

## Judy Glantzman's Essay: From Racism to Art (ISM)—Dartmouth College

911. Those three numbers, three simple numbers joined together to change history, the past, present, and future, will forever be cemented in our memories. After these attacks, American patriotism represented itself in various ways. The American flag hung not only from the hallowed halls of court and government, but from homes across the country. This was a nationalistic effort to ease the shock of the worst terrorist attack ever inflicted on American soil. It seemed like a good thing, but there were others who took a darker view of the circumstances. Violence against Muslims increased tremendously. From the graves of three thousand souls reignited a notion that racism and patriotism are the same, and this form of xenophobia has lasted for sixteen years, finally resting its separatist head under reins of President Trump. Policies, ranging from increased surveillance, airport security, the Patriot Act, and other systematic restrictions designed to afflict limitations on certain groups simply because of their race or religious beliefs, has caused a distorted interpretation of our country. The deaths of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and the never-ending flood of unarmed African American men, who have died in “officer-related shootings,” “the violent consequences of an unresolved history of race relations,” has largely defined the past years of public discourse in the United States, culminating in the violence of Charlottesville, Virginia.

What is race? Blood? Skin color? DNA? It is unreal, a fake construct designed to confuse the masses. Even if one believes there is no race, there is certainly racism, a close cousin, a relative not welcomed by most, especially in America. Race is as ephemeral as blending colors on an artist's pallet. Racism is a coercive belief system that affects us all. No dictionary adequately denotes its purpose. It is usually too simplistic. Racism is a complex system of ideas that cannot be described by mere words. This system has been codified and renamed, reassessed to make it palatable to the masses of people who occupy space in this great country. But, this word cannot be adequately defined by letters alone.

However, there is one medium that can shed light on this pronouncement and that is art. Of the countless lenses, we've adopted for this nationwide racial reckoning, art is the one we might not typically think of. But, here is where the real reckoning lies, in the art brush, the pen, the color, form, texture of our desires. How can art help us move closer to understanding one another? How can this medium possess such power of faith? It is in the visual aspect of our existence. We are visual humans, and, thus depend on photographs, paintings, films to offer some sort of answer to the ever-increasing nature of our troubled existence. The Confederate flag, Robert E. Lee statues, and the many other examples of hate that pervade the geography and mindset of this country, are all made clear to us by the visual. So, why all the arguments, disagreements when the “R” word raises its ugly head?

There is no easy answer to this question, or there may be no answer at all. So, we rely on the gentle, sometimes harsh hands of artists to assist in helping us work through this relationship, to understand the social realities of racial divide in America.

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Art has the means to transcend the obvious and lead us into a world of visceral reactions that encourage us to think outside of our own needs and wants, and into a world of rational, loving, peaceful discourse that make this country the great American tapestry. It can be a bold endeavor that challenges artists across this nation to take arms with their paint brushes, pens, and cameras, and move to help our citizens make some sort of sense of this brutal reality.

One such artist is Judy Glantzman. She views art with a distinct contradiction of life, both beautifully uplifting and dangerously horrific. It is no wonder that with her unique vision that she chose to approach this controversial issue. She experiments with materials and process, using painting, collage, drawing and sculpture to reflect experiences that define the beautiful insanity of our lives. Judy's work connotes resistance to slavery of the mind; it is freedom in its purest context, and this freedom allows her to present a multitude of imagery that not only expresses the constraints of our limited society, but also independence of mind. To be an artist is to express the autonomy that most people long for, the willingness to "be", to exist in a world of your own, not limiting yourself to others' thoughts but to your own as they apply to your specific beliefs. Judy knows of this world and gives us a glimpse into her psyche, filled with complication and mastery of art form. Her work is bursting with color and expression that harkens to unabashed self-scrutiny, "the inside of [her] head made visible".

In her latest work, a 15-piece exhibit on racism, Judy presents works of art that not only exemplify her free form, some would say abstract, technique, but presents a clear, controlled method that she very much owns. This is a glimpse inside of her mind, a mind that is constantly at war with the injustices that seem to permeate our culture. In this series, she captures an array of emotions: love, hate, fear, anxiety, and sadness. It is expressionistic in context but never manages to lose its emotionality and connection to the viewer. We are part of her world, and we relish in the multitude of images presented in a collage feast for our eyes. Her reworking style is present here as it is in all her work; this is her landmark, her passion, her way of working. This is life. We are a mesh of emotions, of different people, all thrown together in a soupy gumbo of raging cultures that long to understand one another, but are challenged to do so.

Two works of note are "Reach", seven wooden carved hands, a major motif in Judy's past work. Hope is a major theme and the repetition of hands in all the pieces is an inspiration to dream for a better future, a future where all races, creeds, and colors may "break bread" with each other, and feed our differences with understanding and not hate. Glantzman has said that she "learns from going to extremes", and another work entitled "Barack's Face" offers the most extreme images of the series. The painting centers on a face, deconstructed and filled heads of Obama, hands, boats, baby shoes and guns. Surrounding this face are a collage of guns, hands, both reaching singularly and praying. One could get lost in the bombardment of dark images, but the hands offer us inspiration.

Lastly, Judy's most uplifting piece entitled "Missing Obama" illustrates possibilities in a world where we question that meaning. Obama represented hope for the future of America, a future filled with possibility of togetherness and the absence of separatist ideals. Sadly, this dream that galvanized a nation to elect its first African American president has since lost its fervor.

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This intensity and desire for acceptance of all, is apparent in this work. Within layer upon layer of this collage piece, Judy examines the complexity of this country and the missed opportunity of hope. But, do not fail to miss the hidden message: hope is rising and it will soon conquer any semblance of hate and dissension. Hope will always win, and with each stroke, each reworking of images, Judy believes in the sanctity of goodness amidst the anguish of evil. This is reality; this is America, and she chooses to show it in all its bleakness and optimistic potential.

Judy never white washes (pun intended) her ideas in her work, no matter the subject. She simply presents it as it flows out of her mind, a mind filled with the chaotic nature of love, spirituality, possibility, and, yes, hope. Her work in this series shows that our nation can and will live up to its potential, the potential of acceptance of all, and the potential of inclusion of all sexes, races, ethnicities, religious factions, sexualities and the like. We are a nation of people, who breathe daily and hope for equality of thought. This is the nation Judy knows well, and in this series, she offers the viewer a chance to examine their own demons and better angels as human beings are encouraged to do in a free society.

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