

INTERVIEW: VERA GIRIVI

James Barron: When did you begin painting?

Vera Girivi: I started painting as a girl, then I stopped. Six or so years ago I found a piece of plywood in the house and I decided to paint it. It wasn't acrylic, but watercolor. It was a landscape with people, nuns and priests, children playing, everything. A complete little world.

JB: You often paint women and nudes relaxing in their rooms. Why is this an important subject for you?

VG: I started painting nudes after looking at Modigliani. I wanted mine to be different. Clothes are unimportant to me. You put on clothing and you appear, you hide your defects. What's important for me is what's beneath the clothes: a beautiful woman or a heavyset one, it makes no difference.

JB: You're very interested in models. Have you seen many of Matisse's paintings in person? Do you consider him an influence?

VG: I've seen few exhibitions in my life, but I'm curious and like to find out above all about the life of artists rather than their works, even if sometimes I'm dazzled by them. Matisse is an artist that I look at willingly because some detail always escapes me. I let myself be influenced by beautiful things, but I have no ability to copy. This is my limit.

JB: What other artists have influenced you?

VG: Chagall is my favorite, and I especially love Modigliani, Picasso, Cezanne, Monet. I'm also interested in Jewish culture. I've always read authors like Singer and other Jewish writers. They tell the truth; they're raw, direct. Jews don't hide their defects. I love Chagall. He makes me dream. There is magic in his work.

JB: Flowers appear in your work. Are you a gardener or do you take walks in the countryside?

VG: I have a garden that in the spring I take care of with passion. Flowers bring joy.

JB: You often paint sailboats and villages. Tell us about those paintings.

VG: Those are my villages, Portofino and Genoa, where I live. The sea is elemental for me, like air. I need it.

JB: Tell me about your name. I've lived in Italy for over 15 years, and I've never heard that last name.

VG: It's not my real name. It comes from the names of my family: Giovanna, Riccardo, and Vittorio.

JB: Do you feel more comfortable working under an artistic name, creating nudes in which the subject is vulnerability and timidity?

VG: I do. I find it freeing to have an alternative identity.

JB: What is your life like?

VG: I'm a wife and a mother whose hobby is painting. I paint at home in the kitchen on a large wooden table, and of course I am bothered continuously, and between one fight and the next I am able to work about two hours a day. I started at first to fill my house with paintings until my children shut the doors of their rooms so as not to turn them into storage space, too. Then they encouraged me to start selling my paintings. I created an Instagram account. I had very few followers, and when some notable people liked several of my posts, I woke up one day with 13,000 followers!

JB: What does it mean for you to show your work at the Outsider Art Fair in New York?

VG: I have never had ambitions of success, and would be happy to let my work do the talking for me as I don't have much to say. I like silence and concreteness. I am happy with others' success and read about and follow all their work with curiosity and pleasure. I'm very happy and excited about sharing my work at the Outsider Art Fair.

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