

agnès b.

**Selma Selman** *You have no idea*

February 5 – March 19, 2017

Opening night with the artist: Saturday, February 4 (6-8pm)

agnès b. Galerie Boutique

50 Howard Street, New York, NY 10013

#### Curator's Statement

I met Selma Selman for the first time in the Duplex 100m2 gallery in Sarajevo in 2013. Artist Mladen Miljanovic had organized a gallery visit for his students from the Banja Luka Art Academy. All students showed me their art portfolios; I still remember all of them, but I was particularly impressed by a young and very promising artist named Selma Selman. I didn't know how yet, but I was already sure that I was going to do my best to support her. In 2014 Selma Selman was a finalist for the Zvono exhibition award in Duplex 100m2, organized by the Sarajevo Center for Contemporary Art. I was not surprised when she finally won the award. She then moved to the USA for a residency art program where she had new exciting opportunities. Almost three years later, Selma Selman is still living in the USA, where she is a Transmedia MFA candidate, and professor at Syracuse University, in Syracuse, New York.

Later in 2015, I presented some of her artworks at the Budapest Art fair; in 2016 I invited Selma to be part of the collective exhibition "Conquer the Beauty" in the "Good Children Gallery" in New Orleans. I am really pleased to work again with Selma Selman for her solo show at the agnès b. Galerie Boutique in New York. It is Selma Selman's first solo show in New York and it is conceived as a portrait of the artist dealing with ideas of prejudice, survival, self-emancipation and collective freedom. The exhibition will present the work "Paintings on metal," a project consisting of paintings made on different kind of metal pieces started in 2013 and is still in process. Selma Selman belongs to the Roma community in Bihac; she has always had a very personal relation with metal, since her family is living from the proceeds of collecting and selling it.

Roma people are the biggest minority in Europe where they face constant discrimination and exclusion from the world. Roma, in their language means "Human." However, by most of Europe, the Roma are known as Gypsies. The inherent universality of the Roma is ironically obscured with notions of stealing, begging, dirtiness and a host of other negative attributes.

As a personal diary, Selma Selman portrays her family and community life on metal pieces found in the streets: self-portraits, family scenes with her and her mother, portraits of all relatives but also a painting of a van Mercedes Benz. The paintings that will be on display represent something intimate, but they also speak of her family's struggle to survive. There is the beauty of the family life but also the brutality of life in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the Roma community without legal status. For the local government, the Roma community simply does not exist! The video "Do not look into my gypsy eyes" will also be part of the exhibition. A beautiful woman is warning us to be careful: gypsy women can be dangerous, they can put a spell on you, they can eat you, one never knows. In this video performance the artist is fighting against a common stereotype connected with Roma women.

It is a way for Selma Selman to say between the lines that she wants to be free, to decide things for herself, to do whatever she wants even if her family wants her to be married. It is about her freedom, but also about the freedom of all women.

The exhibition will also show some of the artist's portrait photography. Closely linked to the video "Do not look into my Gypsy eyes," the exhibition presents the photograph "Balcan," a black and white portrait of the artist proudly posing, looking directly at the viewer. The context of this work is the representation of the female body as something that is most of the time hyper-sexualized. The aim is to portray a female body that was affected by traditional influences from

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The other two photographs titled "Mercedes 310" is a portrait of the artist in a white dress in front of the Mercedes truck of her father. The Mercedes truck refers to the stereotype of the relation between Roma community and the Mercedes brand; in the case of Selma it represents a vital element of the Selman family who works with iron and metal to make a living. The contrast between the artist posing like a model for a fashion magazine photo shoot, or for a wedding, deliberately links how she's taking care of the truck and her own safety; the truck is like a "cocoon" and represents how she survived during her childhood and how her family still survives today.

During the exhibition opening, the artist will present the performance "You have no idea." Very simply, in a "crescendo" move until her voice breaks, the artist will infinitely repeat the sentence "You have no idea." The exhibition will include a selection of artworks produced from 2013 until today. It will give a "picture" about Selman and the topics she deals with such as ideas of prejudice, freedom and emancipation together with her Roma background. As Selman nicely said, "Through my work, I hope to break down prejudice against Roma, as my art does not focus only on Roma, but on all human beings."

Without doubt, the development of her body of art works needs to be followed, I'm already looking forward to it!

Pierre Courtin, Sarajevo, January 2, 2017

agnès b. Galerie Boutique  
50 Howard Street, New York, NY 10013

Gallery hours are Monday – Saturday (11am – 7pm) and Sunday (12pm – 6pm)  
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