



## Ebecho Muslimova

By Walter Scott  
Photography Emiliano Granado

Ebecho Muslimova and Walter Scott have never met but they share a habit. Both artists ground their drawing-centered practices in a Dr. Jekyll-like (or, perhaps more contemporarily, Anna Delvey-like) activity of embellishing and maintaining an alter ego. These alter egos, Fatebe and Wendy, respectively, act almost as scouting parties sent out ahead into the dangerous 'thick of their creators' most embarrassing fears and desires. Muslimova and her foil, Fatebe, landed their first institutional solo show this in an exhibition curated by Rosario Guiraldes at the Drawing Center in New York.

On the occasion of the show, the Brooklyn-based Muslimova agreed to delve into Fatebe's world with fellow alter-ego tripper Scott, who like Muslimova swerves the line between fine art and cartoon. Together the two artists find common ground in their love of *Roger Rabbit*, the clarity that comes with the sting of embarrassment, and the undeniable intelligence of being kind to yourself and others.

**WALTER SCOTT:** What's interesting to me about Fatebe is that she never seems to be at the mercy of anybody. The situations that she's in are of her own making. There never seems to be another figure. She is always performing these things for herself.

**EBECHO MUSLIMOVA:** She's performing for herself and also for me, but she's also always thinking of the perfect angle because he knows she's being seen.

**SCOTT:** So she is still performing but for a viewer.

**MUSLIMOVA:** Exactly.

**SCOTT:** I realized that the original desire to create Wendy, my alter-ego that performs all of these acts of embarrassment and mortification, was my own desire to somehow ratify or turn my own humiliation into something else. There is something weirdly empowering about being able to humiliate yourself publicly, but also have control over it.

MUSLIMOVA: Creating an alter ego character that then you can place in these compromised situations is the ultimate control issue. You have to literally invent another self to control.

SCOTT: Yes and that's what's fascinating. It's the flickering between what seems to be images of lack of control and what it actually is at the same time, this hyper controlled act. I think it has a lot to do with the conundrum of the artist that we're always toying the line between hopeless abandon and tight self control. We go in between these spaces all the time. It is a productive tension that I see in your work.

MUSLIMOVA: [Fatebe] is a solution to a problem in many ways including the problem of the image. She solves whatever situation she's in. The beginning, middle, end and climax all in one.

SCOTT: I'm thinking about prickles and goo philosophy of which I know very little about. It's a quote by Alan Watts and it's about two kinds of being. Prickly people are precise, rigorous, and logical and goo people are vague and creative. I feel like literally and figuratively Fatebe is goo and that it's probably a good idea to have more goo in the system because her gooey body is able to, sometimes literally, envelope concepts and thereby solve them.

The situations you are putting her in seem to be also increasingly real from your early black and white drawings to these more 1-to-1 reality to fiction panels at the Drawing Center.

MUSLIMOVA: I think for me it felt like the *Roger Rabbit* effect was the best way to expand things around her without just cartooning everything.

I don't come up with the image before I start painting, so of course that translates into this kind of gerrymandered world. If reality is a little too real maybe her gooey body processes that information through collage.

SCOTT: I love that. I've been thinking a lot about *Roger Rabbit* lately. There is this scene that I posted on Instagram where the detective and Roger Rabbit are handcuffed together. And the detective is trying to saw the handcuffs off so that they could separate. And I thought it was a profound image. It resonated with me that there's this representational, cartoony world or cartoony self, and then your own self self and they're kind of intertwined and stuck together. That's why these new things that you're making resonate with me specifically, because I also feel like it's almost like the compositions were there without her.

MUSLIMOVA: Sometimes that's true but sometimes the gesture of [Fatebe's] body comes first. She's like this lock that activates in any situation.

SCOTT: She's an adhering agent. She's malleable. She operates herself like furniture. She could operate as a platform, but she also can operate as an actor. She has this way of being an object herself.

MUSLIMOVA: At the Drawing Center, it shows. I made the architectural drawings of the room panel by panel and then that was my blank piece of paper.

SCOTT: There seems to be this burgeoning interest in architecture in your work that wasn't there before. Or were you always sort of interested in these super realist looking architectural spaces?

MUSLIMOVA: I have always been, but it floated in lately. Maybe it's like the goo and the prickles thing. The intimidation of architecture appeals to me. My parents are architects. I don't know. The concreteness of structures is something that [Fatebe] can stand up against.

SCOTT: Do you ever feel like the art world is intimidating and that there's a way that Fatebe can contort herself around the art world to reveal how intimidating it is?

MUSLIMOVA: It can be very intimidating. For a long time, I didn't show Fatebe at all. The first couple years, it was like I had this sick joke with myself where I would only do this for the rest of my life. I wanted to have this weird drawing practice that no one was going to think of as art. Art school fucked me up and Fatebe was a way to own something.

SCOTT: I relate. I drew Wendy on a placemat one day because I was tired of feeling like I needed to behave in a certain way as an artist. Wendy was like the least conceptual thing I could think about doing, but it was sort of the most honest in the end.

MUSLIMOVA: That's why I started [Fatebe]. I realized you know nothing and to front like you know anything is posturing. So why not just do the thing that you know you like and humiliate it and see where that goes. It turns out to be a lot of places.

SCOTT: It gets you all the way to the Drawing Center.

MUSLIMOVA: [laughs] Yes. Fatebe reveals things to me that I can only access through the process of unlocking her.

SCOTT: Creating Fatebe is a way to examine yourself. I've looked back at volumes of Wendy and realized she's a lot wiser than I gave her credit for at the time. She actually went through a lot of shit and figured it out because she actually is very emotionally intelligent so I guess I am too.

MUSLIMOVA: As you say, Fatebe is part of my emotional intelligence. I learn about how I feel through drawing her. But I don't know if all art does, maybe it does.

SCOTT: I like the slippery territory that your work exists in where if you look at it in a feminist lens it's interesting because it's not the type of work that proposes some sort of politically progressive solution, per se. It sort of just expresses the contours of a lived experience that it's kind of solution-less, but not in a negative way. This is true with Wendy too because I never set out to create like an empowered character who had her shit together.

MUSLIMOVA: Because that's reality. I don't know anyone who has their shit together.

SCOTT: I actually find that like a lot of art that proposes itself as a solution to a political issue doesn't seem very honest.

MUSLIMOVA: Plus, what kind of solutions can we have anyway? Things are so complicated.

SCOTT: Yes. It's empowering to just create work that expresses the details of living in a problem.

MUSLIMOVA: Before you had the nerve to think that you had a solution, why don't you just get good at describing the problem?

SCOTT: For myself, I have these fictional characters and they all have different subjectivities where they all face their own issues. I have an identity that feels not fractured, but multi-faceted. And so I get to create characters that express different parts of my identity and just send them into a little pit together to communicate.

MUSLIMOVA: Ever since I began drawing Fatebe, I've been trying to also kill her off. There's been dark moments where enough is enough. You have nothing left and then I find myself making a drawing about her death and that leads me back in.

SCOTT: I'm starting to feel like I've made like a Netflix series or something where it could go on forever.

MUSLIMOVA: It's because they live in their own world. The more you add to the character, the more dimensional they become. And then you're just kind of a custodian to these entities. You no longer have to just water it but arrange it and clear the path for it to grow wherever.

SCOTT: I feel a little stuck because I need to write the next Wendy and there's things that I want for her. And then it makes me wonder if maybe there's things I want for myself and there's actually things in my life that need to change.

MUSLIMOVA: The closest I feel to pure misery is when I have to come up with things. I can't. The only way to make a new work is to just do it. But perhaps because you have a storyline, there is a different need.

SCOTT: I think there is a narrative quality to Fatebe too, in a way.

MUSLIMOVA: Yeah, but she's a one-liner. She has to be the set-up and the punchline in the same form. She's a bit like a standup comedian.

SCOTT: I see that. I'm remembering that piece where she's eating the asparagus and peeling. You have it all in one shot. You see an expression of both cause and effect. You see what she's eating and then you see how it affects the toilet paper. Something about like the color gradient reminds me of the act of looking at art. I feel like she's literally taking on the act of perception. Here is her body, creating a gradient on this field. It's funny that I'm looking at this ombre pattern, which is very artful, but it comes from her urine. It's confrontational at the same time as being an aesthetic gesture. There's a belligerence there. Is Fatebe angry?

MUSLIMOVA: No, she's just an innocent. She gets angry when he stubs her toe but she doesn't have baggage. Her anger is like the anger of an animal.

I would say that I don't like to draw her angry. I also don't like to hurt her and that's how I know I love her because it's not intellectual. That's the only thing that she doesn't do is get really hurt.

SCOTT: Perhaps it's also because she's so malleable. She's generous in the way that she can envelop things and then remake, reconfirm, reconstitute them just with her own body. And it's always with a child hearted openness.

MUSLIMOVA: She withstands. She's not able to be humiliated.

SCOTT: She seems like she realizes that the problem is not the problem. The resistance to the problem is the problem. And that's pretty profound. She's the water that flows around the rocks.

MUSLIMOVA: Definitely. When I'm able to be the water, my reward is her. When you're making art, it's always a condensed version of that lesson.

Published: March 19, 2021

*Ebecho Muslimova's "Scenes in the Sublevel" is on view at the Drawing Center, 35 Wooster Street, through May 23, 2021. This exhibition is organized by Rosario Guiraldes, Assistant Curator.*

*Walter Scott is an interdisciplinary artist and writer, his most recent graphic novel, "Wendy, Master of Art," was published by Drawn and Quarterly in 2020.*