

Using Glass To Explore Strength & Fragility: Interview With Silvia Levenson



13 lbs of love. 2018, Kilnformed glass 10,6"x 7" x 5,9" each one. Photo Marco Del Comune, courtesy Punto sull'Arte Gallery.

Originally from Buenos Aires, Argentina, Silvia Levenson immigrated to Italy in 1981, during the “disappearances” of the Dirty War . She explore daily interpersonal relationships through installations and objects that state firmly what is usually felt or whispered. Her work is centralized on this unspeakable space, which is oftentimes so small, located between what we can see and what we feel and use glass to reveal those things that are normally hidden.

Join us in conversation the artist tells us about the hardships of her past, her experience emigrating, and why using glass as a material is the perfect way to convey her message in her art. Plus, Silvia shares with us a meaningful encounter with artist Louise Bourgeois and how it shaped her outlook and life path.



Something is wrong, 2006, detail of installation. Photo Natalia Saurin, courtesy Tutsek Foundation. Germany.

Your work is undeniably feminine, but with an edge, with each piece having an unexpected detail of harshness or violence. Can you talk about this element of your work? What aspects of the female experience do you hope to bring to light?

In my work, I use objects to enquire and say aloud what is usually felt or whispered. I explore this unspeakable space sometimes so small and so big, located between what we can see and what we guess, and in this process I show what is usually hidden under the rugs. Being a woman in our society can be uncomfortable and sometimes dangerous. I try to bring to light this contradictions and I use glass as a magnifying lens.

We were raised to be good girls, like Cinderella—the marginalized girl who had solved all her economic, housing, and social advancement problems thanks to her marriage to the prince. In fact, in my version of Cinderella's shoes, I added a copper nail to evidence my doubts about it.



Until Death do us part. 2000. Kilnformed glass, 13,7" x 9,8 " x9,8". Museum of Sforzesco Castle, Milan. Italy.

Your art is part domestic object, part social justice. What life experience has influenced the messages behind your work?

I am a woman, emigrant and Latina. I had to emigrated from Argentina to Italy during the military dictatorship in 1980. My aunt and two of my cousins were killed during those years when 30,000 people disappeared. So, I had experienced what a lack of justice means. I had to emigrate and start a different life in a different country and I think this comes out in my work.

On the other hand, my mom came from a country family with an openly male-dominated culture. As a child, I witnessed violence against women and girls and this is something you never forget.

In the past, I was very reluctant to talk about my private life, but something happened in 2008. I was so lucky to visit Louise Bourgeois's studio in New York and I remember that when she saw the pictures of my works concerning childhood, she asked me, did you have a difficult infancy? I felt that I couldn't answer her in a neutral tone with something like "as an artist, I explore the mechanisms of childhood." Not to Louise Bourgeois, since in her work private life and art were intimately united. In some way, she makes me find a new way of speaking about the connection betwixt my art and my own life.

I love your use of glass—a material that can be very strong, yet also fragile. It's a material that is all around us and you use it in such a unique way. Can you talk about your decision to use this material as the primary medium in your work?

I love the short circuits that happens when I use glass. On one hand, glass is a beautiful material, but we also know that can be fragile, exploding in thousands of tiny pieces and it can hurt us. So, it's the ideal material for speaking about the ambiguity of human relationships.





Strange Little Girl # 8, 2015. 47" x 25" x 25", Kilnformed glass, textile. Photo Marco Del Comune.

I love your series *Daily Life*, which reminds me of the incredible fur-covered cup and spoon by the celebrated Meret Oppenheim. What female artists do you find the most inspiring?

Of course I love Meret Oppenheim's work, she is so inspiring! Furthermore, I love the work of Louise Bourgeois, Doris Salcedo, Mona Hautoum, Ana Mendieta, Eva Hess, and Francesca Woodman . Now I realize that I love artists that has or had a fluid national identity since they travelled or emigrated. I feel that all those female artists invite us to enter a space where their own experiences and social views open our eyes and hearts and cancel the distance between us and their time. I admire the mix of social engagement and esthetics that are the basis of all their works.



Tea Time is back. 2019. Kilnformed glass, 20" x 8" x 7". Photo Marco Del Comune, courtesy Rofa Projects.

What has been the biggest challenge you have had to overcome as an artist?

I don't have a formal education in art or glass. I studied as a graphic designer and for years I experienced impostor syndrome. I got married at 16 years old and my daughter Natalia was born when I was 19. On top of that I was doing, there was political activity against the dictatorship until I emigrated to Italy in 1980. When I was 23 years old, my son Emiliano was born. Let's say that my life was not normal for those years.

By the way, some years later, I was showing my work in museums and galleries and I felt I didn't have the attributions for being an artist and sell my work. After some years, I understood that as an artist I was moving in the direction of the unknown and in this place no one cares about where you come from.



Little Cinderella. 2005. 3,1" x 6" x 7", Kilnformed glass, copper nail. Photo Paolo Sacchi.

Christina Nafziger

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I am a Lady. 2000, Kilnformed glass/ safety glass, 11,81" x 10" x 3,1". Photo Cristiano Vasalli.

