

PRESS RELEASE

Selma Selman
DON'T LOOK INTO MY EYES
02.09. – 24.10.2021

Opening: 01.09., 6 pm

Performance Letters to Omer: 01. und 02.09., 19 Uhr (in front of the Kunstverein)

Press talk: Wednesday, 01.09., 12 pm

We cordially invite you to the press conference with the artist and the curators on the occasion of the exhibition.

The Kasseler Kunstverein is pleased to present DON'T LOOK INTO MY EYES, the first comprehensive solo exhibition by Selma Selman in Germany curated by Boshko Boskovic and Olga Holzschuh. The Bosnian and Herzegovinian artist and activist Selma Selman (*1991) integrates narratives of the Roma community, including her own family in her artistic practice. Her works alternate between sensitive, harsh and ironic gestures revealing discriminatory identity attributions, role expectations and stereotypes. Thereby Selman's body and identity becomes a medium for capturing universal and personal themes that articulate political resistance and feminist empowerment. Her work is socially engaged bringing to the forefront the value of the labor that is traditionally performed by Roma people, making these stories visible thus reorienting the usual narratives and making them more socially acceptable.

The exhibition title DON'T LOOK INTO MY EYES, references an early video work, Don't Look into Gypsy eyes, featured in the exhibition. Talking into the camera in her native language (Bosnian), Selman threatens the viewer that if they look into her eyes many things could happen to them including seduction, spells or danger.

Commentary on the fear and fascination with the other as well as crossing boundaries has been a constant theme in Selman's artistic practice. The video work, You Have No Idea (Election Day) is a version of Selman's most well known performance piece where she confronts the audience by continually repeating the words "You Have No Idea." She has performed this work in New York City, Syracuse, New York and Maribor, Slovenia amongst others. This video is set in Washington, DC on the election day of 2020. The artist walks across Black Lives Matter Boulevard shouting those same words -- followed by a swarm of photo reporters from around the world, an intrigued crowd as well as angry bystanders filming her with their cellphones expressing rage or fascination against Selman's body.

In her artistic performances Selman is continually attempting to create space for her own expression and being. In the video work No Space produced to be consumed on the phone where Selman sits on top of a virtual earth globe while explicitly stating how she is fighting for her own space and how no one is welcome there. Commenting on personal security, personal liberty and perhaps private property, this work can be a commentary of one's own fight for their place in this world.

Anger, power and vulnerability are often intertwined in Selma Selman's artistic practice. The theme of destruction is often embraced within her performances -- using vehicles or household appliances such as washing machines or vacuum cleaners.

Mercedes Matrix, exhibited for the first time in KKV is a video documentation of a performance, where Selman and her family destroy a Mercedes Benz on Kampnagel Piazza in Hamburg. Through the act of demolishing the valued vehicle Selman co-opts her family's manual labor transforming it into performance art. For decades her father has depended on converting metal waste into a resource to support the wellbeing of his family while Selman today utilizes the very same labor to ensure her own survival as an artist. Repeatedly evoking the motif of scrap metal collecting and recycling, Selman invites us to question the ways in which we assign value to material objects, labor, and our relationship to those.

In her new multi-part installation the artist carves out separate pieces from one vehicle creating works that reside between the painterly and the sculptural. Having had a very personal rapport with metal since childhood, Selman's scrap metal paintings fuse impressions of everyday life, art history as well as use of colloquial language and her own personal experiences. Humor, wordplay and her dynamic hand gestures with acrylic and paintbrushes result in small intimate objects on metal. The paintings, spread out all over the exhibition space, very much like fragments of a body could represent parasites invading the clean "white cube" space.

Selman's series of drawings in colored pencil on paper reveal a female character which morphs from one entity into another questioning notions of gender expression and internal personal identities. Escaping fixed definitions the artist's protagonists are presented with distorted faces, unimaginable bodies and animal-like features.

Throughout the last decade, Selman's family has served both as an inspiration as well as collaborators in her work which is very clearly manifested in the works *Salt Water* and *Don't Be Like Me*. The *Salt Water* video brings forth a witty moment when Selman takes her mom to the seaside for the first time. At first glance a humorous work, this piece has deeper layers of meaning commenting on personal freedom, migration and human rights since Selman's mother was undocumented for the majority of her life due to ethnic and political policies in ex-Yugoslavia making it difficult to obtain a passport to travel. The photography diptych *Don't Be Like Me* captures Selman as a grown up daughter sitting in her mother's lap. Both look directly into the camera in front of a palm tree inspired wallpaper reminiscent of paradise. Clad in white shirts in a domestic setting, this portrait references depictions of mothers and children in Renaissance religious paintings.

Selman also shares her most intimate moments with us, revealing her vulnerabilities and showing us how they can become empowerment tools. In her performance and sound installation *Letters to Omer* at the Kasseler Kunstverein, she writes a letter to Omer, a fictitious being that represents the whole world that Selman addresses. This being encapsulates everything that is the best and the worst that exists within our society. She tells it her secrets and her desires while imagining what life could look like in a utopian world. Stemming directly from the poetry that Selman consistently writes, this work reorients conversations around contemporary performance as well as femininity, eroticism and patriarchy.

This exhibition explores multiple concepts that coexist in the opus through the media of performance, drawing, painting, video and photography of Selma Selman including alchemy, reimagining identities, oppression, intimacy and desire. In her oeuvre, Selman transforms some of the negative experiences of her life into positive ones: family dynamics of survival become channeled into art, unwanted metal gets dissolved into paintings and sculptures; dreams, visions and strange feelings get sublimated into performances. The exhibition *DON'T LOOK INTO MY EYES* invites visitors to see, hear and feel what Selma Selman has to say to us. It is upon the public to dare look into the topics that Selman addresses through their own eyes or to decide to turn a blind eye and look the other way.

Boshko Boskovic

Selma Selman was born in 1991 in the Roma community village of Ružica in Bosnia and Herzegovina. After studying painting at the Fine Arts Academy in Banja Luka, she completed her MFA in Transmedia Visual and Performing Arts at Syracuse University, New York. She has exhibited extensively across Europe and the US and her work is included in numerous international collections. She took part in the FutuRoma Pavilion at the 2019 Venice Biennale. In 2021, she was awarded the Rijksakademie residency in Amsterdam. Selman is the initiator of the educational activist program Get the Heck to School where she funds grants for girls to attend elementary school in her hometown of Bihac, Bosnia & Hercegovina

Opening hours

Tuesday - Sunday & public holidays 11am - 6pm
Thursday 11 a.m. - 8 pm

Week 35 - Kassel Museums Week, 02 - 05.09.2021
Thursday 11 a.m. - 8 pm
Friday and Saturday 11 am - 10 pm
Sunday 11 am - 6 pm

Admission
5€ / 3€ reduced

For the current COVID-19 regulations at the time of your visit, please visit our [Homepage](#).

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