

1. Please remind me of your personal background. You immigrated to Canada as a child, right? Do I remember correctly that you are from Israel originally? And please remind me how old you are.

My family moved to Vancouver in 1976. Since then I travel to Israel about every 2 years to visit family and friends. Recently I was there to attend my grandmother's funeral. She was 100!

I was born 1969 so almost 45!

2. Your two most recent projects before this one focused on women. What made you decide to focus on the subject of religion this time?

Much of my work has been inspired by my two daughters Jordan,9 and Zoe,5 . I have seen first hand the effects of pop culture on young female minds and my work reflects these observations.

Within my art practice I utilize recognizable/ iconic figures first Disney Princesses and then Barbie and Ken, and now images of Gods to bring attention and discussion about the human condition. A running theme in my work questions "how do we define the concept of 'good' and how do we live a 'good' life?"

I have always had an interest in religion - As a child, within a Jewish education, I was fascinated with the parables and fables of the Bible. As an adult and mother I am now confronted with my girls asking the more difficult questions; about GOD, belief and tradition.

Religion is not the most popular topic at a get together because people hold what *they* believe to be sacred and holy; and this is not up for debate. To have an open conversation about how the universe began, who created the universe, what happens after death is mostly taboo and for good reason, there are too many different opinions and beliefs.

Gods Of Suburbia asks these question;

How does complex iconography affect the way that people envision their personal god?

Do we need religion to make us 'good' and 'moral'?

Does religion make sense in modernity?

2. What is your own religious identity?

I am culturally Jewish and enjoy/celebrate the holidays and traditions. I respect the rights of people to believe in and worship whatever gods they choose, even if I do not conform to a personal god myself. I most relate with Pantheism because of the great respect I have for the natural world.

3. What influence does your living in multicultural Vancouver have on your work, and on this project in particular?

Vancouver is indeed a melting pot and living here has made it possible for me to befriend and celebrate people living with many different belief systems. In Canada there is a sort of unspoken agreement that allows people to believe in and live how they

please. Religion is kept in the privacy of the home and community or in a metaphorical 'Suburbia'.

4. Do you feel you are making a single statement with all the photos in this project, or are you making individual statements with each?

As a cultural critic of sorts I am interested generating a rational conversation about religion and what role it plays in modern society.

By placing each supernatural character in a real life environment I attempt to humanize them, and explore more practical issues. Lakshmi , The Hindu goddess of beauty and wealth is a perfect example of how woman today shoulder the responsibilities of home and work and Ganesha, the remover of obstacles, easily recognizable by his elephant head and human body, embodies my personal experience as an immigrant to Canada. With Satan I question what counts as fair within society today, and Xenu scrutinizes those that interfere with free thinking.

So there is a central message that splits of into many parts.

5. I read in to your photographs a sense of frustration with and pessimism about how religion is playing out in modern Western society. Do you have any positive/optimistic thoughts about the place of religion in life today?

I believe that religion often unites communities and gives many a purpose/answers/ for their existence.

The stringent rules of most religions often provides those that tent to stray from 'good' behavior a moral compass and this is comforting to me as an observer of human nature! The separation of religion and state throughout the Western world has allowed more and more people to live a secular lifestyle without judgement. However despite the forces of technology, science and medical breakthroughs, fundamentalism and puritanical faith is on the rise.

Thousands of years of religious warfare have proven to be divisive and brutal.

I do often question why have ancient doctrines been excused from scrutiny, rational thinking and scientific evidence? Is this sustainable going forward?

6. You have chosen to do staged photography (as opposed to photojournalism or documentary photography, for instance). Can you say a bit about why you like this kind of photography? Does it allow you to express yourself in a way that other genres don't?

I have been a photographer for over 20 years. I started out as a photojournalist and documentary / editorial photographer. I spent time in Gaza and the West Bank documenting Palestinians living in refugee camps. I have always felt that my experience as a documentary photographer has informed my conceptual photography

both technically and creatively. From my more candid work, I have learned that spontaneity and a lack of control are sources of inspiration. My practice today involves large scale tableau series that take approx. 2 years to complete. Many of my pieces require a sizable crew that involves a makeup team, costumers, set builders, assistants, digital team etc.. Overall I am working with a restricted budget (I was granted a small amount from the Canada Council for the Arts) and depend on print sales from my previous collections to be able to continue producing new work.

This lean towards Pop Surrealism has altered my visual language which is defined by narratives, use of symbolism, dark humor and subversive messaging.

7. In what ways was creating this project similar or different to creating your previous ones?

As with all of my other series, my first priority is to find the right person to portray the lead character of the piece. This process can happen quickly or may take months or even years. I tend to do a lot of street casting and/or work with local actors and performers. The circumstances are always different but somehow seem to work out at the end. As I mentioned earlier I am working with tiny budgets and each time have to find a way to bring people on board and to get them excited about something that does not yet exist. I strive to find the right locations and there is always the disappointment of it falling through for one reason or the other.

Another similarity is the conversation that my art stimulates. The work welcomes interpretation and discussion.

8. Is there one particular image in the series that moves you the most?

Each piece represents a complex concept that is based on my ideals or experiences, so in that regard it is difficult to choose a favorite.

I did inject a personal and painful memory into the Ganesha piece.

As a new immigrant to Canada at 8yrs i did not speak english, and even though I was not a visible minority, I was subjected to bullying. After a year of suffering in silence, *back then we didn't talk openly about this*, my parents enrolled me in a Jewish school. The rejection and isolation that I experienced in public elementary school remained even while I was in a school full of Jewish kids.

Growing up my identity was split equally as a Canadian and an Israeli. Thus I felt as though I never fully belonged to either, a common reaction of immigrant children.

I have placed Ganesha, the Hindu god and the remover of obstacles, on that bench to illustrate my personal experience.

I wanted to also ask you whether your photos are in any way a response to what people are viewing as a holy war or religious war going on between Islamism and the West (incl Israel) in recent years.

It is now routine for terrorists to rationalize their insanity on the basis of passages found in the Quran, many of which are taken out of context and simply interpreted to satisfy the Jihadist. This blanket warfare propaganda against non-Muslims, particularly Jews and Christians is now accessible to *anyone* online and offers instant accessibility to radical thinking, this is of great concern to me.

Now all major jihadi media departments, part of militant networks, have their own channels on Twitter, linking to content from the jihadi forums and other social media platforms, primarily YouTube, Facebook, and pictures in general.

The role of the media activists, or in jihadist speak the “media mujahid” is increasing as the momentum of members of tier-one jihad forums are expanding. Twitter as a massive communication relay has become the basis for a new generation of sympathizers. Twitter disseminates propaganda material in general and is a platform where activists, sympathizers, and actual fighters upload audiovisual and other types into the jihadi hub.