

ART REPUBLIK GETS CAUGHT UP IN THE  
ENCHANTING WORKS OF ISABELL BEYEL.  
BY TYEN FONG

## The Female Gaze



Featured at both 2014 and 2015 editions of Art Stage Singapore were the stunning mixed-media works by Isabell Beyel. Born in 1968 in Mönchengladbach (Germany), Beyel grew up in the South of Limburg (Netherlands) and interestingly studied law. However, she discovered in 2003 after working a corporate job in human resources that art was her true calling and passion. She decided to then pursue her love for contemporary art and began experimenting with acrylic and oil paints.

As a self-taught artist, she was always curious to explore different materials and media. She started incorporating found objects into her paintings, constructing incredible mixed-media artwork and a unique style of blending different textures and 3D materials. In 2011, she was introduced to the art scene at the TEFAF (The European Fine Art Fair) that skyrocketed her to success, gaining her international recognition.

The central image of Beyel's work is the female figure. Her portraits often depict the women in a contemplative state, caught up in their personal dilemmas. There is ambiguity as to what these subjects are experiencing, provoking thought and contemplation in the audience as well. Her signature portraits of women largely consist of mixed media collages and acrylics on Plexiglas. Among other materials used in her portraits are interesting found objects. Examples include using mice traps for the neck, hair rolls for the lip, assortments of wine corks for the skin, and even keys and fans for the eyes. Her innovative exploitation of portraiture, situations, storylines, and use of material is what captivates the viewer.

Inspiration is key to Beyel's artistic process and success. The artist often intuitively collects photographs, prints, sketches and material that inspire and move her. She later derives a general aesthetic or mood from her collection, and makes a sketch to document her initial impression. Over the following days, she modifies the sketch according to her artistic intuition, and allows herself to do so with little inhibitions and restraints. The possibilities to modify and transform her materials are what Beyel finds the most fascinating aspect of her artistic journey.

The key element of the artistic process is the expressive force of her subjects, and their impact on the audience. Each portrait begins with the meticulous and time-consuming operation of painting the lines that would form the backbone of the portrait on Plexiglas. The careful balancing and combination of materials is crucial in ensuring the cohesion of each portrait. Through an intensive process of trial-and-error, Beyel manages to blend her elements together to form a harmonious symphony of colours and materials that best depict her subject matter. Beyel also has a strong preference for recycled material. She sees the use of old or unwanted objects a means to give them new purpose and meaning.



This page: *Bags and More*,  
isabell Beyel.

Facing page: *Abacadabra*, 2014,  
isabell Beyel.

Experimenting with various repetitions, patterns and texture are also integral to her body of work. "There are recognisable patterns to be found in all forms of change", says Beyel. Her interest in movement and change justifies her interest in experimenting with these various materials, and exploiting the different effects she could yield from them. In many of her Plexiglas portraits, she skillfully layers transparencies of different colours and textures to play with lights and shadows.

Beyel's elusive women play a leading role in her artworks, all outlining different qualities that are essential to her. Although her subject's gaze might not be very telling of the thoughts behind her expressions, the audience is undoubtedly drawn to engage with a deeper contemplation of her portraits. Beyel purpose in creating mystery within her portraits is to allow people to develop different interpretations of her work.

"I'd hate to precisely define in words the meaning of one of my artworks. I wouldn't see the point of producing art anymore," mentions Beyel. "The only effect would be to produce a redundant work, which would signify the death of art. Often people just put a label on a work, so they don't have to think about it again. I like my work to be ambiguous, puzzling. I enjoy the feeling of uncertainty, the mystery around my motivation. Anyone can decide how to observe my work: to look at it from afar or close by, reading the title first or walking around it, perceiving it from all the angles. In short, I'd like my work to have degree of openness in relation to interpretation or self-recognition."

Confidence, energy and strong emotions are all central factors in Beyel's art. Despite her labour-intensive process of experimenting, she is able to come up with art that subconsciously moves, excites and surprises the viewer effortlessly. 

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