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Yoga Mats, Yoni Eggs and Body Image: An Interview with Artist Alex Ebstein

May 11, 2017 by *Katita Miller* (<http://artzealous.com/author/kmiller/>)



"The real you is sexy." "Love your body." "Be your beautiful self." Lately, we can't seem to get through a social media newsfeed scrolling session without coming across multiple posts promoting body positivity or pointing fingers at certain companies for manipulating how women view their bodies. We recently caught up with Alex Ebstein, a Baltimore-based artist whose work deals with the commercialization of body image and wellness. You may be familiar with her yoga mat paintings, but read on to learn about her foray into sculpture and the crazy self-care trend that fascinates her.

AZ: Tell us a bit about your artistic background. Would you consider yourself a full-time artist, or do you dabble in other ventures as well?

AE: I am an artist based in Baltimore, Maryland where my creative practice has also crossed over into curating and writing. I consider myself a full-time artist in terms of my education and my schedule is built around my ability to be in the studio as much as possible. I am an adjunct professor at MICA (<https://www.mica.edu/>) (Maryland Institute College of Art) and have other freelance work.

AZ: What compelled you to start painting on yoga mats?

AE: These pieces began with a performative series of cut yoga mats, displayed as artifacts of a personal ritual. Yoga, a seemingly healthy and helpful practice, was unfortunately making my eye condition worse and I had to cut ties with the lifestyle and did so as literally as possible.

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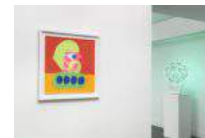
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After conquering this material, taking away its sanctity and utility, I wrangled it back into my mixed media practice. I eventually was able to treat it as an art material loaded with associations for the viewer, but no longer a source of loss or sadness for me. The works also went from white "specters" to colorful compositions.



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Aqua Jogger, 2017. Photo// Alex Ebstein and VICTORI + MO

AZ: How do you feel about all of the attention your mat paintings have gotten?

AE: I love that my work has allowed me to connect with so many people; in many ways, that's the goal.

AZ: You recently began making sculptural assemblages—what are some of the challenges of working in 3D?

AE: I still think about sculpture in a pretty flat way, top view, side view etc. I would like to be able to think more fluidly about space and create forms that have no set ways in which to approach them. That's the challenge—I am still working on it!

AZ: In today's world, new fitness crazes and wellness "gimmicks" seem to surface every day. How does the constant emergence of these phenomena influence your work?

AE: In *Fad Bodies*, I created the two sculpture pieces as a partial checklist of items marketed to me based on my bulk purchases of yoga mats. These included the yoni eggs, which then is a snowball marketing strategy of more yoni eggs (different stones for different energies) and turmeric and charcoal which seemed to be the main ingredients in scrubs, pastes and cleanses.



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Photo// Instagram (@alex_ebstein)

AZ: What's the most outrageous fitness or wellness trend you've heard about recently?

AE: I'm fascinated by the yoni egg and all the reading one can dig up promoting and debunking this trend. Celebrity endorsements like Gwyneth Paltrow's Goop (<http://goop.com/>) attempt to promote this as a luxurious and elite practice, while actual doctors have concerns about infection and injury.

AZ: Are you a fitness fanatic yourself? What's your favorite way to work out?

AE: I enjoy being outside whenever I can, I go for long walks, and I run and swim at the gym.

AZ: "Body image" is such a loaded term these days. What are your thoughts on the media's recent obsession with body positivity?

AE: It is certainly healthier than being held up to an impossible ideal. However it is sort of a calculated and commercialized answer to the first problem. I think concocting a sense of health and self from an amalgam of images and trends will never make anyone happy, but as these things are largely unavoidable, it's good to see body positivity as a small way to empower people to be individuals about their bodies and self-care.



Spa Day, 2017. Photo// Alex Ebstein and VICTORI + MO

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AZ: What do you hope your audience will experience as they navigate your upcoming show, *Fad Bodies*, at VICTORI + MO?

AE: I hope they see a complete body of work that plays on the palettes and materials of gym and fitness environments, upsetting their expectations about the material and associated branded imagery.

AZ: How can we keep up with you?

AE: Instagram: @alex_ebstein (http://www.instagram.com/alex_ebstein); website: alexebstein.com (<http://alexebstein.com>)



Exercise Humors, 2017. Photo// Alex Ebstein and VICTORI + MO

Fad Bodies is on view at VICTORI + MO (<http://victorimo.com>) through June 4, 2017.

Featured image// Instagram (@alex_ebstein)



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