

Artist Statement

Mirto Kodama

In his *Social Contract* (1762), Jean Jacques Rousseau wrote, “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in shackles.” My drawings explore themes of aesthetics and fetishism through the binaries of freedom versus restraint, Eros versus Thanatos. I studied dressmaking in college, and began researching beauty and the oppression of the female body by studying the history of corsets and their manufacture. Corsets simultaneously embody the male idealization of the beauty of the female body, while also representing the woman’s desire to objectify her own body for that same male gaze. Beauty can bring freedom but at the cost of self-inflicted restraint and oppression. These concepts of beauty and their relationship with the physical, emotional, sexual and social oppression of the female body and psychology motivates my work.

Expanding from this experience and inspired by aestheticism, sadomasochism, and fantasy literature, I create stories within my drawings. My work reflects the aesthetics of Tatsuhiko Shibusawa, a Japanese translator of French literature who is known for his translation of the Marquis de Sade's books. The female figures in my work are sexual and seductive, their bodies deformed. The large breasts and seductive pin-up-girl poses of the figures represent objectified sexuality. The excruciatingly thin arms and legs emphasize the dangerousness and fragility of objectified sex. In a reference to 1950s French erotic novels such as “The Image” by Catherine Robbe-Grillet, I use roses as a motif to represent eroticism, aestheticism, and danger. My deep interest in this literature and the references to them within my work adds another dimension to the narratives.