



Titus's work featured above is currently on display at the Bermuda National Gallery in the Re-Interpreting the European Collection

ARTIST of the month

TITUS KAPHAR

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Sifting through my inbox early one morning I suddenly stopped at "Artist Attacks Painting at BNG." Immediately I opened the email and scrolled through images of an unknown man cutting into a painting with a knife. Panic set in and I wondered how this hadn't made the news yet. When I realized this was a performance, I was horrified that I missed out on the opportunity to witness this with my own eyes. Suddenly, visiting the Bermuda National Gallery was a priority, and when I arrived I realized that this wasn't the only piece of work I almost missed out on. Visiting our local galleries is a rewarding experience that you just won't understand until you make the time to find yourself there!

Meet Titus, a Contemporary Artist who reconstructs history by painting versions of pieces from the canon of art and then alters them in some way- cutting out figures, wrapping them in shrouds, covering their faces in tar. In so doing he draws out issues of race and class often hidden from the face of the canvas.

WHEN DID YOU FIRST START DECONSTRUCTING YOUR PAINTINGS?

It happened accidentally. I was making a portrait of a man and a woman but I sensed something wasn't right. I decided the painting was a failure and started to cover over the man's face with white paint, thinking I would start over, and erase what I had done. I specifically started with the man's face – that was my way of committing to go through with it. Then something happened. I stepped back to look at the painting and realized I had painted an image of a beautiful couple but it felt like she didn't belong to him, and he didn't belong to her; they didn't belong to each other. I knew she didn't want to be with this man, and the only way to give voice to that desire was to leave his face painted over. I realized that through the erasure of his face I felt I had come to a more accurate depiction of their relationship.



Soon after I finished that painting I found myself in a similar situation. I painted a portrait of a man standing next to his seated wife based on a painting at the British Art Museum at Yale. I had come to the end of my painting session and was cleaning my palette with a razor blade when I sensed the woman saying, "This is not how I want to be remembered. This man was not faithful to me." Without thinking about it I picked up the razor and cut the woman out of the painting, and placed her on a side table. I went home and said to my wife, "I don't know what I have done." The following morning I went back and looked at the painting, and understood – that the intervention was a way of visually articulating the condition of their relationship. I stitched her to the opposite side of the canvas so that they were looking in different directions.

The figures who are the most voiceless in history, who would never have been heard, are the ones I listen for when I paint. Those are the stories I am interested in telling. I ask the paintings questions and wait for them to answer. Sometimes they do, and sometimes they don't.

"Artist of the Month: Titus Kapfar," *This Week in Bermuda*, November 2011

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WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO USE TAR AS A MEDIUM?



It's easy to become enamored with the material itself but the piece is more about a method of torture than tar itself. I was thinking about martyrs, and the way people's lives are taken for their beliefs. I decided I didn't want to make a painting about torture; I wanted to torture the painting. Most of what we do as painters is illusion – the still life isn't real. We create the illusion of space, depth, weight and form. I wanted to step out of the realm of illusion and do something physical to what I had created so carefully.

I HAVE CHOSEN TWO PAINTINGS OF YOURS THAT I FIND PARTICULARLY MOVING. CAN YOU PLEASE TELL ME A LITTLE ABOUT EACH ONE?

In Conversation Between Paintings #1. Descending From a Cross to be Nourished at the Breast of our Mother (2006-7).

I've spent a lot of time at the MET and other museums and eventually started thinking about paintings that sat beside each other for generations and wondered what would happen if the paintings interacted. I wandered around and stared at the paintings until I began to hear dialog. With these particular paintings I sensed that if he could speak, after so many years of standing beside her, he would probably throw himself at her, and be dying to know her – something that wouldn't have happened in their historical time period.



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