

Fire Becomes Her (2023) by Ace Lemley

I make art about the female experience of oppression and sexuality because it is something I cannot escape as a woman. As I continue living I am finding more and more avenues worth exploring. Beyond my own experience, I draw on modern women's collective and ever-diverse experiences and how things have changed throughout the decades. Furthermore, I was inspired by the feminist concept “the personal is political”. In this particular series, I was interested in the domestic power dynamics in a heterosexual partnership. More specifically the consequences of traditional expectations and restrictions that dim the light of complex fiery women.

I set out to build a relationship with the femme and fire through subject matter and technique. I wanted to depict heat in settings that feel familiar but uncanny in execution. For instance, fire can belong in the kitchen but it shouldn't be catching the above cabinets aflame. I paint the “delicate” female form juxtaposed next to fire which ultimately complements each other through shape and color. In *Firebreather* this is accomplished by showing a flowy ginger-haired woman labeled “soft-spoken” breathing fire, where the fire complements the curves of the ginger hair. I also use pyrography and simply physical fire to build my connection with the chaotic medium, as seen in *Purification of a Deunified Nation*, *Duality of Nature*, and *Financial Insecurity*. I attempted to provide a sense of flammability to all my works by painting on wood panels and using charcoal to outline the subject matter. The most flammable piece is already partially burnt, *Purification of a Deunified Nation* with all the media being flammable including the mirror stars that were laser cut. This represents the fragile and dangerous political climate in which we all play a part.

I like challenging expectations placed on women who are just trying to exist. Presenting female anger in such a casual way shows the obvious reality of its existence while still shocking the viewer due to the unconventional boldness. Tradition expectations do have questionable damages that I attempt to clear up. I answer the questions, “What will happen if women are confined to the kitchen?”, “How will she react to belittling statements of her character?” “What will happen if her bodily autonomy is taken away?”, and “How will she react to the objectification and glorification of her young figure?”. The answer: Fire Becomes Her.