



Gazing and Gazing Back:

An essay on Scout Zabinski's *Hard and Fast* at Adhesivo

By Alexandra Victoria Alvarez

If you punch into google (or perhaps my algorithm's version) and ask for the city best known for Contemporary Art, the web will regurgitate the insect of information that New York City is arguably the Contemporary Art capital. This title is bestowed upon the 13 mile wide island due to the fact that NYC is home to more institutions than any other city in the world. Yet, the exodus of international-arts-oriented-millennials to Mexico City, tells us another history. Anyone who has recently visited CDMX, can attest to the captivating art scene that bleeds through the city built on top of *Lago de Texcoco*. A tour through Roma alone you can encounter on both the street and the white walls artistic practices from the ancient and ancestral to cutting edge technology. With *sabroso* smells that fill the air, galleries high brow and punk in almost every neighborhood, fire breathers next to your car, dancers in the park, flowers brighter than the sun, purple rain in the jacaranda season, intricate weavings, baskets and murals amply available, you don't have to

spend a lot to experience art in Mexico- particularly on Sundays when most of the museums are free.

According to Scout Zabinski, history cannot be singular because there are infinite stories. New York born and based, Scout is currently learning about Mexico City's narrative whilst residing at Edith Vaisberg's Adhesivo Magazine Residency. Scout is an academic who recounts social theory via painting, playing both the role of the narrator and the subject. Scout's paintings in her solo exhibition *Hard and Fast* star her fairytale green eyes that take note from early Feminists like Shirin Neshat and Cindy Sherman who gazed back. If her face isn't present we are presented with Zabinski's incriminating tattooed hands that say I'm here like Diego Velasquez's cameo in *Las Meninas*.

In Hard As You Can Zabinski's stiletto-shaped claws hold up a piñata against a pavement backdrop. The black hole to fill the candy has shadow's that evoke a primordial connection to the divine feminine. The depth of the darkness arouses Ana Mendieta's punctured holes in her sand silhouette series. The erotic nature of the gaping is quite literally overshadowed by the lack of candy. The abyss surrounded by the colorful tissue paper is a gentle reminder that the two dimensionality of painting can be a screen to keep secrets for artists. Scout told us what she wanted, *As Hard Are You Can*, but the viewer is left thinking about what's going to burst out.

The 24 year-old artist who proclaims to not be a fan of flowers, painted a baby pink rose her first week in the residency. Why? Because that's the sacred charm of Mexico City, it blooms something out of people like a portal. Scout's aversion to flowers is less based in visual dissatisfaction as much as it is rooted in the fact that she has never been in a serious relationship. Translation: the artist has never been given a flower. That was until a beautiful sunny day a man on the streets of CDMX named Octavio handed Scout her first gifted flower. The title of the painting *Una Rosa Para Una Rosa* is an echo of what Octavio said to her in this exchange that sparked an artistic evolution. Zabinski is growing an interest in depicting natural things. The rose is met with a knife which prompts us that roses have thorns even if they have been conveniently removed. The scars on the wood table read like nails on a chalkboard because, frankly, intimacy is a struggle.

Scout's relationship status is quite common despite what *Euphoria* may indicate. In October of 2021, Newsweek published an article on a study that yield the results that Gen-Z's are more likely to report having no sexual partners in comparison to Millennials and Gen-Y. In addition to Sex, Gen-Z are also less into Alcohol and Driving and more likely to identify as Queer. Scout's intersectional identity as a single-12 step attendee--New Yorker is in vibration with the zeitgeist which drives her work to be accessible and digestible. She titles her works after excerpts of poems she writes in her iPhone, she hires photographers to capture her poses prior to painting, she studies the masters with a flair for drama such as Bernini and Khalo, she utilizes the tools she has access to. The contemporary academic process that guides her art-making partnered with her precise craftsmanship makes the thesis of Zabinski's work stand out in a room full of self

portraits. Her paintings are deeper than just a pretty face because they tell the story of a good catholic girl breaking the rules, they show a struggle with the reclamation of the body, they hold a mirror for our own subversions.

In *Warm Milk*, Scout lays next to two baby calves on a bed of grass evoking a teenager plopped on early 2000's furry furniture. The artist combs out her hair like the blades of the Kelly-green grass sprout out of the head of the ground. One of the cows is nestled in between her thighs as if the hitachi clad Scout birthed the beast itself. This darling moo-machine is a way for Zabinski to practice nurturing, skills she didn't inherit from her mother who struggled to raise five children by herself. Scout's childhood trauma is a knot in her psyche that her art practice helps either unravel or tighten the grip. Because the artist chooses nudity as a vehicle for articulation, Scout is simultaneously empowered and in charge while also vulnerable to be a space for others to inhabit. The cow was humanity's first friend, our first tool in moving from a nomadic existence to a settled one. The acrylic on canvas nude self-portrait is an ode to the duty of motherhood- the restrictions of being loyal to the children that call you their first friend.

Playtime featuring the game *La Loteria* shows that Scout has taken a bite out of Mexico City and is trying to organize its imagery. Her trademark *SPIT* tattoo pointing to the devil has been joined by sparkling initials in a sub-familial Gothic font holding a papaya. Both depictions of the devil and the pink meat of the papaya are an acquired taste; coupled together there is an implicit arousal. The progression of *Playtime* to *Bleak Midnight* during the Adhesivo Residency highlights the importance of cultural exchange programs and the value of Vaisberg's hosting to emerging international artists. While *Playtime* is taking notes, *Bleak Midnight* shows Zabinski is paying attention. The game *La Loteria*, is a Mexican style bingo and its cards are ubiquitous, however the characters that join Scout for a drink in *Bleak Midnight* require time in Mexico to get to know.

In her most confrontational position yet, Scout swims and stares stooped on a stool against a sea of green ceramic tiles. The glazed squares are a recognizable shade and format to a *chilango*. Zabinski works in acrylic because she is therefore creating herself in plastic; one of her rules as a painter is to only create scenes that have been real or something that has happened. The composition with the figure grasping a martini at the bar is gloriously executed, yet the most noteworthy star is the art deco calla lily lamp. Dangling down from the sky like an epiphany the lamp is a staple to a particular set of personal interiors in Mexico City. *Mi tía* has a baby pink stained glass lamp in the same lexicon next to the chrome framed portrait of my great grandmother and her sisters. The lamp, accurately a source of light, is a signifier for Scout's first study program in the city in the mountains built amongst gardens.

With only a tree as her witness in *Fast As You Can* Scout makes a throne for a nude body on top of a taxi, which of course in Mexico is a bright pink; a shade somewhere in between Barragan and Hot. Instead of her hand hailing a ride it dangles against the pink pool of car paint. As a city girl with divorced parents riding in cabs in the big apple is tied to Scout's memories of moving

between homes, sometimes wanting to get away to a better place. Reimagining the cab as a woman who knows she is in control marks Scout's departure as a woman and as an artist. Having created multiple series based on physical and mental processes, Scout leaves Mexico with a drive for spiritual and fantasy. The magical realism of Latin America that is pregnant in the speed and slowness of Mexico City is the stakeholder in Contemporary Art that's not found in the shores of New York.