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A Dick Joke Made By A Woman: On Fatebe, The Character Created By Artist Ebecho Muslimova

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Ebecho Muslimova Fatebe Asparagus Pee, 2017 Acrylic on canvas 54h x 42w in COURTESY OF EBECHO MUSLIMOVA AND MAGENTA PLAINS, NEW YORK

Fatebe, the character who stars in an exhibition of drawings and paintings by Ebecho Muslimova that opens tonight at Magenta Plains, is a slob. She is a feminist icon. She is ridiculous. She is a dick joke writ with vaginas. She is joyful, she is gluttonous, and she is body proud.



Ebecho Muslimova Fatebe Rack, 2017 Acrylic on canvas 54h x 42w in COURTESY OF EBECHO MUSLIMOVA AND MAGENTA PLAINS, NEW YORK

She emerged while Muslimova was an undergraduate at Cooper Union, as "an excuse to entertain my friends. This is what art students do. They get together, they get drunk, and they draw pictures of each other."

Fatebe takes her name from Muslimova's abbreviated first name. She is Fat-Ebe. She is uncouth. She is a comment on vanity. She is a low-brow concern. The fact that she is fat is none of your business. "I tell people, she's already an entity, she just happens to be a bigger weight than other people," Muslimova said. "It's not a big deal. It's just a part of her attribute. It's ok to be big. It's not a giant statement."

What started out as a joke became all that Muslimova could create. A sculptress by training, she stopped making objects, and started just drawing Fatebe. Fatebe with a vagina like a hot air balloon; Fatebe making a circular hole in a wooden floor with her big dumb head.

"Whether I was thinking of it consciously or not, I wanted to own the dick joke," Muslimova says. "All of these boys around me had the privilege of making boner jokes, and making boner funny art. I didn't see that being done by women — the back of the bathroom doodle type of freedom."

Consumed by Fatebe, Muslimova was unsure if she could ever have a career in the art world. She preemptively gave one up. When she graduated, she took a job making prints used on mass-market pajamas — a job she still does today. "I draw flowers by day, and vaginas at night," she laughed.



Ebecho Muslimova Fatebe Wheelbarrow Unicycle, 2017 Ink on paper 9h x 12w in COURTESY OF EBECHO MUSLIMOVA AND MAGENTA PLAINS, NEW YORK

Little did she know, but her career was just starting. Her Fatebe images are skillful, and funny. They emerged at a time when women finally seemed to be breaking through the prison of a certain type of representation. "Vaginas are so serious," Muslimova told me. "They're either something so furious, this origin of the world thing, or they're sexy. But what if it's just like — the same way men twiddle the thing that protrudes out of them. What if you owned that? Fatebe is not ashamed."



Ebecho Muslimova Fatebe Self Possession, 2017 Acrylic and gouache on canvas 60h x 42w in COURTESY MAGENTA PLAINS

In the exhibition at Magenta Plains, Muslimova is showing Fatebe paintings for the first time — previously, the character only existed in drawings. The work draws a wealth of connections. They resemble racist cartoons from the 1930s, the drawings of Roger Hargreaves, Japanese woodblock prints, and even the paintings of Tahitian women by Paul Gauguin. They are vulgar, but they are also beautiful, and arresting.

"The paintings work like one liners," Muslimova says. "A big concern of mine is that they are read really fast. You might not get the statement I'm making, but you get a statement really fast."



Ebecho Muslimova Untitled (Jar), 2017 Acrylic and gouache on canvas 12h x 10w in COURTESY OF EBECHO MUSLIMOVA AND MAGENTA PLAINS, NEW YORK

The titles, Muslimova, are deadpan; but they are also nonsensical, derived from word associations. *Untitled (Jar)*, 2017, which shows Fatebe impaled on a stack of coins, is a "painting I made about getting fucked by money," Muslimova told me. *Fatebe Asparagus Pee*, 2017 shows Fatebe with her mouth and ears full of asparagus, straddling a pyramid of toilet paper. "I felt very humiliated making this whole show this whole time," Muslimova told me of the work. "I wanted one painting where I was literally pissing myself. I wanted to do it in a way so that it works as a kind of scratch and sniff in understanding."

Muslimova is only at the beginning of her career, but she has a natural instinct towards staying true to herself that most people only gain from decades of failing. Fatebe, she believes, is not the kind of character that makes an artist into an art star; but she doesn't care because Fatebe comes out of her cleanly, without struggle. Fatebe is a compulsion, and she is a beacon.

"Whatever I need to be say can be said through her," Muslimova says. "If I can't figure out a way to say it through Fatebe, then the statement isn't thought out well enough."



Ebecho Muslimova Fatebe 2017 Show, 2017 Ink on paper 10.50h x 17.75w in COURTESY OF EBECHO MUSLIMOVA AND MAGENTA PLAINS, NEW YORK

It might not be your first choice to go see an exhibition that features a character with sagging breasts that she dips into the brown murk of a flooded basement; but go. I get why Muslimova is fascinated by her character. Once you get a glimpse, you can't tear your eyes away.

Ebecho Muslimova is open at Magenta Plains through February 11, 2018 concurrently with an exhibition of paintings by Zach Bruder.



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Brienne Walsh received her BA in art history from Brown University in 2004. She has worked in the art world for over a decade, first as a gallerina, and then as an art critic. [Read More](#)