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# lolita cros

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**“I have to be careful to not offend anyone and to represent women in the right way. I have to think about each piece in its context.”**

*Lolita Cros is an independent art curator from France. She is known for her work at The Salon at The Wing, which is a permanent exhibition with rotating artworks by female artists throughout the spaces. Lolita lives in New York City.*

### **tell me about yourself...**

L.C: I'm french. I was born in Paris, I lived in Casablanca, Morocco for a bit and moved to New York when I was 15. I went to High School here and studied at Bard College. I started curating while I was a sophomore. I majored in Art History and put up my first show in an empty apartment. During my senior year, I curated a show in NYC with a couple of friends, I had twenty artists, forty artworks and all the profits went to Occupy Sandy, an organization that helped the victims Hurricane Sandy.

### **how was this first show?**

L.C: It was a silent auction, in 2013. The goal was to show both emerging and established artists. We had big names that brought lots of people who ended up buying works by the younger artists. There was a gallerist that I had interned for with so it was fun for me to go to them and sell them something. After graduating, I knew I wanted to do keep doing this. I moved back to New York and worked at a gallery for three years, which was a great experience. I learned so much from it but I knew that I couldn't work for somebody else for longer. I love interacting with the artists. Even when I was working for the gallery, I would come home and work on my own shows. My goal was to do one show a year and it forced me to not give up. I was forcing myself to do this which was exhausting but rewarding. When you have a full-time job, everything else seems easy and fun.

### **so you quit, and started working independently?**

L.C: Yes. In this shows I did, the artists made money and I did too, so I thought, *"I think I can live from this. I can quit my job, follow my passion and make that my job"*. So I quit. I'm still in contact with most people I worked with at the gallery. I learned a lot from them but I knew it wasn't for me. Right after I quit the gallery I became a member of The Wing. I was working on my shows from there and was always in touch with the founders. They suggested we worked together and we went back and forth figuring out what we could do. Before they opened the SoHo location, the idea of The Salon came out. We are now working together for the upcoming locations and I still try to work on my shows on the side.

### **how does the salon at the wing work?**

L.C: The Salon is a gallery within the walls of The Wing. All the works are consigned for a year. I consign them either through the artists or galleries if they're represented. I want it to feel like it's a Collector's Home. I want people to come in thinking they're in somebody's home because this

is what The Wing represents for so many women. Lots of the members feel at home here, they feel they can lay on the couch, take showers... so many things they wouldn't do at a regular office. I want the Art to feel like that. I want people to feel comfortable with it, which is also so much fun to me as a curator because I get to think about my audience a lot more than I would if I were doing a show at a white cube.

### **what has been the greatest challenge so far?**

L.C: I have to be careful to not offend anyone and to represent women in the right way. I have to think about each piece in its context. If they're next to a bathroom I have to make that a point. In the bathroom I've put works by Rachel Libeskind, from the series Jewel Box Revue. The characters from these collages are all transgender women. The placement is strategic and important because of all the conversations there's been around gender in the US. The entrance is the first image you get when you enter The Wing, so I don't want to have something that's too political because it can offend someone, and so on. The pieces need to convey a message. I sometimes see an artwork online that looks pretty, but I can't include them just because it looks pretty, that's not art. If it doesn't move me, it's not going to move the viewers (and I'm moved easily!).

### **so you try to stay away from politics?**

L.C: When we opened it was important for me to not be too political, but I can't talk about art without being political. I drew inspiration from the Radical Women Exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum and the Revolution in America at the Whitney. For the locations in LA and San Francisco, the audience is different. It's more techie and I think people will be into learning about art. They spend their days looking at numbers and it's beneficial for them to have a stimulating atmosphere. Each neighborhood has its own history and for each space, I try to find and include Local Artists as well. As a curator, it's important to challenge your own comfort, to set rules for yourself, and not to only include painters or just women in their 20's.

### **what do you look for in an artist?**

L.C: Primarily, the context of their pieces. I think what's interesting about an artist is their story. The other day someone asked me what 'good art' was to me, and I think it was such a hard question because there are so many layers to it. I think good art is something you want to know more about; there has to be some aspect of it that seems inclusive, exciting, and then from that first layer, the story

that it comes with. I think you should be able to write a ten-page essay about a piece of art that's good. It's not just about art history but about how that piece is deep, what makes it part of the evolution of their practice. I always ask: how did you get to what you're making today? What's your background? What's your process? Where you always a painter or did you start as a photographer? How did you get to what you're making now? I visited Sophia Narrett's studio, she's an embroidery artist. We talked about her embroidery technique, what it means to her, what it means to women and how it relates to her process. And I said *"your embroideries really feel like paintings, they don't look like regular embroideries"*, and she was like *"Oh yes, I started as a painter"* and she showed me her paintings from back in college and they looked so similar. I think so much of her process today relates to it, the intricate details, the subject.

### **do you keep a list of artists that you like?**

L.C: Yes, I have a list of artists. In my phone, I have lists of show ideas that I'd like to do. Sometimes I meet an artist and it's not the right time or place or click, then years later I see a space that will be good for that artist.

### **do you collect art?**

L.C: I started selling art to people and I would get so much FOMO, that I was like, why don't I buy it too? I love the stories that art pieces come with. I like to buy art right at the moment when I feel like the artist is going to change their practice; I feel like i'm going to look at it later on and be like, this is when she/he was still making this. I bought a piece by Devra Freeland, I've been working with her for years, her work changes a lot and she's always showing. I feel like every time an artist shows, they get sick of what they were doing and change, which is probably why Devra is evolving so much. I remember a studio visit with her before an upcoming show, she was showing me her pieces and I had always loved her work. She told me she was going to do this 6 ft tall piece that was going to be directly into the grass; I was looking at her small sculptures and said *"These feel like studies for that big piece you're going to make and I feel you're gonna become a land artist, I don't think you're going to stay a sculptor for much longer"* so I bought one of the small pieces, I wanted to be a witness of her transition. I am starting to buy more and more. I mostly buy pieces to remind myself of a moment and time. Most of the artists I buy, I just know they're going to be big ones. I have a gut feeling that they're just good artists.

### **are you gut-based or academic? do you look at an artist's resume?**

L.C: I don't care about that. There's a lot of good artists I know that went to Hunter College for Grad School. Not everybody has the money, the time or the contacts to get into Yale and that shouldn't define them. If I see that an

artist went to Yale, Cooper Union, RISD, I get an idea of their practice, who they work with, and I get an idea of the depth of their pieces because I know they're being pushed. They couldn't have graduated if they were completely lazy or flat. Also, I don't ask for prices when I do a studio visit. Unless I'm interested in buying or thinking about insurance, I don't care about how much they are.

### **what's your long-term goal? where do you see yourself in the next couple of years?**

L.C: The job I created for myself doesn't exist, so my goal would be to do what I do now but at a greater scale. To me, it's more about the impact I can have than about just me. Hopefully, I will be able to represent people in the arts. Also, I truly believe in all the artists that I work with. I want them to be famous, to make money and to not have to work on side jobs. To me, it's exciting to see an artist sell something because of a show I curated with them, it's very rewarding. Creating connections through art is beautiful. For a comedian, having people laugh at your jokes is rewarding; it is the same with art but for some reason, there's a barrier. I wish that one day, people can have a more genuine approach to art.

### **with all the new technologies, where do you see the art world going? do you see it becoming different?**

L.C: I see it mattering more but I don't think it's going to change that much. Art goes in phases. If you look at the art that was done before, during and after WWII, it tells you a lot about the climate and I think a lot of what was done at that time is very relevant today; we are going through similar processes again. With everything that's happening in the world now, as an artist, it's hard to not be political and to not think about the impact you and your art can have. I think art is starting to matter because people are realizing that, if you want to send a message or create an impact, sometimes words are not enough. Videos and propaganda are not enough. Art is the way to do it. I don't think Digital Art is going to replace anything. There's a lot of artists coming out as painters because they're sick of the digital movement. Other artists, on the opposite, are trying to create new mediums. A lot of people are interested in social media, the movements that rose from it and the access it gives you to content. I don't really know where art is going, but I think it's going to a good place because the world is becoming much more aware than it used to be. Not only the role of the artist has to



The Salon at The Wing's SoHo Location, 52 Mercer St, NYC.

change, but the role of the institutions needs to evolve. More and more museums are starting to include women in their shows. People keep telling me “oh, you only work with female artists”. Then I go to any museum and it’s all male artists, but no one makes a fuss. I think that’s going to change, so when people think about artists they not only think of white male artists. The Guerrilla Girls do a great job of bringing awareness of gender equality. It should be less of a deal to feature a woman in a show, it should be more like, *“I think she’s good, I forgot she’s a woman.”* It’s like the World Cup... no one calls it the Male World Cup, it’s just the World Cup. It’s the little things, it’s going to take a while, but we’ll get there: it’s a collective effort.

**what made you want to be a curator?**

L.C: It was The Haunted Show at the Guggenheim, in 2010. It made me understand what curation meant and how you can start from a page of a book that inspired you and translate that into a fine art experience. When Jay Z came out with his music video, everyone was like *“what is he doing there looking at art?”*. He was talking about Picasso, Basquiat.... His audience, mostly teenagers, never heard about them before. They’re going to Google them, and learn who Picasso and Basquiat were through Jay Z, that’s cool. To me, that is democratic, it’s something that breaks the barrier. People keep hating because *“it’s a sell-out”*, but so what? He’s made it and now he can buy a Basquiat, good for him! People should pay more attention to stuff they don’t like. If you hate something, it means something in there is triggering a feeling in you.

**besides art, what else do you enjoy doing?**

L.C: I like hiking, walking, and dancing.

**what’s a piece of advice you would give a young curator?**

L.C: I would say experience is key. I always tell them to make a list of things they like to do and things they don’t. Especially with Instagram and people doing stuff all the time, they’re like “that looks fun I want to do it” but you don’t really know if you’re a producer. To put a show together you have to like logistics and shipping, you have to be straightforward with artists. If you want to sell their pieces you have to be transparent about commissions and money. It can be an awkward subject for a lot of people. You have to figure out if you like being social, because that’s also part of your job. The artist is the one who’s supposed to be the weirdo, and you’re supposed to be the voice of that weird voice, you need to be able to pitch them in a way that’s not aggressive. If you don’t have time to curate a show, throw a party, see if you like gathering people. Go step by step to realize what you like and what you don’t. But don’t quit your job to do something you’ve never done before because you might hit a wall. It’s better to be overwhelmed than bored.