

Lavishly Dressed Women Equipped with Shovels and Chainsaws Consider the Tools Used for Change

APRIL 14, 2022

GRACE EBERT



"Power Move." All images © Kelly Reemtsen, shared with permission

“My work has always been a tribute to all the hard-working women in my life,” says Kelly Reemtsen. The artist (previously), who lives and works between Los Angeles and London, has spent the last decade producing a subversive body of work devoted to exploring gender, its constructs, and real-world impacts, from wage gaps to the continual rollback of reproductive rights. Her practice spans printmaking, sculpture, and painting and juxtaposes visual markings of femininity with objects associated with masculinity. Each piece portrays an anonymous woman dressed in a tulle skirt, patent pumps, and glitzy jewelry grasping a chainsaw or shovel in an easy, nonchalant manner.

In recent years, Reemtsen has gravitated toward oval canvases evocative of traditional portraiture, in addition to pedestals and ladders that elevate her subjects. “Are the women in my paintings trying to break through the glass ceilings or just escaping the current situation? I think most women are doing one or both at all times, consciously or not,” she shares. A series of chainsaw sculptures painted with vibrant, playful colors augments the artist’s broader questions concerning how “the tools available to us shape who we are and who we want to be. I find using tools– whether a printmaking press, a chainsaw, makeup, or anything else– to be incredibly empowering as a vehicle for initiating change.”

A 10-year survey of Reemtsen’s work will be on view at albertz benda’s Los Angeles gallery this May, and she also has pieces in a group exhibition opening on April 21 in London and in August at Galeri Oxholm in Copenhagen. Explore a larger collection of her paintings and sculptures on her site and Instagram.

