



# Painter with a Punk (or is it New Wave?) Attitude - Liz Markus

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by Pat Rogers

If you're not bringing attitude, then maybe you want to walk away, reconsider, and then return. Paintings by Liz Markus have plenty of it so it's better to meet the work on its own terms.

In her latest series of paintings, Markus taps into the daydreams of a disenfranchised male teenager from the late seventies. Bored with everything, this imagined troublemaker-wanna-be starts doodling emblems of loud rock, fast cars, and (strangely enough) lobsters and crabs. Guess that what happens when a Heavy Metal rebel thinks of the Hamptons.

These imagined drawings are the muse used when Markus made art for her solo show "11." The title is a reference to the movie "This is Spinal Tap" - a mockumentary showing the life of an imaginary English rock band as they rise, fall, and make a comeback in over-the-top Heavy Metal panache.

Like the lifestyle portrayed in movie, the paintings play on a teenage credo of living fast and furious and leaving a beautiful corpse. Each artwork feels like it could be a possible icon found on sticker affixed to a binder or bumper or emblazoned on the front of a T-shirt.



"Ramon" by Liz Markus. Acrylic and graphite on unprimed canvas, 60 x 48 inches.



"Gulf Ford GT horizontal" by Liz Markus. Acrylic and graphite on unprimed canvas, 40 x 60 inches.

Like Warhol, Markus finds pop culture imagery is the best way to express her art. Unlike the untrained imaginary teenager, Markus channels art history and an intricate painting process into her artwork.

Markus's art typically binds three influences: the visual style of a historic male painter, pop culture

imagery, and a painting technique from the abstract expressionists that lets colors randomly mix on the canvas.

Markus's art is stain paintings made on unprimed canvas. Colors move freely across the surface and saturate the canvas as it quickly roams. The abstract expressionism painter Helen Frankenthaler (1928-2011) was an early proponent (some say the founder) of this methodology.

Markus likened the experience to painting with watercolors. The paint bleeds across unprocessed canvas causing a saturation of color. The paints can blend, create new shades or travel across untouched canvas to change the surface.

Collaborating with chance, while trying to exert some control over the path of paint, requires concentration and the ability to let the random unfold. She always has to be on top of her game when making paintings.

"It's intense," Markus said. "The color is bleeding as it's driving across the canvas. Sometimes, you wish it got stopped at a certain place but it doesn't stop where you want it to. You never know what's going to happen."



"Glitter GT" by Liz Markus. Acrylic, graphite, and glitter on unprimed canvas.

Some of the paintings in the "11" exhibition contains references to Willem deKooning (1904-1997). The works are figurative and can contain the name "Bill" in the title. The reference to deKooning also includes a similarity of gesture and a melding of subject and background. deKooning came to her mind for this series because the gallery is close to where deKooning and Jackson Pollock (1912-1956) lived and worked, said Markus.

He is also a major influence on her work. So are the abstract expressionism painters exhibited in the seventies at the Albright Arts Gallery in Buffalo, said Markus.



"Bill" by Liz Markus. Acrylic and graphite on unprimed canvas, 36 x 24 inches.

In other paintings, a likeness to deKooning mixes with references to Markus's father. The paintings in "11" were made earlier this year when Markus temporarily moved into her childhood home while her father was dying. She found herself drawing her father's name (Gabor) and then ran with it.

"I started drawing his name like it was a logo for a metal band," said Markus. "It kind of looks like Gabor is the name of some huge metal band out of Eastern Europe. I think he would have liked it. He had quite the sense of humor."



"Bill and Gabor 1" by Liz Markus. Acrylic and graphite on unprimed canvas, 60 x 48 inches.



"Spider Crab Gabor 1" by Liz Markus, 2012. Acrylic and graphite on unprimed canvas, 60 x 48 inches.

Markus makes her art in series. Each series starts from scratch. There is no conscious reference from one to the next. In every case, the work is a mix of personal experiences, pop culture imagery, and art history.

"I paint the different periods of my life," said Markus. "My life is broken into different time periods with distinct flavors. You have to live in order to be a painter. There's always something that's relatable to my life but it's important to tie it into art history."



"Gabor Lobster" by Liz Markus. Acrylic and graphite on unprimed canvas, 48 x 60 inches.

Markus's subject matter is widely accessible. Yet, the work can conjure questions about superficiality, group dynamics on identity, and how self-attention can play out in the subgroups of America.

She is especially interested in how teenagers grope through toward self-identity. Like salmon, the journey to individualism can be a battle against torrential tides of social conventions and pressures that can force individuality to the wayside.

One telling moment happened in the eighties. Markus had graduated from a private prep school in Buffalo and had just started art school in NYC. Soon after arrival, she recalled being asked: "Are you Punk or New Wave?" The musical differences might have been slight but the side

chosen was fraught with meaning.

“There were a lot of questions being asked in that one question,” Markus said.

Memories of that moment resulted in a painting series that was the subject of a 2010 solo show at ZieherSmith in NYC. The exhibition title was “Are You Punk or New Wave?”

Other series explored WASP culture, the broken hearts club (“The Look of Love”) and more.



“Breakfast in America” by Liz Markus. Acrylic on unprimed canvas, 48 x 60 inches.

Markus considers her art “distinctly American” and presented through a pop art lens. She hopes viewers will experience moments when they transcend their everyday and move into reflection.

“People don’t have to know the back story to look at the paintings,” she said. “Paintings connect to a non-verbal part of the brain. I hope they come and see the art and get turned on.”



Liz Markus next to “Gulf Ford GT horizontal” at Ille Gallery.

**BASIC FACTS:** “11” - A solo show by Liz Markus is exhibited through July 11, 2012 at Ille Arts, 216a Main St, Amagansett, NY. <http://illearts.com>

Markus’s art is part of the Whitney Museum of American Art’s collection. Her international exhibition credits include galleries in Germany, Sweden and Norway. Solo shows have been held at ZieherSmith and White Columns in New York City. “11” at Ille Arts is Markus’s first solo show in the Hamptons. Her studio is located in Brooklyn, NY.

**Liz Markus:** [www.lizmarkus.com](http://www.lizmarkus.com)