

Renata Stih & Frieder Schnock

ROSIE WON THE WAR

NYU Kimmel Windows Galleries @ La Guardia Place & West 3rd Street, New York City, NY 10012
Jan 17 – March 22, 2019 (open 24/7)

Women on the American homefront during World War II shifted ever so briefly into roles at odds with traditional conceptions of womanhood. Taking on the jobs that men formerly occupied, these women wielded tools and operated machinery as support for the war effort against the rise of fascism in Europe, as well as the threats in the Pacific. The image that most captured that period, when some women exchanged dresses for coveralls and coiffeurs for kerchiefs, was Norman Rockwell's Rosie the Riveter. Here a muscular female twists into a powerful Michelangelo-esque position, is poised to chomp on a sandwich, and imperiously rests her brown loafer on Hitler's Mein Kampf. Both serious and playful – Rockwell's picture is important commentary on what women were not only capable of, but also only briefly recognized for, way back in 1943.

Roll forward to 2019, more than 70 years since the end of World War II, nearly a century since women gained the right to vote, and more than half a century since the rise of the modern women's movement in the United States. Today, in the era of the Me Too, society has yet again needed to reconsider the power and progress of women. The response from Berlin-based artists Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock is ROSIE WON THE WAR, which showcases a monumental series of portraits that recasts Rosie as a woman of today. The results mix the ironic with the heroic.

For NYU, Stih & Schnock present women, who may use their hands, but more often utilize their minds, in their current professions. Merging staged photography with computer-assisted image making, the artists have created individualized narratives that place these contemporary women within the context of World War II.

Stih & Schnock underscore how the opening of roles beyond the home in the 1940s led the way to the greatly expanded positions in society now occupied by women such as these. Juxtaposing the gear of Rosie's time with backdrops that reference battlefields from Omaha Beach to Okinawa, the artists acknowledge the historic conditions of World War II, but also the way in which that time paved new paths for modern women. At the same time, they question gender progress up to our day.

The artists developed this idea initially while visiting D-Day battle-fields in Normandy where they considered the massive sacrifice of Americans to save Europe from fascism. Over time, working from their studio in Berlin, the two decided that a series of pictures imbued with narrative, which referenced traditional portraiture via pose and scale not unlike great 17th-century works by Peter Paul Rubens and Anthony van Dyck, was the right direction. Their goal: „Let women be heroes.“
(Hilary Lewis)

ROSIE WON THE WAR - Panel/Talk on Monday, March 11, 2019 at 6 pm
Deutsches Haus at NYU, 42 Washington Mews, NYC, NY 10003
(a publication will be available at that event in March 2019)