

Visual Portraits of a Voice: Shayna LaBeouf

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Shayna Saide LaBeouf's mystical, visual poems

By Stephanie du Tan

When art speaks to us directly and moves us profoundly, we find that the personal is universal and the universal is personal. Personal experience leads to the discovery of universal truths, and the transcendent in turn illuminates our present. This dialectic is at work in local artist Shayna Saide LaBeouf's creative process and in the beautiful tableaux she has conjured.

In May, the week preceding Mother's Day, JNA Gallery at Bergamot Art Station Center in Santa Monica will present *Invitation to a Dream*, the first Los Angeles solo exhibition of work by California artist and designer Shayna Saide LaBeouf.

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In this exhibition of approximately 30 mixed media collaged works and a dozen freestanding sculptures, LaBeouf invites us to join her in a unique visual journey. Here is a profound poetic meditation on the nature of love and compassion as embodied in the feminine principle, the *anima*, the soul. Here are visages of the archetype of the universal mother as expressed in the sacred bond between mother and child and the limitless capacity to accept and love all there is.

The work naturally fits into several different artistic traditions and movements: magical surrealism, feminist art, folk art, religious and spiritual art. Familiar images such as the child, the Madonna, the butterfly drawn from Renaissance and Victorian sources immediately appeal to us. However, LaBeouf's focus is the unfamiliar and the transcendent, and her work builds upon the archetypal nature of the images as her art crosses over to the spiritual. The pieces are akin to roadside shrines, portable altars and icons: portals to the realm of the invisible.

"I aspire for my work to be a witness to the sacred and the sublime," LaBeouf shares, "I encounter poetry and enchantment in every day life, offering themselves to endless interpretation. I use the brush of my inner eye to represent them in my work."

While LaBeouf is a self-taught artist, it would be more appropriate to call her a “self-made” artist. She has an eye for unusual and provocative combinations. She appreciates old jewelry and the tradition of craft in couture. Her love of fine craftsmanship underscores an artistic sensitivity that has intuitively gathered inspiration from the simplicity of folk art, the poetry of Renaissance art, the freedom of pop art, and even French couture.

Her images of women, girls, children and angels have been collected from different periods of history, from the Renaissance through the Pre-Raphaelites and the Victorian era with its sweet and intimate imagery, and also Oriental art as embodied in exotic geishas and compassionate Buddhas. These she combines with found materials, with a predilection for the broken and discarded: old brooches, oddly shaped pins, abandoned necklaces of crystal and glass, fragmentary strands of stone and metal. Her hunting, gathering and collaging places her in the surrealist tradition where the discovery of an *objet trouvé* (an interesting and meaningful “found object”) was desirable proof of an active relationship with the poetic unconscious.

—*Invitation to a Dream*, May 5–14, JNA Gallery at Bergamot Art Station Center, 2525 Michigan Ave, Building D4, Santa Monica 90404, 310.315.9502