

# FORT GANSEVOORT

i-D

## Artist Zoe Buckman Brings Biggie to Bras

By i-D Team

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There's something innately brilliant about the juxtaposition in artist Zoë Buckman's latest project, 'Every Curve', which features dainty pieces of vintage lingerie hand-embroidered with Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls lyrics in neon thread, hung...



Zoe Buckman

Buckman, raised in "the flavour" of East London, and now living in NYC's East Village, is, in the academic sense, a liberal artist. Using materials from concrete to lingerie, her work challenges our acceptance of contradictions by synthesising them. Having just dealt with a high concept in Present Life, an exhibition exploring the transient nature of time (opening at Garis and Haan Gallery on February 25), Buckman was drawn to a personal source of conflict: her love of hip hop as a feminist. "I want to reduce the stigma of the word 'feminism,'" she says. "It's not about eliminating and excluding. You can be yourself and still be a feminist." Selected pieces from

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Every Curve are displayed in a group show, "What Is, Isn't," at Alan Koppel Gallery in Chicago until the end of October.

## **You grew up in East London, and I read that your childhood was very influenced by rap and feminism. How was that?**

I grew up in a feminist household in Hackney, East London, my mum was responsible in many ways for the feminist stain on the socialist party, and my dad had really strong feminist leanings. I was a big hip hop girl, and still am, I listened to artists like Wu Tang, and K'Naan, but I was a particular fan of Biggie and Tupac. When I became older and started to become more in tune with my political leanings, there was a disconnect between the feminist in me and the hip hop side of me, and I don't know if, in some way, those influences are also present in Tupac's work. Many people don't know this about Tupac, but he said some incredibly uplifting, pro-choice, things about women, but he also said the opposite. When it comes to Biggie on women, it's very difficult to find anything positive, even about his mother. But there is an unmistakable humour to his voice, so you kind of don't know if he was joking. As a feminist, my approach is not to shun them or their music and say, "That's bad, I never want to listen to this." My approach is to take their words and recreate them as something beautiful and thought-provoking.

## **How did you decide to embroider these lyrics onto lingerie?**

For my last body of work, called Present Life, I was essentially outsourcing the work to other people. So for this project, it was important that I had complete control. The embroidery came as a response to that, me sitting quietly, with my hands at my work, completely undisturbed by anyone, with complete creative and artistic control. As I was working on it, I also became very aware of how much it felt like "women's work," me sitting there propped up in bed with my embroidery. I was just like, "Whoa, this is kind of amazing." It felt like I was drawing on a whole lineage of women.

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Images courtesy Zoe Buckman

What I found very interesting about using the vintage lingerie is that I'm also kind of examining the undergarments as representations of women throughout history. When I first started this project, I thought I would take the lyrics and embroider them onto these very flowy, silky, liberating 20s and 30s-era lace slips bralettes. But as I started working on those, I realised that I also wanted to create pieces from 50s, 60s, 70s lingerie, which were almost the opposite. They had Spandex, garters, wires under the breast cushion of the bra... everything was squished.

**Many feminist works use the stereotype of delicate women to convey repression. But this project seems to celebrate that same delicacy. Would you agree?**

I'm really glad that you have that reading of it. I don't think that you have to always present as angry, masculine, aggressive to be a feminist. Actually, I think that telling someone what to do is a very masculine approach.

**Do you see people wearing these garments?**

I did wear one to a dinner party and I felt really good in it, and other people can if they want to? But I really like them as objects, and I really like the idea of them hanging suspended.

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**The lyrics also seem to be functioning as labels for feminine curves, and it made me think of the work in terms of street harassment. If someone yells, "Nice ass," the lyrics are right there on the butt to accompany it.**

I always try to marry the placement of the lyrics with what would have been said. I really like this one on a bra: "She doesn't even love me like she did when I was younger, sucking on her chest just to stop my fucking hunger."

**Oh man, that's too Oedipal. I also wanted to ask you for advice about responding to catcalls.**

You know what, it's been so long! I feel like it used to happen to me a lot more often when I was younger. I must be losing it, girl. It's horrible when you feel like there's a group of guys looking at you for purely one thing. It makes you feel so vulnerable. Then there's the opposite, where they're like, "Hey girl, your titties ain't no good." They're always telling me, "Your legs are good but you ain't got no ass." It's like, "What is happening, that this is ok?"

*[www.zoebuckman.com](http://www.zoebuckman.com)*



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## Credits

Text Hannah Ghorashi  
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