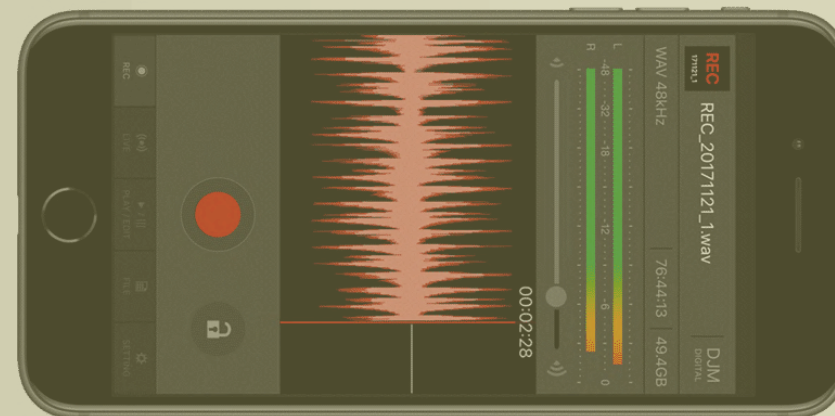


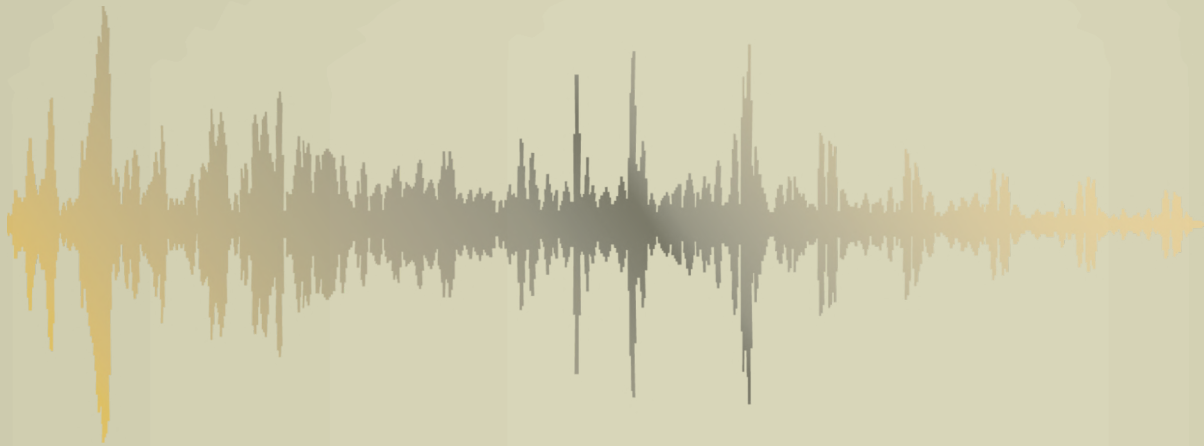
ARTIST TO ARTIST

Photographer Clare Steele and Painter/Videaste Lala Drona reflect on what it means to be an artist today.

Photography by Clare Steele
Transcription by Lala Drona



Clare Steele sets up her camera and tripod in a dimly-lit Airbnb on the outskirts of Paris. The walls sparsely decorated in unoriginal inspirational quotes and IKEA-style basics. Lala Drona sits on a new couch, feeling a type of discomfort only found in newness. She studies notes scribbled on computer paper. Clare sets the timer on her camera, Lala presses record on her smartphone, and the two artists freeze time together.



L.D.: Hello. Lala Drona here, interviewing Clare Steele. Clare, can you describe what type of artist you are?

C.S.: Predominantly I'm a photographer but in a sense I work with documentary, but not in a traditional way... in a more conceptual art way. So, long form bodies of work, heavily researched, with an idea that I'm either passionate about or can relate to. I research a topic that I am interested in, and I go on and I make photos about that.

My name is Clare Steele. I'm here interviewing Lala Drona. Lala, could you describe to me what kind of artists you are?

L.D.: I'm a visual artist. I work predominantly in painting and video art. I work mostly under the theme of "women in the digital age." That covers topics in online relationships, the acts that we commit online on women's bodies, and how those acts online can

influence the real world...for example how our acts online can influence how we treat people in the real world.

C.S.: What is it like to be an artist nowadays with social media?

L.D.: I think with social media everyone feels FOMO, the fear of missing out, where you compare yourself constantly to other artists. So I think artists do this too, except for we're just always looking at other artists and what they achieve etc., etc. What do you think?

C.S.: The Internet can bring us together more. You can research and understand other people's art better, but then it's also made it more competitive in a sense. But you're only ever seeing the good. You never see the struggles of being an artist because no one wants to portray that on the Internet, which is interesting.

L.D.: And you can also use the Internet

and technology as a tool to your benefit. I like to take images of artists whom I respect, save their images, analyze them, and then attempt the techniques that I like. I try reproducing them myself and learn from that. And the Internet is great because it enables us to build artist communities. For example, it's a big part of our story. --just some background:: Myself, Lala Drona (France), Clare Steele (Australia) and Ezra Enzo (USA), we all met each other in Spain at an artist residency and ever since, we have kept in contact through digital media--leaving voice messages to each other.

C.S.: Yeah, like being a collective: being able to chat from around the world and get ideas, and understand

other people's perspective. It's amazing. I think it brings us together and of course, the Internet also brings us apart. There's good and bad as in everything. It's insane to think that's the way the world is: We are so close we're just a push of a button and you can hear someone's voice for the other side of the world and get their perspective.

L.D.: I really appreciate that we have found each other and share our different stories and perspectives from 3 different continents in real-time.

C.S.: Yes, sharing stories. Like within photography, documentaries are essentially like sharing stories, sharing people's lives and connections and ▶



feelings...and that is something easier done with the Internet. And I think Instagram itself has helped photographers a lot more than, maybe say, other artists. It's also a downfall as well because it's like oversaturation of the images. So then people don't put that emphasis on photography or art anymore because you can literally press of a button and see ten thousand pictures a day.

L.D.: Do you think images are losing value?

C.S.: For sure. I think photographers ourselves, we start losing value in other images because you think "oh that's an amazing photo" and then 2 seconds later, "oh, that's amazing



photo." So then, you just see so many images you can't wholeheartedly appreciate a great image because you can flip past it so quickly. I think the average person looks at an image for seven seconds max. And that's whether it's on the screen or on the wall. It's interesting because you want people to slow down and maybe not see as many images so that they can actually process and understand how our image actually makes them feel. That's not going to happen anytime soon.

L.D.: There's so many factors that are contributing to the depreciation of art images. The Art Fair explosion that's going on. There are so many art pieces to see. Even in a museum format, you don't have enough time to fully appreciate and digest an image.

C.S.: Yeah, especially with art fairs. There's just too much going on.

L.D.: That's actually why I've decided to paint only in grayscale. I feel like humanity needs a break from all of the saturated colors and lights and that come from screens. I want to invite somebody to sit there a long time and look at it. And since I use a lot of storytelling, and some symbols in my paintings, there's already a lot there to look at and to sit with. If I were to use bright colors with all that, my paintings would just exhaust already exhausted people.

C.S.: I think like that's what art should be about. It's like returning. Like a

good book or a good film. Every time you rewatch it, reread it, every time you look at a painting or look at a picture again, you should get something new out of it. Returning gives you that sense of gaining more knowledge but you're also more deeply understanding what the piece is trying to say, or how it relates to you. An artist is always going to have a reason or story behind their work, but it might trigger you in a completely different way.

L.D.: I like your idea of returning regarding the viewer. Also, that's why



From series Descendants, Clare Steele

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within one's art practice, whether you think of the viewer or not, the viewer's experience is integral to the creation of the piece. Without them looking at the art there's nothing there; there's nothing to interpret, so I think in our practice it's very very important to think about the experience of the viewer and maybe even play with that to create a new image or a new experience or something. On another topic, why do you think it's important for women to be creating art right now?

C.S.: I think we haven't dominated it

ever, so it's always been the stories of men. Art has always been male dominated, especially white men. So, now in a ever changing world where there are still so many social pressures on women but less, in a sense that we can do art and be artists and not be ridiculed as much as in the past. So, right now, we need to be getting those stories out there, getting those ideas out there, getting the way women see the world, and especially point of views from women from all different backgrounds and experiences; they need to be celebrated. They need to see that ▶



From series Descendants, Clare Steele



Video still, La Politesse, Lala Drona

bringing women to the forefront of art makes it better, diversifies it, and is more relatable to everyone. It is only going to help. So, women's art should be even pushed to the forefront at the moment, because we've spent so many years in the dark. Would you say it's harder as a woman in the art industry?

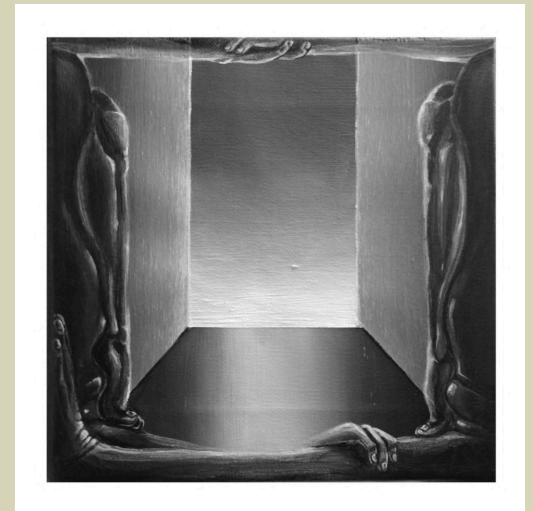
L.D.: Oh yeah. I think that the art industry is one of the worst industries for women still to date. Of course, it's improving slowly, but it's similar to the technology industry as well. There is quite a lot of misogyny, and just

and we need to contribute to the creation of this new world that's coming in so that we have a say in our role in it. We want to be sure that we are viewed the way that we want to be viewed.

C.S.: Before, we discussed these kind of old stereotypes of the art world, where in the past, living off nothing, creating art, and being a part of a movement was easier back in the day and is easier for men. Men will just have this sense where they just "have to make it," so they'll be poor, they'll ►

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undervalue of women and of our ideas in general. As you were saying, it's very important to put women at the forefront. I think it's important for women to just create in general--the reason is because right now, we're living in a very interesting time where we have the Internet, where we're creating this new digital world, we are creating a new order. Our voices have another form to be heard through. I think we're very lucky, and not just "lucky," as we've had people in the past to work really hard to get women to where they are today, but I think we need to take advantage of this moment where we are being heard



Painting: Female Frame, Lala Drona

live on the streets, they'll do whatever to make it, where with women, it's ingrained in us to be a bit more protective: have a house, have food. Obviously if women have children they take on a massive amount of the mental load of bringing those children up or they just bring them up by themselves. Therefore, a lot of women can't just "make it or break;" they can't not have a support system; they can't just go to the street and go hungry.

L.D.: Not to mention, even if women don't have to look after anyone, the consequences for women on the streets are very different than for a men on the streets, like the sex trade, other violence. Of course, these things could happen to a man too, but it's

almost a given for women. The consequences of sexual assault or sex work on the street are also different because women can get pregnant. So this whole romanticized view of the starving artist willing to live on the streets for their work, has been an unlikely model for women.

C.S.: Being an artist today is just different than how it used to be. In the sense that everything costs more now, even art supplies. You need a computer. That's a couple of thousand dollars. A smart phone. E-mailing: that, 40 years ago, wasn't a thing.

L.D.: That's why the whole "bohemian artist" stereotype is just over. It's a simulation of a former time.

[At Arles Photography Festival] 80 percent of the artists showing were men...and this is a progressive festival. Quotas need to be there for a reason.

And it's dangerous to pretend we're living in those times now because what did the former generations do? Many hit the "fuck-it button" and that's why we're here where we are today with all the issues with the environment,, overconsumption and decadence. We should be doing the complete opposite. We should be intentional with our art. That's why I'm over the whole toxic bohemian artists thing, and I think it's time to create a new stereotype.

C.S.: Yeah, and put that value back in art...or has there ever been value in art? I don't know, but I think it's just people want to feel and look cool or be cultured but they don't want to pay for it. Which is interesting because people would pay for music, or people pay to go to gigs, but would get upset if they had to buy a beer at an art show. And that money isn't even going towards the artist, it's just keeping this face kind of running

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C.S.: It's the whole idea that a ten million dollar painting is only worth

ten million dollars because someone with ten million dollars would pay it. And half the time, it's not the artist selling it. And when you think about the whole art market, don't quote me on this, but out of all the money in the art market, maybe 90 percent of it is shared between 100 or so artists, and half of them are dead probably.

L.D.: And how many of them are women? (laughs)

C.S.: Yeah. Like one (laughs). And then the rest of the 10 percent of money in the art world is shared between the hundreds of thousands of people scrambling over it. The amount of women displayed in museums and that, is probably between 1 to 5 percent. Maybe not even. And then I know at Arles, which is a progressive photography festival; last year they got a heap of flak because 80 percent of the artists showing were men...and this is a progressive festival. Quotas need to be there for a reason. It's the same with having female only shows: wish we didn't need them, but so many people don't even think about making it equal. They just think "these are all my mates" or "these are all what I perceive as good, so I'm only going to ▶





Painting: *Destiny and Doom*, Lala Drona



From series *Descendants*, Clare Steele

show them." And the majority are always men. So, check it if you run a festival. Make sure you always have 50 percent, and that you include people of color and other minorities. Do better.

L.D.: Do you think there's an art movement going on right now?


C.S.: There's always one going on. Maybe it's "the digital art movement." I know photography is huge, and people can make a livelihood out of it. Even if you're making art photography that's not necessarily commercial. It's interesting because we're overshadowed by the 50s 60s, like especially in painting. You go into the museums and you always see

Rothkos, De Koonings... all those massive artists from that time, and they're still overshadowing what we're doing now.


L.D. My theory is that our times won't be defined by an art movement. What defines our period of time is the the art market--the boom of the art market. How grand and exaggerated it is. Looking at other movements, the way artists create new movements is by rejecting the former. So, I think the only way that we're going to have a new movement for art is if we reject the art market in some way or another, or change it, or even create something new. ■



Lala Drona (b. 1988) is a Venezuelan-American painter and videaste, born in Denver, Colorado. After receiving a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Colorado, Lala Drona has since published and exhibited her work from North America to South America, and from Western Europe to Asia. Lala Drona uses painting, video and writing to probe into identity and women's bodily experience in the context of the digital age, all media combining together to create a surrealistic and dystopian universe. She is currently based in Paris, France. To see more of her work:

 www.laladrona.com

Clare Steele (b.1994) lives and works in Melbourne, Australia. Through her practice she seeks to construct a contemporary narrative from people's emotional and physical connections to place and each other. In 2015, Clare graduated with a Bachelor of Photography from Photography Studies College, winning the Award for Photojournalism/Documentary Photography.. Clare's work has been widely exhibited both locally and internationally and published online and in print. She is currently based in Melbourne, Australia. To see more of her work:

 <http://www.steele-photo.com/>