



MELANIE PRAPOPOULOS

SOCIETAL PROFUNDITY

BY NICOLE BORGENICHT

Melanie Prapopoulos has works in museums and galleries all over the world. The art she creates is fun, exotic, familiar, abstract and quite unique. Her pieces are entertaining to look at, plus they evoke the curiosity to wonder: what are the mixed media ingredients from dolls and x-rays to paint and pearls, and lastly but not least, what narrative accompanies each work of art? Whether we invent a story or understand her theme in an alteration of a common item into a surreal expression, we are caught up in the artistic journey. Prapopoulos's artistic elements are two fold, beautiful gems and shiny surfaces combined with ironic twists of the subjects that together create a dichotomy of response. We are encouraged by the images to ask: what is frightening, and what is beautiful? Perfectly pleased when people talk about her art Prapopoulos says, "What has become the greatest inspiration lately is society's perpetual obsession with unattainable notions of beauty."

Education had played an important role in the direction of Prapopoulos's art. She received a Bachelor of Arts from NYU and a Masters of Arts from the University of Indianapolis; her focus has been on world literature and art history. Prapopoulos says, "Both of these disciplines deal with the human condition, and that is what ultimately interests me. I explore, through my work, our place in the world, how we got here and why we are here - all in an attempt to better understand the world that surrounds us." It was studying Goya that inspired her to be the kind of artist she is today. "From learning about Goya, started the discussion of the artist's responsibility of bearing witness. That coupled with Romantic literature and notions of 'poet-prophets'

X-Ray 16

xray, film and acrylic paint, 10 x 12 in., 2014

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- only adds to my desire to somehow reflect what I see."

Two distinct series stand out: *X-Ray* and *Young Fabulous*. They grew out of the earlier series *Unearthing Beauty*, which is of skeletal faces wearing red lipstick that are covered with beads and buttons and bright shiny glittery objects. To Prapopoulos, it is about what she sees in Miami where she lives, "Young and old getting plastic

surgery alarms me. Added to that concern the amount of violence that is racially motivated, also concerns me - what I hoped to do was create a platform where we are all equal, where color doesn't matter, nor does the addition we add to our original 'mode' - to do that I had to go to the core - the base, and that, for me, was the bones. I started with skulls, ready-made ceramic skulls, to which I applied small found objects, semi-

precious stones, sea glass, and crystal and glass beads." Both series grew out of that beginning.

From that starting point evolved the *X-Ray* series. After collecting old x-rays from family and friends, Prapopoulos felt she was uncovering and collecting documents of hidden wounds, revealing personal fears and the core. Adding colorful abstract paintbrush marks, she transposes what is inside with a new vitality into art.

In the *Young Fabulous* series, Barbie Dolls are reinvented; heads are replaced with plastic skulls covered in beads and other materials taking the viewer away from the old familiarity of a sweet and beautiful Barbie. Some Barbies in this series look like they are from another planet well designed to seem lifelike and joyful, while others appear frighteningly surreal and locked in doom. Melanie Prapopoulos describes her technique and philosophy: "The *Young Fabulous* series is my attempt of showing the reality of the woman through often humorous and satirical vignettes. They are Barbies, I remove the head (which is part of removing the propaganda swirling around the minds of women and young girls, funnily enough!) As women, we have made many advances, but also many steps backwards - obviously plastic, or better cosmetic surgery is one of them. For all of our advances, too many women are still being held captive under patriarchal notions of beauty. I explore notions of beauty and 'the mirror on the wall,' I also explore the poor choices many working women and mothers make when it comes to the modified food we eat, and turn it around by putting

the doll in the shopping cart - we have been bought and sold by industry that really does not care about anything but the bottom-line. Also each doll has amazing shoes, and though I too have fallen into this obsession - I do see it as ludicrous. As to the heads, they are small plastic skulls (another product I have issue with in that it never breaks down - just as these notions do not evaporate) - I cover the heads with crystal and white glass beads - and the eyes are semi-precious stones. I give them white heads, not as a notion of any race - but more to the fact that when speaking of color - white, for me, is the deadest of all colors - it is sterile, void of color." She continues to create new pieces for *Young Fabulous*.

Staying in this same theme, Melanie Prapopoulos is planning a dollhouse with miniature dolls of multiple ages and of both sexes, in order to reach everyone. Whatever issue may arise in all of us through our societal circumstances, art is one way to take us out of these patterns of thinking and responding, and show us another view, which will encourage us perhaps to laugh a little bit at ourselves. Meanwhile, we relish in the insights through Prapopoulos exotic, artistic creations. Future projects will engage us to peer inside at the world in which we live. "I think my next step will be to do a dollhouse - and get all ages, genders and mirror them back to the viewer. As the series takes on social issues and markers of identity- by addressing the issues not just of women- a doll house will have examples of what issues face children and men - and the setting and dolls of women, men and children will mirror as commonalities between the object and their own socialization."

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(facing page) **X-Ray 11**
xray, film and acrylic paint, 10 x 12 in., 2014

(top) **Young, Fabulous and Zoom, Zoom**
barbie, skull, toy car, crystal and glass beads and semi-precious stones, 11 x 15 in.

(above) **Young, Fabulous and a Prisoner**
barbie, skull, mirrors, crystal and glass beads and semi-precious stones,
11 x 11 x 11 in., 2013