

RED DOT INTERVIEW – BARBARA FELIX, *THE COLOR OF WOMEN: TARA AND BECKY*

INTERVIEWED BY ÁNGELA GARCÍA ON JULY 29, 2020



Barbara Felix
The Color of Women: Tara and Becky, 2018,
Watercolor Monotype, collage, acrylic, thread, gold-leaf, lace on wood panel,
24 x 36",
Courtesy of the artist.

AG: Can you tell me a little bit about the artwork that you submitted for Red Dot this year?

BF: Yes, I started this series called *The Color of Women* and what I'm doing is I'm pairing women that have close friendships together. I like drawing and drawing people's [entire] bodies. I really like thinking about body language and how people express themselves and how you can get a sense of people's personalities right away, especially women and the way we hold ourselves. I wanted to have women talk to each other and what I did was videotape them and pick stills to draw from. For the first time, I started with collage on this series. I've done a lot of monotype printmaking in the past. I've done self-portrait dance images using monotype techniques, so I decided to use that for the portrait part of this series. Then I collaged their clothes with really beautiful scraps of art paper I got from art supply stores. I used hand stitching which allowed me to revisit my roots because I used to do a lot of sewing when I was in high school and college. I hand stitched the clothes to make them feel like their real clothes and I usually do some sort of texture-surface to the background using laces.

I really want the pieces to be about the women and their relationship with each other, so I asked each woman to send me a 1-2 minute voicemail telling me about their relationship to the other woman they were paired with. I asked them not to talk to each other about what they were going to say, and told them they could either pretend they're talking to that woman or they were talking to me. I put those messages together in an audio file and uploaded them to SoundCloud so people can use their digital device to listen to them talk to each other while they look at the conversation portrait. I have more

pairs of women that I want to [paint]. I'm just waiting for a moment when COVID isn't so dangerous to get photographs [for future portrait pairs]. Right now, I'm working on another body of work, but I still have these portraits, am pairing women in my head, and am wanting to continue that work [in the future].

AG: You use different mediums and also have an auditory component to pair with the visual part of your work. What do you think is the benefit of having an all-encompassing experience when viewing your work?

BF: I'm actually more of an audio person than a visual person. I listen to a lot of audiobooks. Whether I'm watching film or music whatever, I'm very impacted by sound. I work as a graphic designer, and recently I've been able to do some video projects, and I've been wanting to figure out ways to add something digital to the work that I do. For these particular portraits the audio was a simple thing that I could do. I could use streaming technology and make that audio accessible. I'm hoping that the audio will help people really get a sense of the of the connection between the two women in the portrait.

When I was first going to make the portraits, I didn't know what they were going to be like. The idea for the audio came after I started the portrait. The first two pairs of women left me voicemails and I just downloaded and edited them. I [now] tell [my subjects] to use the the recording app on their phone and I get a better quality sound file. One of the portraits that I have is of my two younger sisters that are super close. Their relationship is like close friends—more than sisters. Their audio piece [was] a little

bit longer than the two minutes I was hoping to get, but it was really hard for me to take out stuff. Even though each woman said similar things about each other, I thought that was an interesting thing that I'm finding. For the first few [portraits] that I've done, the women say the same thing about each other. I would really like to get more of these done and see if that's always the case or [if] sometimes they're complete opposites and that's why they're good friends. I would really like to see what happens when I collect more of these audio stories. I did have one of my sisters tell me "I hope that your family is going to buy this because it feels so personal. I feel like I'm invading or am not supposed to hear this because they're talking so intimately about each other." I [think] that maybe it's a good thing and that maybe that reaction is good.

AG: Your work has to do a lot with intimacy between friends. How do you feel about your work tackling close relationships and being celebrated through Red Dot during a time of isolation?

BF: I think it's probably work that's going to make people miss those interactions a lot more than [usual]. I certainly am missing friends and family of mine that I haven't seen other than on a Zoom call. Yeah, I'll have to do a Zoom call interpretation of this work. I think it's good timing for this work since people seem to be growing apart. You got the wall of the virus that makes people want to stay connected or do what they can to preserve their connections and I think it's important to know the value of that.

AG: Do you feel that your art commits itself to a specific style or method?

BF: I consider myself a figurative artist. Everything I do is around the figure, the body, people, and women in particular. I tend to do a lot of work about women. It's funny actually, male family members of mine who have seen my work and know this "Color of Women" title, ask me when I'm going to do "Shades of Men." They want to know when I'm going to work with men. I said "Well if I had more hours in the day I would definitely consider it, but right now this is the time I have." I'm actually starting some new work and I do a lot of drawing and watercolor. I started off with oils; I loved oil painting, but it just took me too long. I had to think of a medium that would allow me to produce more results, so I use watercolor and a lot of Yupo paper.

It feels like every time I start something new it's an experiment. I don't always know what my end product is going to be or what I'm going to try to incorporate, whether it's collage material or another kind of medium on the Yupo [paper] because I'm starting to experiment with some alcohol inks, acrylic, watercolor, and mixing material. I'm doing these very large-scale drawings of women dancing with multiple poses on the same sheet of paper. As of right now, there are four of them in progress. [The sizes of my drawings range between] 5' x 8', 5' x 5', and 11' x 5'. It's very exciting for me because I like to think about my work as a celebration of women, the way we move, the way we hold ourselves, our style, our poise, and our body language. The thing about the Yupo [paper] is that it's definitely a challenging surface to work on. I only have so much control. Sometimes [the yupo paper] wants to do what it wants to do, and often there's

this pull and pull fight that I have going on with it. Figuring out where I have to give in, let go, or where I can bend it to my will has been a big challenge for me. I feel like I haven't seen a lot of people working with that material, so instead of stopping after a failure I'm taking them as learning experiences and then trying something different the next time.

AG: Are there any specific experiences that influence these techniques/methods that you use now?

BF: I really like gesture drawing because it feels very immediate and in the moment. It's fleeting, like a lot of aspects of life. I even feel that right now friendships are fleeting. I just feel like every moment is precious, so I like the feeling that I get from working with the Yupo and gesture. A lot of things in my own life have been like that as well. I was in a car accident many years ago and I almost died. I've had to deal with a lot of challenges in my life and I think that's probably why I like challenges. I like overcoming obstacles. That's why I like working with Yupo because it's a challenge that I have to overcome. I'm constantly looking at art, especially figure art by figurative artists. I've had to accept that it's hard to create something original, but in a way your own mark is original. Your mark, my mark, they aren't going to be like anybody else's mark. I had to find that place where what I'm creating has something unique to say, even if it's influenced by something else I'd seen. I'm just trying to find my own unique way of mark-making, and it's been an interesting journey for sure.

AG: Do you think that your work responds more to questions about the future or the past?

BF: I think my work is more about questions about the moment than the future or the past. It's definitely [related to] the immediacy of the gesture line. It's definitely not a future or past-related kind of work, it's right here and now in the moment.

AG: What's the experience of having your work purchased for a private collection like?

BF: It's pretty exhilarating actually. I still remember the first few pieces that were purchased by collectors or when a collector has commissioned me to do a piece. It's extremely rewarding, especially because collectors have an eye for what they see as excellent or something that they haven't seen before. I respect their eye so much, and I love the idea of being part of somebody's collection. A lot of times it winds up that you feel like you've [risen] to [another] level with your peers that you admire.

AG: Do you maintain relationships with your collectors?

BF: I have with one of my collectors in Seattle. I got the opportunity to ship my piece to her and I attached my resume, bio, and card at the back of the piece. When they received it, they sent me a photo of my piece hanging in their home. It was really exciting, so I have sent information about when I've had shows so they can at least see when I have new work. I've introduced collectors of mine to my colleagues whose work I admire. I like those networking connections and being part of that. There's a couple of

other collectors in Austin that don't come down here that much but reach out to me and let me know what they've thought about my work; so that's been great.

AG: Where is the best place to follow you for updates?

BF: I do have a website: barbarafelix.com and I'm in the process of updating it. I'm going to add a new section that's going to be "Work in Progress." I don't know when and where I'm going to get to show these large portraits because of COVID, but it is new and exciting work that I'm doing. I want for people to have a place where they can see the pieces in progress. I've also got a little bit of work on the Gentileschi Aegis Gallery Association website: gagaart.org, but I'd probably steer people more toward my website. That will have the most up to date work.

AG: Is there anything else you'd like to ask or share?

BF: I'm very excited to be part of Red Dot for the first time. I can't thank them enough for this opportunity. I hope my piece sells or that I get a commission, but again I just want to say thank you.

ABOUT BARBARA FELIX

Barbara Felix is an Afro-Latinx contemporary figurative artist. Most known for her self-portrait dance series, *Bailando con Mi Misma*, where Felix explores relationships, gender, cross cultural identity, body language and sensuality. Her newest work, *The Color of Women*, expands to celebrate diverse female connections in mixed media collage portraiture. She received a BFA in Graphic Communication at Texas State University where her TXST coursework fired her love of the human figure and inspired her long pursuit to work as an artist. Felix has participated in numerous exhibitions in San Antonio

and throughout Texas. Her recent video work has been screened in festivals and exhibitions across the country. Felix's monotype self-portrait work is in private collections. Her art practice is evolving to combine traditional media, mixed media and multi-media genres with her love for the figure. More at www.barbarafelix.com

ABOUT ÁNGELA GARCÍA

Ángela García is Blue Star Contemporary's Arts, Letters, and Enterprise summer intern from McAllen, TX. She is pursuing a BA in Art History at Trinity University, and plans to study architecture after receiving her undergraduate degree. García has also worked as a studio intern for Artpace San Antonio, a radio host for KRTU 91.7FM, and has done volunteer work at the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, TX. She works in digital and film photography and analog collage.