

# REBECCA BRODSKIS INTERVIEW — Interlocutor

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Exhibition view of *Arrêt sur image*, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, 2021

*Paris-based artist Rebecca Brodskis grew up living between Morocco and France, and in recent years she has also resided in Tel-Aviv, New York, and Berlin. Emotional and psychological liminal states are central to her reflective and evocative work. Her figurative paintings explore the realms in-between unconscious and conscious spaces. In this interview, she talks about her artistic process, why she is obsessed with the human figure as a subject, and her current show at the Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery in London, Arrêt sur image.*

Interview by **Abby Provenzano**

**When did art begin to be a prime form of expression for you? Do you come from an artistic family background, or was art and painting something you felt naturally drawn to on your own?**

As far as I can remember art has always been very central in my life. At school all my notebooks were covered with drawings. My grandmother was a painter in Morocco, where I spent half of my childhood, and many of my parent's friends were painters, so it's definitely something that was very accessible [to me] from a very early age.

I barely had access to television. My parents — who both worked in films — only allowed me to watch black and white movies like the Chaplin films or Buster Keaton maybe once a week, so painting and drawing became my main distraction.

**What is the artistic process like for you? How would you describe a typical day in your studio or in working on a painting or project?**

I am very spontaneous, I don't plan anything. I let things happen. I don't feel like I really control anything. I actually really enjoy this feeling. I am very focused, though, and when I paint I become totally detached from reality.

It's like meditation. Usually when I arrive at the studio I start painting straight away. I literally dive into it and I emerge when the alarm rings to remind me to go and pick my son up from school. Most of the time I skip lunch and live on coffee so that I don't have to stop the process. I love to start painting as early as possible. I am always very inspired in the mornings.



“Le lien” 130x97cm, oil on linen, 2020

**Can you speak to your choice of subjects to paint, and to what draws you specifically to painting incredible human figures?**

I am just obsessed with human figures. To me they are infinite landscapes. There's just so much to it. It's endless. I always love to stare at people. I find faces incredible. The weirder they are the more I adore them. I find beauty in distortion. I admire asymmetrical figures, bended bodies, misshaped profiles. This is what I want to paint and what gives me eternal inspiration.

**How might you describe your painting style?**

I would say I paint figurative paintings with a twist. If you really look at them they are never truly realistic. I don't work [from] photographs so the shadows are always at the wrong place and some elements don't always make complete sense.



“Above the Difference” 80x60cm, oil on linen, 2020

**Who are some other artists and creators who have served as influences, guides, and inspirations for your own artistic career?**

The list is long but I would say the artistic movement that inspires me the most is New Objectivity, among which the painters who I find the most interesting are Christian Schad and Otto Dix. I find their sociological approach of painting very inspirational. I

also really like painters such as Balthus, Bacon, Dumas, Hopper...



“La penseuse” 61x50cm, oil on linen, 2020



“La suplication” 146x114cm, Oil on linen, 2020

**Much of your work has been said to embody the idea of exploring borders of the “sensible” world, spaces, and freedom. Your work has been described as being in an “in-between” space, reflecting on the existence, self, and otherness through the unconscious and conscious, reality and imagination, order and disorder, material and spiritual – how would you define your own art, purpose, and what you strive to create?**

I would describe my art as a reflection on contemporary societies, questioning and reflecting on the doubts of my generation. I can only describe what I see, feel and perceive from the time I am living in. I try to give an impression of moments of everyday life, people I meet on my daily travels. I do like the idea that painting is this in-between space where everything is possible. There the reality merges with the imagination, consciously or unconsciously opening the gates for deeper introspections.

**Your paintings have also been described as encompassing the “ephemerality” and the fleetingness of life — can you speak to this idea, perhaps particularly in relation to the paintings in your upcoming London show at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery?**

The show at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery is called *Arrêt sur image* which means “freeze a frame.” It tries to capture moments of everyday life, encounters, dreams, eclectic situations. It’s an attempt to stop time for a brief moment and catch a fragment of this ephemeral existence.

We live at a very fast pace. We are submerged by images, drowned by information. Painting — especially with oil — is a slow process. It allows one to really stop for a moment and reflect on one single frame for weeks and sometimes months. Every single moment of existence is full of details that we are unable to really grasp. When you walk down a street how many faces do you see? They appear for a second and the next minute they are gone forever. The idea is to immortalize this vanishing point.



“La paternite #1” 130x97cm, oil on linen, 2020



“La paternite #2” 160x97cm, oil on linen, 2020-RS

**Your artistic work, exhibitions, travel, and education have brought you all over the world — Paris, New York, Berlin, Tel-Aviv, and Morocco, to name a few places — how does your environment and experience in the world work to influence and shape your art and process? What might other artists gain through travel?**

Traveling and moving to new cities has always given me a great deal of vital energy. When you arrive in a new place all your senses are on alert. It's amazing. When you stay too long at the same place you get stuck in a daily routine and you stop noticing what surrounds you.

My inspiration comes mainly from my surroundings, I need the reality around me to change to be able to carry on my artistic process. Discovering new cities allows me to become a kid again and to find interest in all the small details of everyday life.

**You have a Masters Degree in Sociology focused on the themes of social crisis and vulnerabilities — how has this influenced or inspired your art? How might you describe this merging here?**

Studying sociology allowed me to have a deeper understanding of the society we live in. Undertaking this Masters Degree gave me some new insights into contemporary societies and [it] made me question even more the social foundations. I think my paintings are a reflection of that. They point out the doubt, the anxiety and disorientation of characters in totally decontextualized environments. The characters are each metaphors of contemporary man, entangled in ever-expanding social circles, wandering through sprawling cities, condemned to extreme lucidity but constantly invaded by the fear of tomorrow.



“The Birthmark” 80x60cm, Oil on linen, 2020



“The Childhood of Jacob and Esau” 162x130cm, Oil on linen, 2020

**Are there any particular past projects, exhibitions, or moments in your artistic career that you’d like to speak to?**

The exhibition I enjoyed the most was a duo show in Budapest in a huge abandoned power plant back in 2015. Nikita Zabelin, a Russian sound artist, had made an amazing sound track that would literally captivate you the moment you entered the building. I had made a series of broken faces based on portraits I found from soldiers from the first

world war. The entire experience was very unique. These paintings hung in this place under a 30 meter high ceiling with this sound surrounding you, the experience was just breathtaking.

**As an extension of the previous question, what can viewers look forward to in your current London show? What are you most looking forward to?**

Kristin Hjellegjerde's space at London Bridge is very unique. The gallery is in a beautiful glasshouse with very high ceilings. The light in the space is very peculiar. Seeing the paintings hanging in such a space under a glass roof is truly unique. You never get this kind of light and of course it changes according to the weather. On sunny days the games of light and shadows are adding so much to the show!

**What has your experience as an artist during quarantine and the current pandemic been like? How have the current times changed your work and/or artistic approach?**

I paint people — I am inspired by the faces I see. I would say the hardest part now is the fact that most people are wearing masks. It's like I lost my main source of inspiration! I truly miss seeing the expressions of the people surrounding me. Other than that I work as much as I can to escape as much as possible from all this madness...