

Talking to Jenifer Bar Lev:

N. T: The central motif in the works you created for the Crimson Peels Project is of accessories that belong to the field of sadomasochism. At first I thought you wanted to express the feeling of subjection of a woman in a patriarchal society, but apparently you had a different reason.

J.B.L: The series “Compassion” is based on the attributes of bondage-domination-sadomasochism (BDSM) in the sexual practices of exchange of power by agreement. Somehow this sounds very threatening. My girl-friend saw these works and immediately said “I hope that’s not your thing”. I asked why, and she replied “ – because sadism and masochism are pain and degradation”. That friend has been with her partner for years in a relationship that is, according to what she says, full of pain and degradation, and that she accepts.

N.T: How can there be more negotiation in sadomasochist relationships than in ordinary ones?

J.B.L: Power is part of any relationship. When a woman chooses to use physical power, it’s considered abnormal. Physical power still belongs to men. In sadomasochism female power is accepted and even valued.

N.T: How did you get to the images of those accessories?

J.B.L: I’ve always been interested in clothes, and these items are also a kind of clothing, like work clothes. My interest in sadomasochism began from a few sources, the strangest of which was definitely a fascinating phenomenon called Fan Fiction. There are whole novels written on the internet about figures taken from popular culture. It seems that this kind of literature is mainly written by women, most of them PhD students. They change the usual systems of relationships between the figures. For instance, the novellas of Fan Fiction are based on the TV series “Star Trek”. In the original, the central figures are Captain Kirk and his aide, Mr. Spock, an extraterrestrial. In the alternative literature they have a homosexual relationship, and sometimes a sadomasochistic one.

N.T: If I’ve understood correctly, these are tough, heterosexual males, and in Fan Fiction they become more vulnerable.

J.B.L: In the original series, Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock only learn to trust each other after a very long while because Mr. Spock is not a human being; while in the alternative internet version they are a sort of royal couple. That made me ask myself why women are so fascinated by homosexual couples, to such an extent that they write about it in the erotic literature. Does the secret of this fascination lie in the fact that for homosexuals the sexual acts are more flexible than among heterosexual couples?

N.T: So, like those doctorate students, you're actually looking for the "other male"?

J.B.L: Yes, and for the other woman. The equation is something like – violent men and nourishing women. But how does "violent women and nourishing men" sound? There's still a strong objection to powerful women, even in self-defense, which makes the world very unbalanced.

N.T: In the exhibition "Beauty 1995" that I curated at the Antea (?) Gallery, you exhibited a work called HART. In the center of that work there was an image of Brigitte Bardot, and a repeated pattern around her of inverted Eiffel Towers. To me, those phallic images seemed to threaten the fragile figure in the middle.

J.B.L: A hart is a deer. In movies, Bardot embodied a hunted creature, but in the end the femme fatale was the one that ruined men's lives. The relationship changes all the time. I suppose that basically everyone threatens everyone.

N.T: In the present series of prints, in which the central motif is an enslavement object, I feel that the situation is reversed; it's the central motif that is threatening and violent, while the repeat pattern around it is broken down formally into its components so that its effectiveness dissolves.

J.B.L: Pattern, as concerns textile, indicates both body and house. The pattern makes the work intimate, integrates it with the space of the house. There's a theory that wild animals see the world as patterns so that they can distinguish the hunter concealed in the thicket, breaking the regularity of the pattern. I think the pattern helps me to find my place in/cope with the world.

N.T: And what about color? The colors are very subtle in these prints, almost monochrome.

J.B.L: The original sketches were black-and-white with all sorts of grays. At first I thought to use etching. Arik said they (the sketches) were more suitable for silkscreen, which would also express their color, which he liked. When I worked with Eytan – printing – the color element was emphasized. Eytan got the finest nuances out of my blacks and whites. You could say that this was a cooperative effort.

N.T: Among the prints there are some in which the pattern is more open, the line gets a certain freedom.

J.B.L: I'm not interested in the sensitive line or the free brushstroke. I feel very exposed in the world, and so I look for the definition of form that will support me, the complete line that will reassure me, the net that will hold me. I look for clear definitions in order to understand clearly what goes with what and what isn't there. Up to a few years back, they didn't paint realistically here. One was allowed to be sensitive as long as one didn't see anything.