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TOP STORIES



COURTNEY LOVE

I Found Courtney Love in a Hopeless Place

BY JEN CARLSON

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Courtney Love has an art show. It's under the High Line on a desolate strip of New York City street that made me feel like an awkward, new, and fumbling hooker when I stood there alone in too-high heels waiting for a friend yesterday in broad daylight. Only cabs and moving trucks passing by.

I was there for the press preview. The show is at Fred Torres gallery, and for someone not immersed in the art world, I would say it seemed like a standard affair. White walls: check. People transparently searching out the most important people in the room: check. Drinking wine under bright lights: check. *Vogue's* Lynn Yeager in the house: check. This was the backdrop for Love's first gallery show, and it's clear who was there for the the love of art, and who was there for the love of Love.

A little history: I was a huge Hole fan in high school, and all the way up until I got sick of hearing

"Malibu" too many times in college (and fine, I'm a fan forever). I had a cherry red Plymouth Reliant K car in a town filled with kids who drove Porches. I was from the wrong side of the tracks as much as one could be from the wrong side of the tracks in a small, wealthy town in Connecticut. I was also quiet and awkward and didn't know who I was. And I wasn't very concerned about who I was, because I only knew that I was angry about my life, which seemed harder than every other girl's in my high school. And this anger consumed me so much that it left me very little time to figure out who I was, so it ended up defining me.

For much of my life an older, extended family member sexually abused me, in very standard terrible and also very odd ways that I will not fully get in to here. But I will say that he made me work out in his basement on exercise machines while reading Playboy, and that was the least insane thing that I actually feel comfortable writing about here. (This is, in the end — spoiler — not about specifics, but about vague similarities in a generation of women who wanted to rise from the ashes of their own fucked up fires that were — joke's on us — never actually going to go out.) So, I was angry about all of that stuff by the time I was in high school, by which point I had for the most part gotten away from it, in a physical sense, though I was still (literally) running from it.



So when a strong woman with a raspy voice and a cigarette in one hand and a guitar in the other came along, I listened. Prior to this I listened to your standard MTV stuff: Guns n' Roses and Metallica, both of which I enjoyed (they were loud, which was important) but neither of which I could fully relate to. I listened to Pearl Jam and Nirvana, which was closer to something I could feel. But not until Courtney Love firmly planted one foot high up on an amp while she belted out tunes about "asking for it" did something click. This woman was pissed off, and so was I. Waiting to exhale (smoke from a quickly burned Camel) achieved.

So here she is, troubled in her own right, suddenly guiding me down a path of accepting my own anger, or maybe glorifying it — but either way, I could put on *Live Through This* in my shitty car, turn

it up, firmly plant my foot down on the gas pedal, and drive through my anger. I'm pretty sure if you toss this story in a can and shake it up a little, it's going to come out as a pretty common tale. *Right?* I'm not alone in this.

And then here I am now, at age 35, in front of Courtney Love, surrounded by art world people whom I felt terribly awkward in front of, without enough hands to grab all of the glasses of wine I "need." The girls sort of look like something between the girls who were at Hole shows in the mid-90s, and the portraits Love has created that are hanging on the walls around them (myself included**). But the girls are neither, and it's unclear who amongst us gets that.

The women in Love's artwork all seem very distinctly *Courtney* — the pieces look like part-nightmare and part-fantasy, but you get the feeling they're all too real. This is Courtney's latest attempt to rise from the ash of her eternal flame, and it's her third act, not ours. But every woman in that room probably does relate to something in the art, whether it's depicting a Birkin bag or is a "cunt"-embroidered tattered white dress. Courtney soundtracked our self-destructions, our break-ups, our bad days, our screams. So at the very least, on that level, it makes sense that we'd understand the visuals.



So why is it so strange that we can't all seem to understand each other in this room? We're with Courtney. This should be the one place where we could all be vulnerable. Or that's what I want it to be. But the women here are coming off like art world starfuckers, and they're throwing terribly boring questions at her. And suddenly I'm back in high school, not connecting, and wanting to escape to my car, but I'm in front of this woman who kind of got me through it all. And I think she's feeling the same way. And then my suspicion is confirmed, as she gets up practically mid-sentence and makes her way, politely, through the crowd. Someone in her circle says she's not really comfortable with this scene. Once again, the feeling is mutual.

So I walk out, past Courtney's** manic pastel artwork, and come home and listen to *Live Through This* five times in a row, really loudly. And I'm not sure how much has changed since the days when I did that in high school. And I'm not sure, looking at Ms. Love's tormented artwork, how much has really changed for her since 1994 either.

**This was written following the party while still wearing a babydoll dress with a Peter Pan collar under a trench coat, which I refused to remove all night because fuck, I'm that girl who is wearing an outfit that looks like it was trickled down from Courtney Love's closet in 1994 and she could, rightfully, raise an eyebrow at that.*

***Editor's note: Yes, it's like Courtney Love Day around here. I KNOW. It just kinda happened.*

*Jen Carlson is the Deputy Editor at **Gothamist**.*