

When I entered the bustling studio the model was being preened by a cluster of makeup artists, hairdressers and stylists. The flaxen haired ingénue from North Carolina was to be the muse for an artist and a photographer, her body, a projected template for both art and commerce.

The artist Barbara Nessim, a global pioneer in computer art, has been at the forefront of men and women working with digital media for 30 years. She has used the computer as a tool to construct art on its own as well as integrating it with her work of traditional media. While her fine art has been exhibited in international museums, including the Louvre, her illustrations have graced the covers of *Time* and *Rolling Stone*, positioning her comfortably at the nexus of art and commerce.

Ms. Nessim's recent figurative drawings, stripped of all attributes retain the bare essence of human form. They are, if anything, candid expressions of inner worlds, untouched by the mythologies of fashions and trends and, like the etchings on the walls of the caves of Lascaux, elegantly timeless.

Ms. Nessim has prepared two 48" x 96" boards with archival paper, and on these she has sketched an array of rectangles using thick lines of black ink or charcoal that she describes as 'rooms' for her figures to inhabit. On some of these blocks she has woven patterns that will hold her figures in place. This is the only preparation of the surface the artist allows herself before her spontaneous live rendering of the model.

The photographer Karl Rudisill, a professional in the world of fashion, inspired by Nessim's work suggested a melding of art and fashion, and when Nessim agreed, a collaborative project began to take shape.

For the shoot Mr. Rudisill's crew has constructed an arena of props and screens that will direct the mood of the photograph. His eyes flit between model and objects, stationary and moving, in search of balance, carving out their positional relationship to fit the narrative of the spread he envisions. The room is a cube of light. The light filtering in over the Hudson, its brilliant aura muted by rainclouds, makes the room appear buoyant. The light is the canvas on which the photographer will capture his vision.

Finally there is the model. She makes her appearance on this prepared stage in an extravagantly layered dress of glittering gold lamé. She glows, effulgent in her ethereal make up, and the light in the room seems to culminate in her sun-like body.

Mr. Rudisill engages the model, and their collaboration is mutual. She poses with slow sensuous artfulness, her movement in synch with the click of the shutter. He woos and cossets her, coaxing the poses that conspire in their theatre of seduction.

While the relationship between the photographer and muse is dynamic, Ms. Nessim glances at the model only briefly, capturing in her mind's eye the essence of the moment. Whatever has been articulated is internalized. Without concern for people milling about her, her focus turns to an inward space. She intuits how to fill the "rooms" and draws the first lines of the girl's chin across the upper rectangles, and in that instance the drawing is decided. The lines she traces slowly extend her creation, her hands drawn as if like a somnambulist's to an inner stream. Thick charcoal lines mark out the model's elongated face, her strongest feature. With brief pygmalion strokes she captures the eyes, and the gaze materializes. She directs the slant of the gaze by deepening the kohl.

Ms. Nessim has recently begun publishing a series of sketchbooks she has kept over the years. She maintains a rule to never edit them. She says, "Whether I like it or not. It is all part of the process. Truth. It is not always welcome...It must continue, page after page. It must have a beginning and an end. Just as I live my life. Moment by moment, the beginning to the end." Here too, her lines are final, her hand steady, though she broadens and diffuses her bold strokes with soft strips of chamois by rubbing and lightening such that her creation remains fluid till the last.

As Ms. Nessim moves across the canvas, her entire body negotiates and participates in the drawing. She smudges the lines of the charcoal blocks to create emphasis and shadow. Grey, blue, green tones appear as she rubs the chamois on the paper, creating subtle depths through the abrasion.

Ms. Nessim's lines transcend the moment to intersect with a specific corpus of art history. The tradition between painter and muse is a long and rich one. For the painter, the muse is only a springboard, and a live model can eventually become unnecessary. Even Picasso, with his excellent draftsmanship, in the end discarded live models to rely solely on the abstractive powers of his imagination.

But for Mr. Rudisill the model is not only the subject, she is an active participant. He directs her through her oeuvre of poses, micro-adjusting her gangly limbs in mimicry of high glamour. His brow glistens with sweat as he briefly pauses, visibly excited by the last sequence of shots. The model lies contorted, her limbs twisted in deft artistry. He continuously reframes his close ups to ensnare the fugitive source of her femininity glimpsed at under layers of maquillage. Later, he concedes to me that the model is new and unpracticed, therefore malleable and fresh.

Photographs convey three-dimensional space differently to paintings. While Ms. Nessim flattens perspective with the broad thick strokes on her white canvas, in the filmic reality of Mr. Rudisill's photographs, the views through the windows are blotted by brilliant white light, allowing the model to float inside a luminous cocoon.

It is possible for Ms. Nessim to be influenced by the photograph's composed reality. A photograph exposes details in an instant the casual eye does not notice. It is also common for painters to choose to work only from photographs of their subjects, and for others to digitally alter that reality one step further before setting it to paint. The artist Elizabeth Peyton has said "I used to think there was no difference between using photographs and drawing from life...But photographs give you distance. They let you be alone to work. Still, I like having a memory of how a person moved, rather than a static image."

Reality is a moving target. Mr. Rudisill's Nikon D300 captures it at 8 frames per second. Mr. Rudisill believes the advances in digital technology have brought new flexibility to his images and expanded his vision. Since the model's poses are fleeting and cannot be sustained for longer drawings, Ms. Nessim works in quick gestural strokes. To Ms. Nessim's eye, the model's motions become visual semaphores that translate themselves in the slight inward pout of the painted lips and the frigid elegance of a mannikin's limbs. And though the end results for both photographer and painter are static two-dimensional representations, they offer different narratives of a single event.

As an additional layer of documentation, the photo shoot is videotaped with the intention that the pared down footage, along with photographic content, will be posted on Nessim's website.

Finally, Barbara Nessim stands and pulls the canvas upright to study the portrait. The verticality changes her perspective. She adds a little red to her palette, and then with confident strokes, draws stripes across the model's dress. She steps back and observes; for her, the painting is finished.

For Mr. Rudisill it is just beginning. His finished photo will be culled from hundreds. Then there will be post-production processing, cropping and editing. The flaws will be removed to fit the perfection aspired to by the industry.

By day's end Barbara Nessim completes two drawings. The first is an austere geometric rendition of the model's face stylized to fit within black and white quadrants. A band of vertical grey forms a sash of hair. The figure disappears from the neck down into a series of contrasting rectangles. With one hand extended in a classical gesture, she holds a drawing tablet like Athena, the goddess of art, poetry and aptly, commerce. Though a spontaneous creation, the drawing remains balanced, and the completed figure sits perfectly poised within the checkered palette.

After having undergone many changes of dress, persona and accoutrements, the model, in Ms. Nessim's second drawing, reveals a new aspect. The sketched figure is fragmented by shaded squares in grisaille. The strong jaw and neckline attenuates into a foreshortened torso carved in stripes, the face peers through a grillwork of windows. Bars and woven patterns are thematic in Ms. Nessim's drawings in which she frequently depicts the body as incarcerated. If in the first drawing the woman appears confined behind a gated barrier, trapped and reminiscent of a time when the sheltering and concealment of women underscored her veiled access to the arts, restricting her from venues traditionally in the male domain – in the second drawing, the woman's face is defiant, open and seductive, the clothing is left sheer without

appearing vulnerable. Her gaze is narcissistic as though through a mirror's reflection, exerting control through eye contact – but in this case the viewer is the one held captive. Paired together, the two drawings form contrasting portraits of subversion and power, exposing the paradoxical allure of femininity.

At day's end, the lights dim, the model removes her mask, we pack our bags and return to the quotidian. In two separate portraits, through a photograph and a drawing, we have captured fragments of motion for eternity, or glimpsed the soul for a mere moment. Whether a photograph or a painting, capturing the real world is an act of manipulation. The genius lies in the skill of rendering, framing, and delineating perspective, for these are the provenances of a great artist.