

Gabriella Loeb: “Trigger-Happy”
Skomakeriet, Stockholm

“Damaged people are dangerous. They know they can survive.”
—*Damage*, Josephine Hart (1991)

There is this idea that karma will be on your side if you are good—that if you abide by The Golden Rule (*do unto others as you would have them do unto you*), then you will not be harmed and will live a prosperous life. But as time and experience shows, a controlled life is often interrupted by chaos or some conflicting agenda. As response to this minefield—where friends turn to foes, where lovers walk away with best friends—many become skilled at altering, assimilating, adapting. All of which are coping mechanisms: tools for survival. American-Swedish artist Gabriella Loeb hunts for a medium which resonates and affirms empowerment. She wavers between diverse materials in search of a compatible expression for a determined emotion or stealthy inclination all her own; yet, like all artists, she does not escape influence or history. In savoring the instinctual and visceral, manipulating objects and embracing unruly methods, she refuses to accommodate.

Reminiscent of the hyper-embellished 18th century Rococo style coined during the end of the Baroque period, to an extent, Loeb appropriates certain stylistic principles into her singular practice, such as: theatricality, illusion and saturation. The artist alludes to the inherently deceptive nature of presentation, where the boundary between the real and fake remains suspect. What is real if no proof exists? What is fake if the object in question possesses the same qualities as its authentic counterpart? What will become the extreme disappointment? Reality—or the dream? So as to not be paralyzed by the overwrought histrionics bleeding from an unstable world, let us dismantle the male gaze, opting instead to exalt the wiles of queens, sirens and nymphs.

Incorporating components of ornamentation and fluidity, Loeb's sensual satin works are intensified via vivid shades of pink, magenta and ultra violet—delicately displayed behind glass. The age-old proverb (*look but don't touch*) arises, as does the reality that sex workers are presently staged behind glass in red light districts and erotic clubs across the globe. This same globe harbors frictional waves of feminism and identity politics which aim to prove or disprove lexicons such as *gender* or *consent*. This same globe archives a Republican candidate's unnerving off-the-cuff response (“I think that if rape is inevitable, relax and enjoy it”) alongside the protest of a surviving student-activist of a recent Florida high school mass shooting who now distrusts authority (“We call BS”). When mediation falls short and trust is broken, the betrayal of information and blatant hypocrisy allows for implementation of more acute imperatives.

Loeb's central sculpture is paradoxical to its surrounding textile designs. Synthetic polymer rods are asymmetrically positioned with the support of an aluminum grid—compartmentalizing askew shafts into individualized trajectories. A cruel ensemble, the cluster discombobulates the viewer, reminding how easy it is to slide along the pleasure/pain continuum. Phallic and splintered, each rod is dually sexualized and weaponized—simultaneously constrained by its primitive architecture. Utilizing polyester, Loeb accentuates the faux delights of simulacra. Here exists Loeb's fleeting neo-noir city-as-exhibition—evoking the excessive “bling” aesthetics of Las Vegas and raw brutality of Vilnius.

Ironically, neither the Renaissance nor Baroque movement was known to support women artists or designers; after all, the term *virtuoso* translates to “mortal god” and was reserved for esteemed male artists. Yet, there are exceptions of women who were unfazed by the harsh criticism and discrimination meant to dilute their talents (e.g., Elisabetta Sirani, Artemisia Gentileschi); they created despite vicious opposition. Loeb absorbs, tweaks and re-contextualizes Rococo traits, perhaps, in an attempt to refine a previous definition or usurp masculine authorship recognized by the movement itself; her work serves as remarkable muse for those looking to the future. For which motif best compliments revenge? Success, to move on perceivably unscathed, to take or become what others wish to possess or be, liberation, to enforce invisibility onto adversaries, no regrets, nihilism, self-love? This cup is close to overflowing—how much is too much?

—Jacquelyn Davis