the studio and the artist.

Nomi's decision to paint herself in the nude as one of the five women places her inside the project and is no less fascinating. In the other women's paintings she is one more figure who observes the painted model, adding no tension to the painting but instead - rounding it off; two women in a painting tell a more tender story than a man and a woman, or a phallic object and a woman. Her entry into the body of the work and her naked painted self-portrait as one of the "Maidens in Blue" tells a new story, distancing it from the original "Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J.)" painting. Nomi feels the experience of exposure on her skin, the experience of the gaze that paints the body. She

courageously sits opposite herself allowing herself to paint herself, facing her body and remaining within the same color palette and the same composition. Because this self-portrait is also one of the five components of the "Maidens in Blue" it can be seen as the height of the individual project, the peak of the five unusual paintings that together form the series.

The large piece in the gallery is a variation of the "Demoiselles d'Avignon" painting. This work contains each of the five women as she stands in the posture taken from Picasso's painting. The "Maidens in Blue" was created alone in the studio during the past few months, after finishing the individual model paintings. Nomi contends with the interpretation and the attempt to convey herself and her spirit into the story of the "other". The result brings out her personality and echoes a direct feminist stance on herself on her friends and on her community, along with a colorful rich feminine perspective that sends us back in time but also points to the present and to the future.

With her self-inclusion as one of the five painted objects, under the same eye and the same painting hand, Nomi creates a new and containing social feminine discourse. By assembling women one by one with her for hours of intimacy between the paintbrush and the canvas, between the color and the composition and the artist and the model, she creates a small community. This community is connected by the fact that each of the women was granted the same private time and similar personal and individual treatment. This new feminine attitude does not abandon woman to herself, but along with being granted her privacy enables her also a relationship, a group.

Exhibited in the gallery is a nearly documentary video film that describes Nomi's driving anxiety. This early video seems at first sight disconnected from the "Maidens in Blue" project, but the threatening anxiety - taken from her personal life - of driving out in the open or overtaking a truck can also be projected on her life as a painter and artist. In her choice to paint a project in the footsteps of Picasso, the decision to "overtake" deals with her basic anxieties. Symbolically, when we met in the gallery, she told me how while driving from Jerusalem to Rishon leTzion an iron rod flew from a driving truck and got stuck in her car's radiator clattering all the way. Needless to say that Nomi is well and her car wasn't seriously damaged...

Perhaps the anxieties don't leave us altogether, however each project is an attempt to overtake, to overcome an obstacle, producing a tremendous feeling of potential success, as she says in her words - "using Picasso for my own needs"...

Efi Gen – Exhibition Curator

This process echoed and inspired some of the participants to think about the Demoiselles d'Avignon painting and create personal pieces that relate to the topic in their own language: