



[Camille Eskell](#)

[September 26, 2017](#) in [Mixed Media Artists](#)

I first became aware of Camille's work when we both did a group show together back in 2011 and have been loving seeing her work continue to evolve and grow through the years. This latest series I had the pleasure of seeing exhibited at Odetta in Brooklyn not too long ago, and it is very powerful. When you get to be up close and personal with it, it's hard to take your eyes off the work. They are exquisitely made, and the choice of presentation perfect. There is something about the balance between traditional identifiable shapes and forms with the unexpected surfaces and imagery that I just can't get enough of. I hope you enjoy getting to know more about her process and ideas as much as I have!



- **I admit, I have a soft spot in my heart for mix media works, especially when they incorporate the mixture of traditional applications and new mediums in unexpected ways. Some of your more recent work, particularly *The Fez as Storyteller Series* uses digital imagery. You've done it wonderfully, where it's this surprise as you closely inspect the work. It's a fantastic way to bring traditional imagery into a more current aesthetic. Can you tell us a little about how you began doing this in your work?**

Actually, this had its beginnings when I decided to create an artwork for a show on the cultural history and fate of synagogues around the world, a curated show titled *Silent Witness*

sponsored by the Jewish Art Salon. All my work had to do with psychological and social repercussions stemming from family dynamics and learned cultural traditions, especially with regard to females. The theme refocused my take on these ideas.

As Iraqi Jews who emigrated to Bombay, India, in the late 1800's, my ancestors were part of a thriving tight-knit group who experienced a melding of influences. Against the backdrop of one of the Bombay synagogues that had very badly deteriorated due to disuse over many decades (ultimately restored by an American), I began to examine social conventions and inherent inequity that defined religious and Old World cultural doctrine. From that, my first piece of the series, *Red Fez: Boy, Woman* was created.



- **Your childhood and cultural upbringing has clearly had an influence on your work, but it seems to go much beyond that. There's a deep rooted ancestral connection and yet also this cosmic mystical connection that vibrates in your work. From the literal icons and symbolism to the astral atmospheres that you create, can you describe your connection to this type of imagery? How is it symbolic to your personal narrative?**

Thank you for seeing the mystical, which in one sense is part of the traditions I am exploring. Throughout our lives there was constant reference to our roots and forbears, an almost tribal connection to those that were and are, thus making a spiritual link to those we never met but who loom large in our psyches (perhaps owing to the concept of memory, "*to remember*" replete in Judaism). The icons serve to provide a grounding for the references but I think the emotional "vibrations" are what ultimately matters.



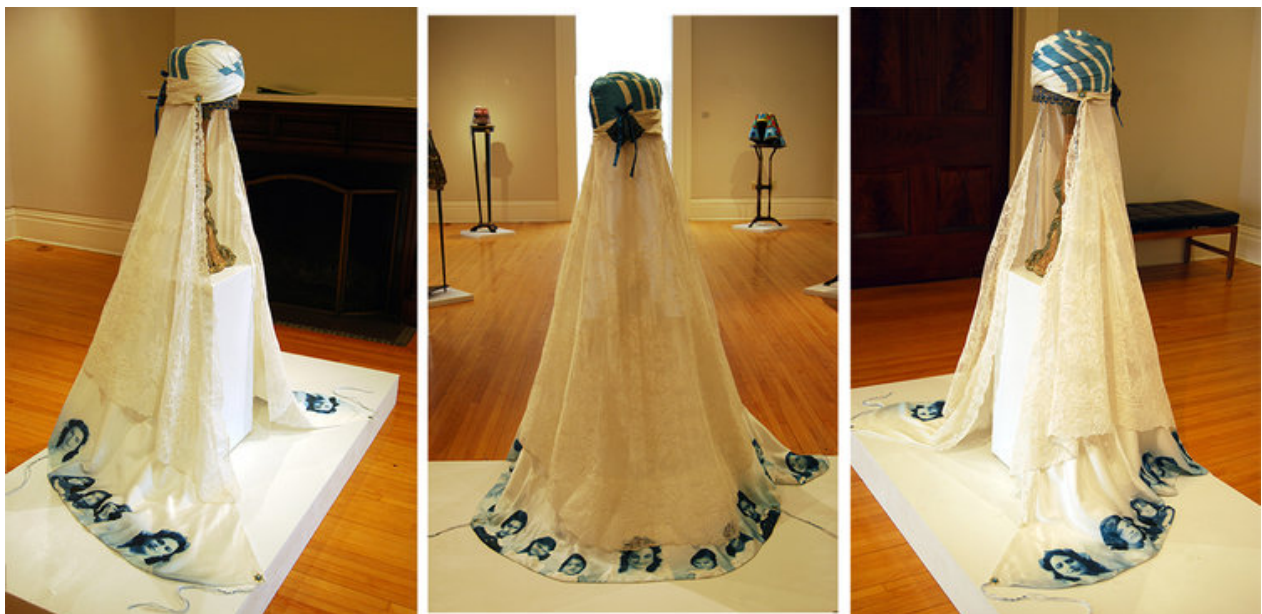
- **Rebirth is also a theme that comes up in most of your work. As well as a deep connection to the female experience. Can you talk a little about what this means to you specifically, and how you feel this theme has grown and changed over the course of your career? Do you ever look back on older work and see a rebirth of its own?**

True, this is a consistent theme in my work. I have experienced a lot of turmoil, crisis, inconsistency, and loss throughout my life, so the drive to be relinquished, to be restored, becomes a natural yet surging theme in my work.

In terms of a female connection, the experience of being all female in my immediate family but for my dominant father fostered a critical vulnerability, but also the necessity to endure the intermittent raging outbursts and abuse to which we were subject. In families from Old World traditions having a male child is celebratory. The lingering sense was that a female was generally seen as a dependent, faintly a disappointment, but also, contradictorily, someone to hang onto, shield, and protect. Without a voice that was truly heard, she was legitimized when a male came along, who took a kind of "ownership" of her.

That said, nothing in my family experience was one way but rather mixed, often to extremes. I used the word "lingering" above. In a larger sense the experience was more of a straddling between the vestiges of the antiquated attitudes and a synthesizing of a modern, contemporary world, for all the players concerned. One of many a mixed message.

Interestingly, I am not sure the theme of rebirth has changed so much but that there are different ways of my expressing it throughout my career. I often use foliage or florals to represent irrepressibility. In a later series there is a return to the cosmos, or beginning. In terms of a rebirth when looking back at older pieces I see a rekindling or continuum of some of the ideas, symbols or images used, as had occurred with prior artworks. I think that viewers will interpret the art through their own relationship with the content, but since there is a timelessness in the work I am not sure their response is significantly different with time--perhaps a deeper understanding and receptivity because the public is more aware in general.



- **One can't see your work and not see you in it. It's highly personally reflective and narrative to your unique story, but at the same time it can read as having a larger political and social message as well. You've also had the opportunity to show your work in multiple parts of the world. Do you find that your work is received and interpreted differently depending on where it is shown? Is there a place that you've always wanted to show your work that you haven't gotten to yet?**

The personal often becomes the political. It is important as a witness to reflect and emphasize the meaning of my experience in broader terms for others to consider, construe and contemplate, to enlighten or interface with the viewer--and less about merely personal aspects. But I find that in discussing the work, the specifics are hard to get away from.

I have not yet concretely found that my work is interpreted differently by locale but perhaps by the individual (though it may be less understood in certain areas due to a homogenization of the population). Some may find the concepts and presentation "foreign" in a variety of ways. Conversely, I recently gave a talk on the Fez as Storyteller series to accompany my current show at Lockhart Gallery in SUNY Geneseo. A young female student born in Bangladesh remarked how she could glean pieces from the work to make a mosaic of meaning for her. It varies, as with most experiences with art.

In regard to exhibiting, there are lots of places where I would like to show. In a sense my art has the air of "museum" work. Ideally, I see the Fez series, for example, in large vitrines to underscore the quality of the artifact. They bear a historic aspect but yet are contemporary in nature--so a host of museums, art spaces and gallery venues would be viable. The Jewish Museum in NY, and contemporary art museums and spaces. My interest lies in what is human, so worldwide the essence could be appreciated.



- **You use a plethora of materials, fiber elements to mannequins to traditional oil sticks...are these happy random findings or do you have to go out searching for them specifically? Have you ever tried working with a found material that just gave you trouble? Or is there any medium that you haven't tried yet that you've always wanted to? Or a technique/skill that you've always been fascinated by and wanted to learn?**

I tend to be lucky with finding material things, but in my work nothing is random--it all has to make sense for me. Though the art has an emotional thrust, I am rather analytical and have an intellectual approach. I can't say I remember having a found object give me trouble--I tend to do many tests to see what is best to use media-wise. A happy story entails my needing to weather some wood to build an intentionally worn-out frame as a metaphor for the center-piece drawing. I was out on my way to the hardware store to buy the weathering product and lo and behold! someone had thrown out their weathered, beaten, rusty nail-ridden trellis!! Just what I needed! I loaded up my arms and made a couple of trips back home with the treasure.

There are so many enticing mediums yielding so many ideas. Right now, I would love to learn digital embroidery, and more about pattern-making and draping for my current work.



- **As an artist that works in sculpture to painting, when approaching new work, how do you typically begin? How do you choose the best medium to pursue the ideas and concepts with?**

I generally tend to "see" the piece in my mind in a somewhat completed state, a kind of visualization, so the medium and technique I use is part of that vision. My job is to assess the best methods and steps to make it material. The question for me is largely "How am I going to do *that*?", and as I mentioned prior, I do a lot of tests. I also haunt consignment shops, thrift, antique, craft and hardware stores, my studio, my closet, or just about anywhere what I need could be attained. The Fez as Storyteller series, especially, requires all types of designing and construction skills since so many disparate elements are combined.



- **Do you have any favorite female artists?**

I have many, but to top the list is Louise Bourgeois (I have a good story regarding her). It is hard to pick after her so I have added a few Frida Kahlo, Joan Mitchell, Eva Hesse, Magdalena Abakanowicz, Kiki Smith, Cindy Sherman.

- **Do you have any upcoming shows or events that you'd like to share?**

Currently I have a one-person show at the Lockhart Gallery at SUNY Geneseo featuring *The Fez as Storyteller* series. I have been invited to show in an exhibition at the Hudson River Museum of Art, NY, titled *The Neo-Victorians: Contemporary Artists Revive Gilded Age Glamour* which opens early 2018. More immediately, I will be in an group show titled *Me, My Selfie, and I* at the Hudson Guild in Chelsea, NYC opening on October 5th 2017. There may be another in the offing as well.

If you'd like to see more of Camille's work, please visit her website at <http://camilleeskell.com/>

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