Wonder whether girls can wrestle? Check out...

Girls Kickin’ Butt

A woman with inspiration more than skin deep

Salvation in Ink
Stereotypes are challenged in a gallery featuring a dozen women artists from the Middle East

by Rain Stites

The Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University is currently hosting the “She Who Tells a Story” exhibit. The 81-piece-collection showcases 12 female photographers native to various countries within the Middle East in attempt to debunk a Westernized ideology of what it means to be a woman in this part of the world. Inspired by misconstrued media reports, which tend to focus on violence rather than capturing the true sense of a place and its people, these women hope to bring life to the place they call home. “It really introduces a view of the middle east that we don’t see in our (American) media everyday,” Gail Walker, tour docent of the gallery, says. Through the use of both staged and documentary photography, the photographers hope to illustrate the story of many with one same notion: not all is as it seems.

In the face of adversity, these photographs offer a voice to the otherwise silenced. “She” does not merely tell a story, but exposes a world through the art of photography. It exposes our world through the eyes of different women with different stories.

The exhibit will remain at Cantor Arts Center Wednesday through Sunday until May 04.
Wonder
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Tangled between the thick ropes, two women struggle for control. Smack—one woman's back is slammed to the floor as the other woman pins her down.

One. Two. Three. The bell dings and the crowd roars with excitement. Cheeks black with mascara and hair dripping sweat, Brittany Wonder lifts herself off the other woman's motionless body and stumbles to the ring's edge to catch her breath. The referee lifts her right arm. “The winner ... Ultra Girl Brittany Wonder!”

“Whenever I tell anybody I'm a professional wrestler, they look at me like I'm crazy,” Wonder laughed.

Wonder trains to kick butt—everyone's butt. This self-proclaimed "master of the ARSE-nel" uses what her mama gave her by taking on her opponents with one of her greatest assets: "I've invented a billion moves that utilize my butt as the main weapon," she said.

The "Turn Down for Butt" finishes her opponent with a literal bang. Wonder makes her way to the top of the ring. Stunned, her opponent cannot run. She jumps off and boom. In the blink of an eye, Wonder is sitting comfortably on her opponent as if she are a butt rest.

For Wonder, wrestling is more than just winning and beating people up. Before each match, Wonder energetically bursts onto the scene, running up and down the crowd giving high-fives and fist-bumps.

"When the crowd gets that far behind me and gets so into the character, I feel like they actually care for me," she said. "There's 900 people who have never met me in my entire life and for that moment, right there, I am their entire world.

So who is Brittany Wonder then? "She's definitely me just turned up to 11," Wonder said about her character. "Be good to others. Have a good time," she said. "If you're bad, I'll kick you in the face.

She loves her fans and her craft. "I never really stopped and thought about what it would be like to not change my dream," she said about a life without wrestling. "My life is never mundane. My life is never boring."

Wonder has been a starry-eyed wrestling fan since her youth when her mother would take her to matches. At age 15, she began training to become a professional. A few bumps along the way however, led Wonder to decide it was time to be a "grown-up" and get a "real job." Her love for the sport never diminished though and when a friend offered her an opportunity to start training, she couldn't refuse.

"I kinda ran away from home with a backpack and a paycheck to be wonder," she said. "They see us as professional athletes that are trying to live a dream just like they are."

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The first time I met Marina Fomina, a tattoo artist in south San Jose’s “Salvation Tattoo” parlor, the smile she shyly turned away from me radiated as brightly as the fluorescent lights highlighting her tattoo designs on the wall behind her. A native of Moscow, Russia, Fomina obtained her degree over the course of six years at the University of the Russian Academy of Education (Universitet Rossiiskoi Akademii Obrazovaniya) and holds under her hat years of study at art schools while growing up. After moving to California two years ago, between jobs of a waitress and a secretary, just to get by, the passion reignited. “It’s not how I want to spend my life,” she said. This led her to the next phase, to becoming a freelance tattoo artist. Deciding not to pursue a career as a children’s art educator, which was her focus throughout school, she shifted to body art, first in Moscow and eventually in the California bay area. “In Russia when I started there’s so many people who just wanted to do it for free,” Fomina said. This catalyzed her artistic career, and two years later, she’s stepping up the ladder in the Bay Area at Salvation Tattoo as a full-time, lucrative artist. Although she has worked here for only the past two weeks, her talents haven’t reflected the fact of being a clueless newcomer to the parlor amid veterans like An Tran, whose old school Japanese style designs intensely clash against hers.

When it comes to tattooing, it’s not all about the quality and customer satisfaction of the freshly finished design. The process in itself is as meticulous and as delicate as it is rough. According to Fomina, it’s more of the skill of making a straight line on the skin, as easy as it would be on paper but as difficult as it is in the practice of tattooing. And, not surprisingly, it often comes down to practicing the art on oneself.

With that, for the sake of perfection and the applause of others, comes the inevitable ruining of the artist’s own skin, which Marina Fomina states “It’s not a good idea”.

Still, she says so with a cheerful giggle as she traces her fingers over the ink on her other hand, so it’s not really something you’d regret.

So how does one perfect the art without putting so much more ink on your own body parts than those of a client?

The artist smiles. “You start with simple things, like a little heart of something, and just color it black inside,” she said. “For the beginner it’s not that hard. When it comes to something creative, like a portrait... you really need some techniques.”

When it comes to personal style, every artist has their own taste, and Fomina’s is definitely unique as much as it is popular. “I like new school mixed with traditional. Bright colors...,” she muses. Pointing at her corner of the studio she says, “I think my corner is the brightest here”, again with her sweet giggle.

For Fomina, art is all about the eye-popping, the neon-hued, and the ultra-cute designs fit for a raver. The cartoon animals on the wall on her side of the parlor looked inspired by the 1990’s Lisa Frank stationary sets I went crazy over in elementary school (and admittedly still do), which made it difficult to contain my excitement during the interview.

Fomina pointed out a few pieces on the wall and I joked, “I need to get a tattoo now,” while her laughter echoed my every word with giddiness.

Stepping out and leaving the ink-fueled business behind me, Fomina calls out after me, “Come in and get a tattoo!” Maybe, perhaps someday I will.
Last month, International Women’s Day (IWD) was observed on March 8. It celebrated the incredibly diverse achievements of women everywhere and from every walk of life.

Empowerment is one of the main ideals of IWD. To be empowered is to be given power or authority. It’s an important concept and one that has been at the forefront of equal rights for women, but what does it mean to be an empowered woman?

I think it has a lot to do with self-confidence in one’s abilities, whatever they may be. However, the characterization of an empowering presence is often reserved for men.

Confident people walk into a room and make a wave with their presence alone; this requires a complete sense of worth and is rooted in an inherent belief in one’s self and ability. These are not ideals that, until recently, were instilled in women the way they have always been in men.

I think we unknowingly sense confidence in others as well. Most of us can think of at least one of these superhero-like specimens in our lives, they exude an aura of invincibility and a vague sense of cool self-assured poise.

I used to think confidence came from success, but I’ve come to realize it’s not success that makes one confident, it’s actually the process we go through to become successful. When it really comes down to it, successful people have worked hard, sacrificed, and learned important lessons throughout that process. It’s their trials and errors that make them strong and subsequently confident. Historically, these characteristics are not something society valued in women.

To me, there is nothing more empowering than struggling, failing and wanting to give up, and yet refusing to do so. Society has managed to glaze over this struggle with our identifications of success or hard work becoming misrepresented via over-consumptive digital media. The over-sharing and posting of images and ideals to our fans, followers or stalkers, provides us with a false sense of achievement when in fact no real work has been done. So is it any surprise that people, especially women, are more insecure than ever before, but equally narcissistic?

Empowering yourself in a way that is good for your confidence, heart, character and soul doesn’t come from the acceptance of strangers, but from yourself. You have to live your entire life with you. Become a strong confident woman that you accept and you will no longer need acceptance or verification from others.

You don’t need to be an Olympic medalist, an entrepreneur, a gazillionaire, or famous on Instagram to do this, you need only strive to improve yourself at the core of your being and for no one but yourself. In doing so, you can inspire others to do the same. This is empowerment through example and we can all practice it.