



Sheila Elias, *Wonder*, 2005, enhanced digital photography printed on Epson archival paper, 7 ½" x 18 ½". Edition of 5.

# SHEILA ELIAS: IN SEARCH OF LIGHT

By Ashley Knight

Sheila Elias is a multidisciplinary artist based in Miami Beach whose works capture those invisible connections between art and social consciousness. Through her oeuvre, she portrays the collective soul of a country that today tries to overcome with cleverness and optimism the *débâcle* of the American dream. *ARTDISTRICTS* talked to her about her successful artistic trajectory, the sources that motivate and inspire her work, her new series “iPaint on the iPad” and her mid-career retrospective book *Somewhere-Anywhere*, published by Nova Southeastern University.

*Ashley Knight - You have mentioned that your work is inspired by the reality that faces Americans today, by the American Dream that became a sort of nightmare. Can you tell me more about what feeds your works?*

Sheila Elias - I always wanted to be an artist from the moment I saw paintings at the Art Institute of Chicago. I attended art classes there from the age of eight years old. I came from a creative family of an interior designer, a dress designer and a clothing manufacturer. Almost everything gives me inspiration, and you can see it reflected in my ideas, images, words, use of color and shapes. My subconsciousness registers what I see and what appeals directly to my intellect. My work is about the layers of life and art history, seeking in it a connection between art aesthetics and social consciousness. American sensibilities have influenced my life, the hues of my country found in the colors of my art. I like to bring an awareness of new directions and individual inventiveness. Through life experience, I incorporate visual, emotional and psychological impressions and feed them into my art. I like to portray a perception of urban tension, raw emotions and

harsh realities tempered with gentle optimism and beauty, countering an American dream that has gone a bit astray.

*A.K. - Your “Elements” and “Cosmic Struggle” series present an apocalyptic vision of the world, one devastated by natural catastrophes, wars and human destruction, a chaotic universe in which despite all, a ray of hope always exists. Can you tell me more about these series? What specific event in your life inspires them? What do you want to transmit through these works?*

S.E. - I was influenced by the implosion of buildings. A building that was built by my husband was later imploded. I had never seen an implosion before. So I photographed it, and that started a new series using photography and installations using smoke machines. “Cosmic Struggle” is all about forbidden entering and the displacement of fugitive souls. I always envision a light coming through, a light at the end of the tunnel.

*A.K. - Can you explain the production process behind these series?*

S.E. - Hand-painted and photographed and collage-like layering, the final image is translated to canvas.

*A.K. - What artists have influenced your work?*

S.E. - Matisse for color and Anselm Kiefer for ideas and form.

*A.K. - You have experimented with diverse media throughout your career. Recently, you presented your “iPaint on my iPad” series. Can you tell me more about these series? How is the production process? Where have you exhibited them?*



Artist Sheila Elias.

S.E. - I have been painting on my iPad since 2011. When I first got the iPad I decided I wanted to do alternative images from what I had previously done, more abstract and less figurative imagery. The iPad differs from traditional media as it has immediate, spontaneous effects. I believe it also stretches your abilities because the apps have limitations and you have to work within those perimeters. I believe, like any tool, it is really the talent of the person executing it that is important. It also is a new medium, which is exciting for a seasoned artist, as I like to continually expand my thinking and adapt to new techniques. I don't consider myself a techie, but I originally started processing images on Xerox machines. I guess I've always been interested in some form of technology as a way to manipulate imagery.

I create my iPad art by actually just using my finger, as I very rarely use the stylus. There are pieces that I have created that originate by using my trained artist's eye to copy by hand the pieces I have originally executed on the iPad. I translate them to a larger format using traditional media such as acrylics and brushes. The other works that I have done, I manipulate the file and, after multiple processes have been applied to the image, I have the piece expanded to larger canvases. I then enhance the painting with a touch of ink and paint. 'Techne Revelation' is a new technological vision that I'm really excited about. I enlarged abstract shapes that took a mysterious, unnatural form. I love the juxtaposition of antiquities with the modern universe. In addition, painting with your finger is what the cavemen did, and I find it so amazing that today's technology could relate the past to the present.

I recently demonstrated a variety of painting and drawing techniques on the iPad at the Apple Store at Lincoln Center. I shared how you can use the iPad to express yourself creatively. How I was invited to exhibit at the Apple Store is

quite interesting. The young blue shirts at the Aventura, Florida, Apple Store were blown away by the images I had done. They asked me to have an event at their store, as they have never had a painter do this. It was so successful that they contacted the New York Apple store at Lincoln Center. This was the first time a painter had ever done this in conjunction with Apple. The next night my iPad paintings, 'Techne Revelation,' were shown at the Mayson Gallery NYC. This was followed by a stint at a NYC penthouse available for sale through Corcoran. The blog Visionary Art Trends published a post discussing my work and Hockney's as among the few that have been so successful at this medium. I want to invite people outside of the traditional art world to view art in a new and different way. As an artist who has shown a painting at the Louvre, I am aware of how my audience is limited. I'm actually showing work to people who are not really into fine art. Everyone who uses an iPad isn't necessarily into fine art, but they are impressed when I tell them I have shown at the Apple Store at Lincoln Center.

A.K. - *Your works have been widely exhibited at national and international galleries and museums. What projects are you working on for the upcoming months?*

S.E. - I just wrapped a piece for an invitation-only exhibit, "Grey Area Instagram Project," at the Whitney Studio Party, and now I am working on a photography installation for my open studio exhibition "Material Possessions," hosted by Vontobel Swiss Wealth Advisors on December 3<sup>rd</sup> in North Miami near MOCA. I am kicking off Art Basel at my VIP reception at Chalk Lounge on Miami Beach on December 1<sup>st</sup>. The group exhibition "Three Faces of Miami" opens at the Conrad Miami November 28<sup>th</sup>. The Naples Museum of Art is exhibiting a mixed-media painting in "Incognito" until the exhibition closing on January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2013. My one regret is that my most current work, "iPaint on the iPad" paintings, are not in the book *Somewhere-Anywhere*, a mid-career retrospective published at the beginning of last year. *Somewhere-Anywhere* was written by Robert C. Morgan and Peter Frank and published in conjunction with Nova Southeastern University. ■

Art collectors and the general public are welcomed to visit Sheila Elias' studio located at 1510 NE 130th Street North Miami. Phone: 305 892 9198 / [www.sheilaelias.com](http://www.sheilaelias.com). An exhibition opens on Dec. 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6-9 pm that will be on view thru Dec. 8<sup>th</sup>.

Chalk will be presenting video projections of Sheila Elias's work. 1234 Washington Ave South Beach. Opening reception: Dec. 1<sup>st</sup>, 9:00 pm. On view thru Dec. 8<sup>th</sup>.

The artist will be exhibiting with Intrepid Art Gallery at ArtSpot hosted by Red Dot Art Fair. Booth E 108. 3011 NE 1<sup>st</sup> Ave. at NE 31<sup>st</sup> Street. Wynwood Art District, Miami. Opening reception Dec. 4<sup>th</sup>, 6-10 pm. On view thru Dec. 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

*Ashley Knight is an arts writer based in Miami.*