

the BABEList

Artist Suzy Spence

design · new York

Art stirs our emotions, triggers our memories, provokes our thoughts, unites us all—and in the end—as simplistic as it may sound, it takes our breath away.

New York-based artist [Suzy Spence](#) acutely understood these attributes at such a formidable age. One could label her as an artistic savant.

Well, perhaps that's a bit embellished on our part (although we really do imagine Suzy as the genius child type knowing that someday she would make her mark on the world). But truthfully, Suzy knew that she would grow up to become an artist, and she stayed true to that trajectory. Always seeking inspiration, always creating and never wavering.



She is a woman of strength, perseverance, empathy, and confidence. Her career echoes this. We fell in love with Suzy's artistry the moment we laid eyes on it. Her portraits of individuals set against moody backdrops caught our eye. And her depictions of the unparalleled bond between animal and human caught our soul. Suzy and her equestrian-inspired, female experience-based art is a celebration of feminism, and possibly more so, a celebration of humanity.

And let us not fail to mention, Suzy is a total babe.

How do you start your day?

Coffee. A double coffee to be exact. I'm not somebody that skimps on myself. And after that coffee, I write in my journal. Every single day. I keep track of how I feel, and what I'm doing, both personally and professionally. I believe writing is an incredible tool for self-understanding.

What does Babes Supporting Babes mean to you?

For me, Babes Supporting Babes is about a common understanding and a common experience. There is a level of trust between us, woman to woman, human to human. This can be in any situation or experience, whether you're out riding horses in a field with other riders, sitting down and having a glass of wine with a friend or in a business setting. The idea behind Babes Supporting Babes can be as basic as simply lending a listening ear to a friend or coworker, or taking it a step further and encouraging someone to take a risk, and then applauding them every step of the way.

What makes you feel confident?

Riding horses is an incredibly confident sport and confidence builder. It's a powerful experience. I find I am most spiritual, most connected, and most confident when I am out riding horses.

Tell us about your art and how you got started.

The female experience is certainly a big theme in my work, as is equestrian culture. There's always a level of vulnerability in the women I paint, but there's also confidence and assertiveness, and the concept of taking up space. For so long in art history, whether it's a Picasso painting or something more recent, the woman is naked and there for us to enjoy her beauty.

But when I present a woman, I am presenting her from the female perspective. It could be considered sexy, but I aim to showcase the woman's own perception of who she is.

I moved to New York right after college to become an artist. I originally went to Parsons with the intent to major in fashion, but I discovered that I just really wanted to be a painter. And so I dove into the New York art world learning as much as I could. I got a studio, started working, and worked in a museum environment to better understand the culture. Before long I started exhibiting my own work. My career has been built over the trajectory of several decades now, and it has become more of a "practice" now really.

You hear a lot of painters nowadays talk about their work as a meditative practice. I have a consistent passion for art; it never waivers. But my work keeps evolving because of the attention and practice I give it.



What did 10 year old Suzy want to be when she grew up?

An artist! You should see my drawings. They are almost exactly the same as they are today. It's all women, and horses and fashion. I've always been intrigued by fashion and the equestrian influence. I actually have a flat file in my studio that contains pieces I did when I was 13 or so.

I really feel that my introduction to the New York art world was more through fashion than it was traditional art. I would watch the runway shows on cable TV as a teenager—Gaultier, Yves Saint Laurent, all of them. And for me, that became my connection to art, in addition to my mother being a painter. I've always felt I had those two streams of influence running through my veins: a background and heritage in art, combined with a personal interest in fashion, which may seem like a women's preoccupation, but in fact it is the longest standing form of female self-expression.

What was your ah-ha moment?

I've had plenty of epiphanies but I had a real one in the summer of 2016. I started to own this equestrian/feministic/riding theme in my work, treat the subject subjectively, and showcase the deep personal connection to the women I was painting. It all felt so much more sincere to me. I was painting women in riding clothes, and top hats, riding side saddle. It came from a place that was both surprising and deeply honest.

What is your favorite word?

Giddyup.



Who should everyone be following right now?

For sure @feminist. I learn something new each day.

What quality do you value most in a person?

Empathy. I think there's no better quality to have in these troubled times.

What quality do you value most in yourself?

My ability to focus and authenticity. I can be very determined and deliberate, which is helpful at work and for problem solving.

When does inspiration strike you?

Regularly! When I'm out riding horses in the countryside with friends, or while I'm at the Met looking at French painters like Matisse or Rosa Bonheur. It could be, frankly, looking at other peoples images on Instagram. I have muses from all over the world. There's so much visual information right here in my hands. @femalejockey is a favorite at the moment, for example.



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Do you have a hidden talent?

I'm really good at negotiating.

Tell us about a hurdle you've had to overcome in your career.

As an artist you have to really believe in YOUR vision. No matter what, people will always question that vision. So I've had to learn how to tune out other peoples voices, and stick with the people that have always supported me and my vision. I've lived and practiced long enough to understand that when somebody acts in that

way it has more to do with them projecting their own feelings and insecurities on me than ME and MY ART.

I use it as a lean in opportunity to discover more about that person and where they're coming from. It's extremely important to take criticism, but you cannot let other people define you. You can only learn and grow from it. As a woman, it's important to not let other people tell you who you are. You have to decide that for yourself.

What movie makes you cry-laugh?

Raising Arizona.

Vintage or New?

100% Vintage. And put 10 stars around that.

Who is/are your mentor/s and biggest supporters?

There is this woman who is a talent lawyer in Hollywood. She represents a bunch of creatives. She is an amazing force who has designed her life the way she sees it. She is a political activist, a brilliant business woman, an incredible supporter of my artwork, is involved in events featuring my pieces, and has really become a big sister/mentor to me.

She has been huge for me. Her name is Jodi, and I will leave it at that. The list of those who have supported me along the way only continues to grow. For example my gallerist Gaines who was the first to tell me "you know, I think I can sell your art." She has been there every step of the way.

I also have an incredible network of supporters in the form of my collectors, the majority of which are women. I have one client who originally came to me to commission a piece and our relationship has morphed from an environment of professional support into a budding friendship.



If you can go back in time, when and where would you go?

I think I would go back to Paris at the time Hemingway was living there. Gertrude Stein was there, during the turn of the century And I think I'd like to hang out with that crew, there in Paris, soaking it all in. But you know what? I'd also really like to go back and meet Catherine the Great! I mean, what an amazing horsewoman and all-around powerful person.

What are three things you cannot live without?

Paint, my vintage motorcycle jacket, my dog.

What advice do you have for others trying to break into the industry?

Be patient. My strongest art world relationships were built over many years, and involve trust and a mutual understanding. Be a partner to other artists and to your gallery, and your most authentic connections will be the ones that sustain you.

What would you like to be remembered for?

I think a successful artist is one that has tapped into the zeitgeist. When I'm gone, I'd like to be someone that represented some aspect of our culture.

Describe a perfect night in NYC.

It starts with dinner at [Atla](#). It's Mexican-inspired, but super innovative and modern, with fantastic lighting and even better tequila. Then I would pop across the street to an opening, or catch a cab and head to a late exhibition at the [Whitney Museum](#). And finish with a party at someone's place. Those are always the best.

What person or organization would you love to collaborate with and why?

I love to see designers like [@zadigetvoltaire](#), [@dior](#), and even [@brunettethelabel](#) collaborate with artists or organizations. I'd love to do a t-shirt or tote to support organizations like Planned Parenthood, or the next female presidential candidate, and ultimately have one of my images carry a message of strength to an expanded audience.



What is your greatest extravagance?

My red python cowboy boots from @openingceremony.

Favorite city?

Berlin.

What was your first job?

I got paid to iron dresses. I honestly went down to this clothing shop when I was 13 years old and got a job taking items out of the boxes and ironing them so they could go on hangers.

What is your most treasured possession?

A pair of vintage riding jodhpurs made in Japan lent to me by a friend, which makes them *almost* my possession...



Do you have a current artist you greatly admire?

Wangechi Mutu @wangechistudio.

Are there any evolutions you are noticing in the art world?

Museums like MOMA in NYC are completely re-considering how they present their collections. They finally woke up and realized that it's not just white men from Europe and America who have been making art. It's the most exciting development I've seen in my lifetime. It gives me hope!

If you had a warning label, what would it say?

Don't tell me no. Especially when I'm fantasizing about my ambition. In better words, don't shut me down before you at least let me try.



Keep up with Suzy Spence on Instagram: [@spenceprojects](#)

Learn more about Suzy's works by visiting [suzyspence.com](#)

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