

FORT GANSEVOORT

THE AESTHETE

Every Curve Matters

By Jessica Ferri

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Zoë Buckman at home in her East Village studio, pieces from the “Every Curve” series

On a recent afternoon in New York, the artist Zoe Buckman was in her home studio in the East Village, at work on “Every Curve,” an installation piece that blends feminism and hip-hop culture through vintage lingerie hand-embroidered with lyrics from Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls. Showing off a recent acquisition—a vintage girdle she said with a bit of a giggle, “see, it says on the back, ‘petitness, but dat ass fat.’” We spoke to the London-born artist about her new work, how marriage (to Friends star David Schwimmer) and motherhood has changed her as an artist, and her favorite things about living in New York.

The Aesthete: What inspired you to create the “Every Curve” series?

Zoe Buckman: I grew up listening to rap music, in particular American hip-hop music. When you’re a kid, you listen to things on repeat, and I basically knew by heart most of their lyrics. Even when I brush my teeth, I find myself absent-mindedly thinking of a rap verse.

TA: It seems that a great deal of your work deals with gender.

ZB: In my upbringing I had these two very strong influences, of feminism, from my parents, and of hip-hop. Sometimes these things are in sync, and oftentimes not. As I grew up, I noticed that I’d be dancing to a Biggie song and I’d think, wow, those lyrics are not cool. But I think if you can re-appropriate it, in the end you are winning.

TA: Is that where the lingerie came in, as an influence of feminism?

ZB: I wanted to marry the very male text with something that feels very typically feminine. Not feminist, but feminine. Aesthetically, I like to make art that looks sumptuous and sensual as well as having a message behind it.

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TA: Now that you have a daughter, how has motherhood influenced your work?

ZB: I'm a lot more aware of the fact that I'm shaping a young woman. It's a big responsibility, it's a big undertaking. You look at the messages that are feeding in from society and it's shocking and I can't help but want to change that and highlight that.

TA: Your recent work "present life" deals with childbirth—and actually features your own placenta, plasticized—a very personal, intimate piece.

ZB: I think when I had Cleo, my daughter, it really opened me up. Before, I was a fine art photographer and that's what I was striving to do and carve out for myself. After I had her, as you can see, I'm using new mediums and learning new disciplines. It quite literally inspired this first work I did after having her, "present life." I had a home birth, and the midwife remarked that my placenta had started to deplete inside me, and that basically, had I not gone into labor two weeks early it would have been game over.

TA: It's almost like your body knew—

ZB: Yeah, I believe that. I do.

TA: But that's the actual placenta in the piece.

ZB: I took a photo of it and put it in my freezer and didn't think about it for a while—but I wanted to figure out a way to freeze that moment when something living begins to die. Then I sent it off to Germany to be plasticized!

TA: Who, or what are your biggest influences?

ZB: I completely idolize Sophie Calle. I was working on a piece, etching words, conversations on to the glass of photographs, and I saw her show "Take Care of Yourself" and I had this eureka moment. I also love Louise Bourgeois and Taryn Simon as well.

TA: What's your daily routine?

ZB: I meditate twice daily for twenty minutes. After that, after I've gotten Cleo up, the next thing that has to happen is a cup of tea. I can't do anything until before my cup of tea.

TA: Is there anywhere in New York to get a good cup of tea?

ZB: Actually, when friends come to New York to visit I ask them to bring me Assam teabags!

TA: How is New York different from London?

ZB: London is definitely more chill, but I like that New York is constantly awake, always moving. I love that you guys have Chelsea—that doesn't exist anywhere else, even in Berlin, you have to move around. It's great to have that unique community packed in with galleries.

TA: What's next for you in terms of work?

ZB: I'm in the process of finishing the "every curve" series—I'd like to have 100 pieces, but there's so much material. I'm mulling over about the use of sexual violence against women in TV, and film, and that'll be another visual project, probably embroidery or fabric based. I'm excited to start that.