

## Elizabeth Lillian LaBarge: *Surgery of the Spectacle*

May 18-August 24, 2014

Opening reception, with artist talk at 3:00 p.m., Sunday, May 18, 2:00-4:00 p.m.



lizalabarge



Clockwise from top left: *Lamaze*, 2013, charcoal and soft pastel on paper, 86 x 56 in.; *The Beheading*, 2013, charcoal on paper, 72 x 56 in.; *Framed*, 2013, charcoal on paper, 56 x 42 in.; *Mother & Child*, 2013, charcoal on Paper, 40 x 66 in.; *Adam & Eve: Evolution*, 2012, charcoal on paper, 60 x 60 in.

## Let's begin with deciphering the title *Surgery of the Spectacle*.

The exhibition title is a riff off of Guy Debord's 1967 book, *The Society of the Spectacle*. The Spectacle can be defined as a visually striking performance, display, or collection of images. Debord theorizes that the spectacle, when combined with advanced capitalism and mass media, can result not as a collection of images, but rather a social relationship between people mediated by images. I hope to simultaneously engage in a critique of contemporary and historical spectacles through the use of "détournement" (the integration of present or past artistic productions into a superior construction of a milieu) by recreating "spectacular images" to disrupt the flow of these spectacles.

My drawings are constructed through the combination of well-known art historical, religious, and contemporary narratives that permeate our lives through mass media. I hope to expose the spectacle by creating dramatized, "over the top" theatrical scenes that address psychosocial power dynamics and the image of woman as spectacle. How has the woman become spectacle and how does she respond? Through my work, I am performing little

"surgeries of the spectacle" in order to expose, contemplate, and subvert the woman's place within contemporary and historical spectacles. While surgery implies corrective measures, I hope not only to reflect reactive responses to the spectacle, but also to provide proactive reconstructions of the woman as spectacle.

**Within your works, how does the combination of Renaissance, early American formal portraiture and references to television programs such as "Toddlers in Tiaras" impact your visual intent?**

I intend to show the perpetuated attempts to control female corporeality through the use of spectacle. Popularized reality television series such as "Toddlers in Tiaras" broadcast mothers altering their young daughters in order to conform to society's beauty standards, ultimately turning their children into a spectacle themselves. By reconstructing the girl's body image with fake teeth, dyed hair extensions, spray tans, and more, the mother reinforces ideal beauty standards that are passed down through generations. This often perpetuates modes of excessive self-observation within the girl.



My work emerges from a conjunction of realism with surrealism, presenting overly dramatized theatrical scenes. These large-scale charcoal drawings are highly influenced by the Freudian uncanny, where the familiar and foreign converge. Each piece strives to create a unique environment for the audience, where cognitive dissonance is enhanced through the paradoxical flux between attraction and intimidation. The work offers a glimpse into ambiguous narratives of femininity, which positions the audience as voyeur.

This series is stylistically influenced by Caravaggio and Artemisia Gentileschi. The aesthetics of detailed rendering and dramatic lighting combine with the engaging gaze of the figures to draw the viewer close; while the disturbing subject matter and surreal juxtaposition of imagery create a sense of unease. By formulating ideas derived from imagery commonly used throughout art history, my recent work appropriates Classical religious and mythological compositions in order to create contemporary Neo-classical allegories that emphasize the female figure. Each piece focuses on a different issue surrounding womanhood that I believe is relevant in today's society. I aim to raise questions regarding psycho-social power dynamics and controlled corporeality through the investigation of domesticity and reproduction. I am interested in how the image of the woman's body can be presented as both abject and object: simultaneously signifying male fear and desire. Laura Mulvey, a preeminent British feminist film theorist and professor in the Film, Media and Cultural Studies Department at Birkbeck University of London stated, "the look, often pleasurable in form, can be threatening in content, and it is woman as representation/image that crystallizes this paradox." I hope to engender new compelling ways of looking and new subversive ways of seeing the female figure.



Clockwise from top left: *The Heiress 1*, 2014, charcoal and soft pastel on paper, 50x38 in.; *The Heiress 2*, 2014, charcoal and soft pastel on Paper, 38x50 in.; *The Heiresses*, 2014, charcoal and soft pastel on paper, 38 x 50 in.

Within *The Heiress* series I depict young girls trapped within this hand-me-down ideal. The jewelry represents femininity as a harness. The mask like structure is meant to represent the absurdity of such performances and displays of beauty.

However, the young girls I have depicted are rendered with confidence. While their body language suggests their obedient nature, their facial expression suggests that the viewer should instead obey them. They are shown within a contemplation of their current situation. The girls offer a returning gaze, as if to acknowledge their potential power within femininity that is slowly protruding from underneath the constructed concealment.

#### **How do your works examine the aspect of control and what is the fate of the individuals depicted?**

My work examines specific attempts to control feminine corporeality. For example, *Lamaze* from 2013, specifically attempts to reveal the hospital's attempts to control maternal corporeality. This piece strives to question the C-section rate that is rapidly rising in American culture. If the hospital can convince a woman to schedule a C-section out of convenience, the hospital ultimately makes more money. Originally, the caesarean section was

developed as an emergency procedure and is slowly developing into a popular birthing method. While many C-sections are used to save lives, these scheduled C-sections can be dangerous to the health of the Mother and particularly harmful to the development of the fetus.

*Lamaze* is a Neo-classical rendition of the biblical narrative and paintings of *The Annunciation Scene*. I wanted to draw a parallel between women's current concerns regarding the religious institutions attempt to control reproductive rights and the hospitals overwhelming attempt to control reproductive decision making processes.

The individuals depicted do not have a particular fate assigned to their existence. To quote contemporary artist Wangchi Mutu, "The woman is in a constant state of becoming, changing, and surviving." I intend for the images to start a conversation while leaving enough ambiguity for further contemplation.

**Michael Beam, Exhibitions and Collections**  
**Interview with the artist conducted in April, 2014.**

# Elizabeth Lillian LaBarge

Liza LaBarge was born in Potsdam, NY in 1990. She received a Bachelor of Fine Arts with a minor in Creative Arts Therapy from the State University of New York at Potsdam in 2012. Her large-scale charcoal drawings are constructed through observational realism in conjunction with surrealism. The work focuses primarily on issues surrounding femininity while incorporating art historical references and psychoanalysis to depict highly dramatized theatrical scenes. LaBarge is currently completing her education, with a 2014 Master of Fine Arts degree from the State University of New York at Buffalo, NY.

[lizalabarge.com](http://lizalabarge.com)

## Education

**2014** Master of Fine Arts, Visual Studies program, State University of New York at Buffalo, NY

**2012** Bachelor of Fine Art, State University of New York at Potsdam, NY

## Awards and Honors

### 2012

*Best of State University of New York, New York State Museum, Honorable Mention, Albany, NY*

Inducted Member, Presidential Scholars Program at the State University of New York at Potsdam, Potsdam, NY

### 2011

Inducted Member, Kappa Pi, International Honorary Art Fraternity, Cleveland, MS

Edrington Scholarship, State University of New York at Potsdam, NY

*Best of State University of New York, New York State Museum, Best of Show, Albany, NY*

### 2010

Inducted Member, Phi Kappa Phi, Honor Society, Baton Rouge, LA

Canfield Scholarship Recipient, State University of New York at Potsdam, NY

### 2009

Inducted Member, Phi Eta Sigma, National Honor Society, Bowling Green, KY

### 2008

Wing-Bishop Scholarship Recipient-Norwood-Norfolk Central

## Professional Experience

### 2013

Instructor of Record for Figure Drawing, State University of New York at Buffalo, NY  
Instructor of Record for Concepts in Drawing, State University of New York at Buffalo, NY

Art Specialist at Happyland Summer Day Camp, Amherst, NY

### 2012

Teaching Assistant for Foundations of Drawing, State University of New York at Potsdam, NY

Visual Art Instructor for Creative Arts Camp, State University of New York at Potsdam, NY

Instructor of Record for Concepts in Drawing, State University of New York at Buffalo, NY

### 2011

Teaching Assistant for Foundations of Drawing, State University of New York at Potsdam, NY

## Selected Exhibitions

### 2013

*Tell Me I'm Pretty*, University at Buffalo Center for the Arts, New York State University at Buffalo, NY  
*Twisted Fairy Tales*, Into the Woods Gallery, Dania Beach, FL  
CHOICE, Arc Gallery, San Francisco, CA

### 2012

*Best of State University of New York, New York State Museum, Albany, NY*  
*BFA Show, Bachelor of Fine Art Thesis Exhibition*, Gibson Gallery, Potsdam, NY  
*Nor'Easter*, Hi-Temp, Buffalo, NY

### 2011

*Best of State University of New York, New York State Museum, Albany, NY*  
*Art Attack*, Gibson Gallery, Potsdam, NY  
*State University of New York Student Art Exhibition*, University Plaza, Albany, NY

### 2010

*Art Attack*, Gibson Gallery, Potsdam, NY  
*State University of New York Student Art Exhibition*, University Plaza, Albany, NY  
**2009**  
*Draw Me In*, Creative Spirit, Potsdam, NY  
**2008**  
*Art Attack*, Gibson Gallery, Potsdam, NY

## Selected Bibliography

Dougher, Colleen. "Arterpillar." arterpillar.blogspot.com, May 24, 2013.  
Farallo, Lee. "Slipstream 33" Slipstream Press, Issue 33, 2013.

*INDA 8*: Manifest Press, Cincinnati, OH. 2013. (In Progress)

Kelly, Geoff. *Art Voice*, Vol. 12, N. 13, March 28, 2013.

*The Love Book*: State University of New York, Potsdam Advancement Office, Potsdam, NY. 2013.

Zuckerman, Steven and Anastasia Sultz. "What Emerges When Truth and Fiction Meet." *SUBSTANCE* magazine, Vol. 1, N. 1, May 2013.

## Exhibition Checklist

*Adam & Eve: Evolution*, 2012, charcoal on paper, 60 x 60 in.

*The Annunciation*, 2013, charcoal and soft pastel on Paper, 60x102 in.

*The Beheading*, 2013, charcoal on paper, 72x56 in.

*Framed*, 2013, charcoal on paper, 56x42 in.

*The Heiress 1*, 2014, charcoal and soft pastel on paper, 50 x 38 in.

*The Heiress 2*, 2014, charcoal and soft pastel on Paper, 38x50 in.

*The Heiresses*, 2014, charcoal and soft pastel on paper, 38 x 50 in.

*Lamaze*, 2013, charcoal and soft pastel on paper, 86 x 56 in.

*Mother & Child*, 2013, charcoal on Paper, 40 x 66 in.

*Tested*, 2013, charcoal on paper, 52 x 46 in.



Artists of the Buffalo/Niagara Region

The museum's Tops Gallery—dedicated to the exhibition of work by local and regional artists—presents the **TopSpin** series. **TopSpin** features a broad range of visual expressions, varied in media as well as message, and focuses mainly on new and emerging artists.

**TopSpin** is made possible through the generous Support of Tops Friendly Markets, LLC.



*Elizabeth Lillian LaBarge: Surgery of the Spectacle* is made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

Catalog design: JCharlier Communication Design



**CASTELLANI ARTMUSEUM**  
OF NIAGARA UNIVERSITY  
[www.castellaniartmuseum.org](http://www.castellaniartmuseum.org)

### Museum and Shop

Niagara University, NY 14109-1938  
716.286.8200 fax: 716.286.8289

Tuesday to Saturday  
11:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.  
Sunday, 1:00-5:00 p.m.  
Docent tours available upon request.  
Call 716.286.8200 for additional information.

### Castellani Art Museum at the Falls

Conference Center Niagara Falls

101 Old Falls Street

Niagara Falls, NY 14303

716.286.8200 fax: 716.286.8289

Monday to Friday,  
10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.



Liza LaBarge will be exhibiting supplementary work at Indigo Gallery, Buffalo, NY. Her exhibition VENAT will be on view May 2-May 31, 2014. For more information call 716-984-9572.