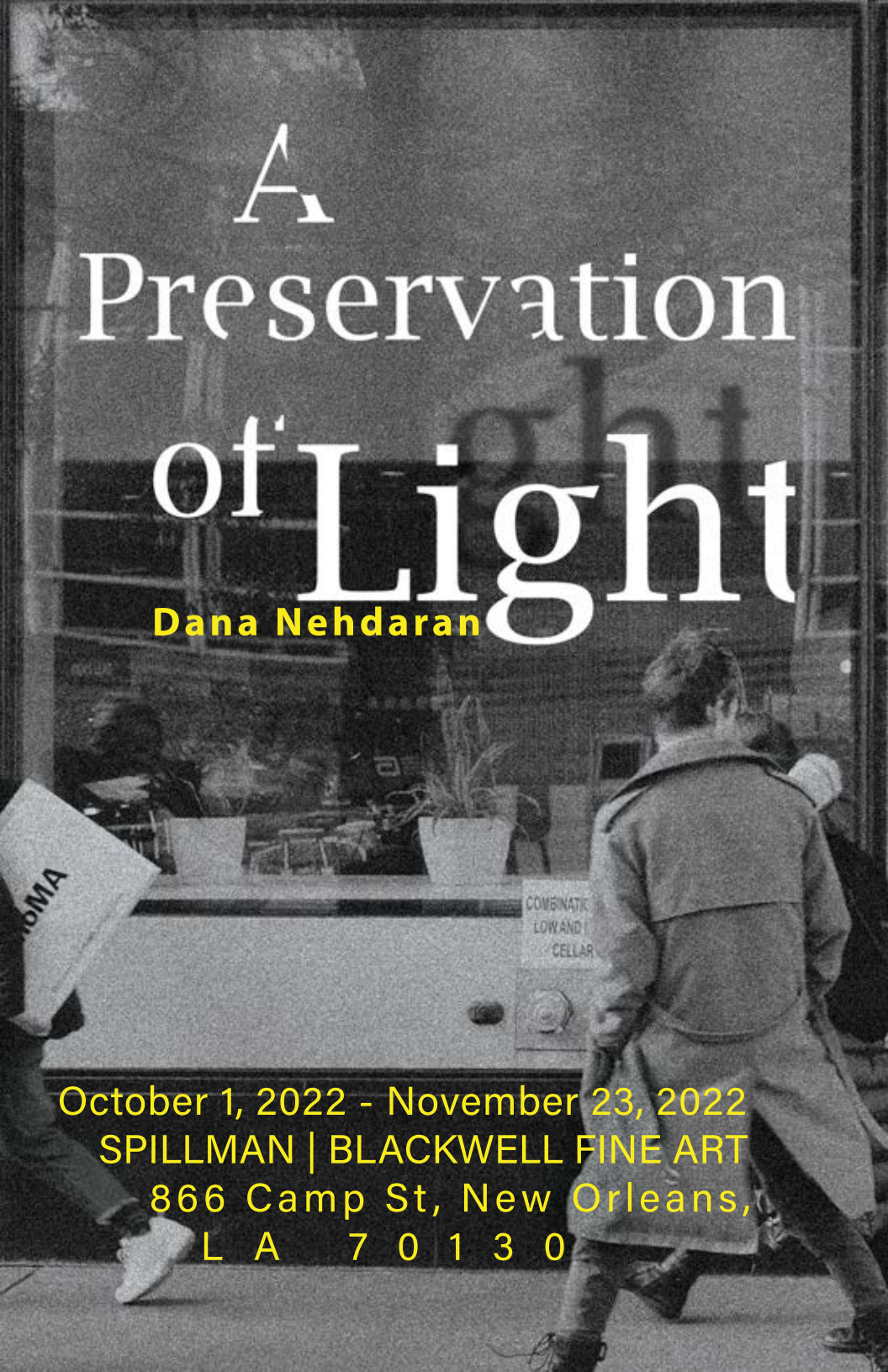




A
Preservation
of Light

Dana Nehdaran



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of Light
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October 1, 2022 - November 23, 2022
SPILLMAN | BLACKWELL FINE ART
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A Preservation of Light

In 1912, a ray of light dabbled the skin of a woman, skin that had been touched by many men during a day and every day. That light then passed through a camera lens and burned the sensitive silver on an 8x10 glass negative.

On January 1, 1898, Storyville, the only legal red-light district in America, was established in New Orleans. Over the course of the next two decades, at any given time, 2000 prostitutes filled those 16 square blocks, plying their trade in opulent brothels, one room cribs, and darkened alleys.

Photographer Ernst J. Bellocq immortalized the prostitutes of Storyville in a series of these glass plate negatives that, at one time, were all but forgotten. Once discovered, they passed through many hands before being acquired by photographer Lee Friedlander who recognized both their historical and artistic value. Because of him, several are now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art. Bellocq's photos are unlike any his contemporary photographers of erotic "French postcards." Bellocq captured the humanity of these women, their sensuality, not their sexuality.

On a trip to New Orleans, I stepped into A Gallery for Fine Photography that carries several of Friedlander's carefully reproduced prints and was, as most people are, immediately drawn into the gaze of these women. On my journey into the world of Bellocq, my friends and art collectors, Bert Greenwell and John Enochs, introduced me to his story and my dear friend and filmmaker Anne Craig, shared with me her documentary, *Storyville: The Naked Dance*. I love historical photographs and have painted a similar series, *Esther's Children*, based on photos of early twentieth century Jews in Iran, my ancestors.

When the COVID-19 pandemic gripped New York City, I found myself surrounded at my home studio with huge empty canvases, my memories of New Orleans, and the haunting reflection of Bellocq's muses. I found solace in the ghosts of these long dead women. I befriended them and their casual familiarity peering at me from the gold-toned printing paper. I hoped to re-envision their spirit, recognize their life's limited choices, and imagine the stories behind each and every one of them. We do not know their names, but Bellocq captured their story in the physics of light and silver. His vision became my vision as I worked to recreate that ray of light using acrylic, oil, copper, and the soot of beeswax candle (lamp black oil).

These paintings represent my version of a love poem both to Bellocq and to each of the women whose life he touched and momentarily captured forever.



A woman in kimono, 84x60 inch, Acrylic, oil, beeswax on canvas, 2020









Bellocq's Desk, 72x60 inch, Acrylic, oil, beeswax on canvas, 2020













Hidden , 72x60 inch, Acrylic, oil, beeswax on canvas, 2020





Don't Look at Me!, 72x60 inch, Acrylic, oil, beeswax on canvas, 2020





Happy, 72x60 inch, Acrylic, oil, beeswax on canvas, 2020





👤 Natural light is the best, 72x60 inch, Acrylic, oil, beeswax on canvas, 2020





Behind the Door!, 72x60 inch, Acrylic, oil and beeswax on canvas, 2020





Ready for my portrait, 72x60 inch, Oil on canvas, 2020





Roses, 72x48 inch, Copper leaf, oil, beeswax on canvas, 2020





Blocked Door, 60x72 inch, Acrylic, oil, beeswax on canvas, 2020





The Nude on a Balcony, 60x72 inch, Acrylic, oil, beeswax on canvas, 2020





Pose on an Arm, 60x48 inch, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 2022





Look at Me!, 84x60 inch, Oil on canvas, 2020





More? 20x16 inch, oil on linen, 2019

4 studies for "Natural light is the best"
each 12x9 inch, Acrylic, oil, on linen, 2019



Some studies for "A woman in kimono"

No:1
40x66 inch
Oil on linen



No:2
48x72 inch
Copper leaf,
oil on canvas



No:3
30x40 inch
Acrylic, oil on linen



No:4
36x24 inch
Acrylic, ironpowder,
beeswax on canvas



No:5
18x24 inch
Siverleaf, oil on linen



No:6
16x20 inch
Acrylic and oil on linen















A Room of Her Own, Storyville, New Orleans

Nancy Nesvet

With the loving but respectful touch of an admirer, Dana Nehdaran has painted the women of Storyville, New Orleans, photographed by E.J. Bellocq at the turn of the twentieth century. In Bellocq's photographs and now in Dana Nehdaran's paintings, we see the history of a unique place inhabited by brave and beautiful individual women. In her essay, "Photographs from Storyville-Notes," Susan Sontag, the public intellectual and feminist writer described the photographs "How touching, good-natured and respectful these pictures are". Dana Nehdaran has exalted that respect and added love to their translation into paint.

Long before Storyville was named and regulated, hundreds of prostitutes were transported during the reigns of the French Kings, Louis XV and Louis XVI to the new French colony of Louisiana, paying heed to the royal edict proclaiming that transport prohibited to persons of bad morals. As opposed to the British method of transporting criminals and debtors to far-off colonies, France transported those it deemed of high morals to become wives and companions of men in its colony, Louisiana. Al Rose notes that it was not until after the acquisition of the Louisiana territory by the nascent United States of America in 1803 that Prostitution ballooned there, its regulation left to the discretion of the propertied, mannered classes of men to increase developing commerce.

By the 1860's, Filles a la cassette, French girls who came with a small trunk peopled the city. There was so much confusion with many prostitutes and other women proclaiming their offense at Union soldiers on the streets of New Orleans that Major General Benjamin Butler regarded women engaging in politics and insulting or ignoring union soldiers to be treated as prostitutes by law, because only then could they be controlled. After Butler left, the law known as the "Woman Order", issued on May 15, 1862, curbed the interactions of different genders, classes and races in the public space. By 1892, crime had decreased considerably but municipal authorities still wanted to restrict the areas prostitutes could live and work in and resulting in the 1892 Police Ordinance No. 7325 dictating that lower class prostitutes could not occupy ground floors in Bienville, Burgundy, Customhouse, Conti, Dauphine and St. Louis streets. The order caused those domiciled there to move to the area that would become Storyville. The Lorette Ordinance of 1857, amended due to a technicality, corrected and finally passed in 1897, permitted prostitution in some areas of New Orleans and licensed women to manage and own brothels, paying a tax to the city.

With a city rampant with the disorder of prostitutes in most parts of the city, affecting social and economic welfare, order was finally restored when Alderman Sidney Story proposed the legislation that easily passed on January 9, 1897, superseding the 1897 Lorette Ordinance. . It finally specified a district "outside of which it will be unlawful for prostitution to be carried on" further including the ordinance "be strictly enforced". Two areas were outlined: one uptown and one

downtown. However, the uptown area, bounded by Perdido Street and Gravier Street and from the river side of Franklin Street to the lower side of Locust Street was not inaugurated until March 1, 1917, when city commissioners reserved this area for lewd women of "the colored or black race, outside of which they could not work. Guidelines for both districts written by city Alderman Sidney Story, considering the unwillingness of Creoles to accept prostitutes within their communities, barring them from living or working in the city or "French Quarter", led to Storyville's creation in 1897. With Storyville's inception as a regulated district, officials in New Orleans were successful in keeping brothels isolated within the district so more "legitimate" businesses could thrive.

Bounded by the streets of North Robertson, Iberville, Basin, and St. Louis in Faubourg Tremé, prostitution was regulated in the district of Storyville in accordance with Ordinance No. 13, 032, and forbade it outside that district. Following the L'Hote Case (L'Hote vs. City of New Orleans, 51 nn.93), the regulatory ordinance fell within the "competence" of municipal government, and did not sanction nor license vice, so not legalizing nor declaring prostitution illegal within the district and designating red lights identifying brothels. As prostitution so became a regulated trade seen through a political rather than a moral lens, in a city with lots of politics but some would say, few morals, regulation turned disorder and disorderly women into public order.

Within the norms of the racially segregated society, the Blue Book identified prostitutes by race: Black, White, quadroon, octoroon, Jewish (usually from Eastern Europe). Black men could only access Black, Quadroon or Octoroon women while White women were reserved for white men as written and unwritten rules regulated prostitutes and brothels.

Within the brothels, prostitutes were treated well by Madams. Although dress-makers, purveyors of food and varied products, and tradespeople throughout the city were accessible to the prostitutes, prostitutes in the better brothels in New Orleans had no need to frequent businesses, since all their needs were taken care of by the madam. Doctors, contraception, midwives, lavish wardrobes, cleansing supplies, perfumes, makeup (particular to prostitutes), laundry, fresh water for washing the prostitutes and client's bodies and food was provided as well as alcohol and opium for the clients. For these services, the Madams earned considerable amounts, allowing both prostitutes and Madams often lavish livelihoods. Girls in the "cribs" had to buy their own supplies and protect their own health and safety, but learned to do so. These working girls and working women, within rules and borders established by men ruled within their own houses, affording control within if not without their domains, and compromising with authorities to the benefit of all.

John A.J. Belloque was purported to be hydrocephalic, with a large, pointed head often concealed under a hat, and a wide, rounded bottom, centering a dwarfed figure. In conversations recorded by Lee Friedlander in 1969 and letter excerpts from Al Rose to Lee Friedlander dated July 12, 1968, Dan Lehrer, a New

Orleans photographer who knew Bellocq reported that he had a "terrific head", with a high forehead that came to a point, high pitched voice and was bald. He talked to himself and waddled like a duck when he walked. Bill Russell, the jazz musician reported some light-colored hair "what he had left" which would corroborate his French aristocratic heritage. Hydrocephaly produces cognitive impairment but also often produces sexual disfunction. The progeny of a French aristocratic Creole family, Belloque might have been more comfortable in the company of women who also had escaped difficult circumstances. Calling Bellocq a social and physical misfit, the New Orleans cornetist Johnny Wiggs reported "he had been razzed so much in his life that he didn't have any trust in people left. He was afraid that a conversation was just going to be a continuation, eventually, of being razzed." He photographed prostitutes who also trusted no one, but they trusted him with their depiction, and he trusted them. Johnny Wiggs goes on: "Bellocq...interests us ...as an artist: a man who saw more clearly than we do, and who discovered secrets...we are persuaded that he had knowledge of the nature of other human beings." He may have, but his photographs differ from any others because he allows, begs, the subject to pose herself, to express herself, with our resultant empathy with her. This was the only way Bellocq could photograph; he was the direct opposite of the prostitutes, physically misfit opposed to their beauty, but shared their state of mind. They suffered derision by society for the role their physical beauty allowed them; Bellocq suffered derision because his physical appearance was so appalling. With both equally suffering, his entrance into their world afforded empathy, understanding, and engagement in a conversation regarding equal derision by society outside their walls.

His practice, photographing Storyville's prostitutes attests to his physical distance from those who made a living through physical intimacy. Photography kept him under that drape, behind an 8x10 camera, far from touching the women, effectively socially distancing himself as a hidden voyeur. But he was as hidden from the women as they were from him, not allowing his dwarfed body and pointed head to appear to them, to contrast with their beauty, or to invite criticism. Susan Sontag, who wrote the introduction to "Bellocq: Photographs from Storyville: The Redlight District of New Orleans, notes in her earlier book, "On Photography" the resemblance of a camera's lens to a phallus. E.J. Bellocq's camera phallus could only produce photographs that he never developed, never bringing them to final fruition.

Negatives are not final products, calling attention to Bellocq's reluctance to close the chapter of each woman, to produce the final story. By producing only negatives, and hiding them away in a drawer, he may have wanted the "conversation" to keep going on, their relationships to evolve and not end. Bellocq, the product of a French aristocratic Creole family, but damaged himself, photographed the girls not for profit or fame but to retain their images in the negatives and view their beauty through the camera's lens. We can surmise that E.J. Bellocq may have never consummated a sex act with the prostitutes, nor had the ability or inclination to. Belocq has often been compared to Toulouse Lautrec, as their subjects, women in brothels are the same. But Lautrec had sexual relations with prostitutes and

Bellocq most probably did not. Lautrec's women are active, flirtatious, and Bellocq's contemplative. Lautrec's women are dressed in prostitute's or dancer's or actress' attire. Many of Bellocq's women, fully clothed, one in a feathered hat, others in lace-trimmed, long-sleeved silk dresses, complemented by bead necklaces, could be depictions of high-class women, those who are nude could belong to any class. Bellocq's photographs, part of a series, depicted a sorority of these brothel women, a community of which Bellocq has become part, photographically documenting them and his role in their community.

Although photographers of the day, making society portraits, often stood a rod between the sitter and the chair back to make the sitter's back rigid, Bellocq's women are turned, with no rod used, hands and arms apparent, often clasped, and ankles often crossed in a ladylike but not stiff pose. They look not at all posed, but rather caught in a candid moment, with their glance sideways, away from the camera, looking lost in a world of their own. A woman with ivory skin is casually stretched onto a chair, legs crossed and hands behind her head, in a doorway. A bob-haired woman, indicative of a flapper hairdo is in a wrinkled cotton dress, hands held together wearing simple gold bangles and a necklace, backgrounded by a draped sheet. In "Photographs from Storyville-Notes", Sontag writes of their "sensuality and domestic ease, and tangibility of their vanished world." Maybe E.J. Bellocq produced those negatives, took those photographs, to have evidence of this vanished world, and to note that these women existed in this strange world of their own making.

During an era when European modernism came to America, and Picasso's strong geometric shapes dominated scandalous paintings like *Les Femmes d'Alger*, Bellocq, the artist photographed a masked woman, posed like Goya's *Odalisque*, in a black, triangular mask echoing her triangle of black pubic hair against white skin and black stockings. For a master of form and contrast, those segregated black forms against white skin cannot be accidental. The recall of *Carnevale* from that mask is here black, provocative, and mysterious as opposed to the *Carnevale* colors and beaded and feathered accoutrements. Yet she is nude but for mask and stockings, setting up a geometric composition and creating a hide and reveal scenario. Another black-stockinged girl, her white lace gown falling onto arms from shoulders, revealing breasts with nipples covered in lace, shows not only a state of undress but a state of half-covering and half-revealing lace. With her fearless, confrontational stare, in her boudoir, the prostitute poses only for the photographer who does not touch her, nor demand touch. He is a voyeur, hidden behind a camera, as protected as the prostitute.

The negatives were black and white. The complexion of an Octoroon or Mestizo or Caucasian cannot be easily distinguished in the negative, so the viewer must rely on features and texture of the long hair to see that bit of black in the prostitute or Madam. Hair style can distinguish the class of the woman, but updos confuse the higher class of society women with the prostitutes sporting the same hairdo, or the Madams, always in that updone hair. Only when hair is long and loose are the women identified as loose women, or prostitutes. The style of dress ranges

from full nudity to full-length, embellished, imported (usually from France) designs. That woman with the white feathered hat, probably ostrich sits with hands clasped, eyes down, but legs crossed at the knee, casually juxtaposing the proper hands and hairstyle with the risqué crossed legs, exposing the left calf. Another could be a wedding portrait, with hands carrying a rose bouquet, casually assembled, and looking forlorn against a white, lace-collared dress. Only the texture of her hair reveals her race. Those roses appear in full bloom against the bosom of a beautiful woman whose eyelid covered eyes could indicate she is sleeping, as her right arm hangs, fingers distended. That same woman appears again with the same flowers, the same closed lidded eyes, but this time carrying them as she would a baby. You can almost hear her gently humming a lullaby to the package in her arms. How different this is than the lace-bonneted woman holding the dog, one hand holding the neck, so the head stands straight, while the other hand almost strangles the leg, so tight is the hold. The dog faces right, as her posed legs face left, one knee crossed over the other. It is as if the woman is posing her dog for the photograph, whereas the woman holding the "baby" bundle of roses, red, the color of love, is candid.

Another dog, looking like a black pit bull, smiles for the camera, as its owner, clothed in long pantaloons looks to the left, partially hiding behind her dog. Smiles, frowns, happiness, sadness, it is all there. Perched on a Persian carpet, one rather buxom woman, in black thigh-high stockings and a slip barely covering her pelvis, is a beautiful composition of black hair, interspersed with white slip, ending in the black stockings and shoes. Black striped stockings and Persian carpet were quite expensive trappings and a sign of the wealth of the woman wearing them. The same woman is shown in another photograph completely naked, her knee on a rattan chair seat looking proudly at the camera, this time on the bare floor. One particularly interesting photograph shows a woman with her black hair caught in a low-slung bun staring contemplatively to the left, naked, showing the black marks of a knife across her chest next to her breast. What has befallen her and what has she risen above? So many women smile, so many women play. In a nod to Mardi-Gras tradition in New Orleans, a masked woman stretches out Odalisque-like on a couch, but identified not by her hidden eyes and nose, but by her white-toned body. Again, Carnival culture so fits. The woman with closed eyes and tied kerchief standing almost straight, arm resting on her lace-covered dresser top, looks tired after a hard day's (or night's) work. The long, straight-haired Odalisque, hands behind her head, stretches out on a couch smiling in a come hither pose in front of a locked door. The young woman with straight hair, curled at the ends, sits with legs crossed and hands on hips, looking straight at the camera. Another woman, curled hair piled high on her head, nude, casually poses on her bedsheet, between two wooden window pillars, the shadow of a bed behind her, appearing the inhabitant of a "crib", a cheap one room house for one prostitute, exhibiting herself in the window for potential clients. Another Odalisque, perhaps the saddest looking of the photographs, stretches out on a rattan couch, unblemished body shining under blonde wavy hair, as eyes, not colored, but clearly blue in their grisaille, have an open but inward look. Exhausted, she has nothing on her mind.

What of the photographs of the parlors, bedrooms and exteriors of the fine houses and cribs? Two photographs include views of the parlor with walls covered with photographs around a painting. Those photographs include both nudes and smartly dressed women; a fireplace in one and a rolltop desk in another makes clear that the furnishings are upscale as well. Bellocq is setting the stage for the actors that follow, and they are actors, creating a world for their patrons, and for Bellocq that is different and more insular than the world outside. He never photographs the outside world, establishing the ghetto that is Storyville, its inhabitants all related in one way or another to each other. The curtained, dimly lighted interior is the result, not establishing day or night, as it is for the Prostitutes working hours. One photograph shows a mantel, with a portrait of a young woman, demurely dressed, emerging from her sheets, surrounded on three sides by framed photographs of other women, a veritable picture gallery of the women offered in that house, with significantly, a clock stopped at five minutes until midnight, the witching hour, underneath the set of portraits under the larger portrait above. These are staged photographs by a master of showing human emotions, without invading the privacy of these women, but are at the same time biographical, telling the stories of the women at different times of their lives, in different moods and circumstances. The woman standing at her mirror, back to the camera, face in the mirror, is concerned only with herself, but the photographer is concerned with her contemplation of herself, not his. An indefatigable lover, in mind if not physically, Bellocq is generous, not self-obsessed at all, but photographs for the benefit of his subject, interpreting their emotions and his in the pose and the photographic treatment of his subject.

Careful in producing the photographs to make them appear true to what he perceived was Bellocq's intention Lee Friedlander rejected conventional developing technique using silver oxide on bromide paper limiting the tonal range. Instead, he used a nineteenth century method called P.O.P, Printing Out Paper, exposing the plates to sunlight for three to seven days, finishing with a toning bath of gold chloride, then fixing and washing the paper, ultimately to producing the eighty-nine prints with the turn of the century look he believed Bellocq would have wanted.

Following E.J. Bellocq's lead, never colorizing the photographs so retaining the confusion of skin color, portraying nearly completely in black, white and grays, relying on hair texture and style of dress to distinguish race and class, he retains an allegiance to the era they were taken, and to the photographer who produced them. By finalizing the images portraying the women, developing the glass negatives into prints, Lee Friedlander recognizes that Bellocq's relationship with the women of Storyville is in the past, ended. This is a history of a past place and era and the women who lived and worked there.

Dana Nehdaran has translated into oil paint on canvas E.J. Bellocq's Storyville Portraits. Bellocq's negatives were clearly never intended to be developed into photographs. If they were to document the lives of the prostitutes, they were not intended to be made public and, not labeled in any way, did not identify the women in them. Their anonymity allowed Dana Nehdaran creative license in

adapting the photographs, creating each depiction. In taking this third step to recreate the lives and images of the women of Storyville, Nehdaran's technique is significant. Using a knifeblade and paintbrush guided by an empathetic and loving hand, he is the first to bring touch to the portraits, normalizing the relationship between male artist and female prostitute, as much as possible touching them. Nehdaran first applies sand to the underlying canvas, never quite covering the fabric. Then, he lays crackle onto the sand, designed to develop deep fissures, appearing as cracks as the crackle cures. Continuing this ancient fresco technique, he then applies the pigments using lamp black, a carbon black derived from the soot of burned candle oil often used in the nineteenth century south including New Orleans; the natural brown pigment, burnt umber for the rich browns of Black skin; iron oxide and manganese oxide that becomes warmer in degree when calcinated, effectively mixing those rich browns with a calcinated natural white. We cannot avoid the significance of sand, lamp black, Umbrian brown warmed when calcinated, or the intentional cracking of portrayed skin in some portraits while, in others, unblemished, smooth white skin prevails. We cannot avoid the appearance of underlying layers of canvas, and lack of any white pigment, allowing the canvas to show through, much as the prostitutes' skin and history shows through the photographs and paintings, although efforts have been made, in the crackle and the paint to cover what is not exposed, to pass. The final medley of colors that is New Orleans, burnt umber and copper leaf fixed for the color of the red roses and verdigris for the green leaves recall the coloration of the skin and roses held by the Black maid in Manet's "Olympia" where a Black maid attends a white woman, clearly defining class and racial roles. and crack under pressure.

Each participant in the history of the portraits infuses them with the vision of the subject and his own. The entire set expresses the emotion and history linking photographer, photographic printer, and painter, serving as mixed portraits and auto-portraits. As much as Bellocq posed the women of Storyville and staged their surroundings, Bellocq photographed but could not change the colors in the glass plate negatives. Friedlander refused to, using the P.O.P technique that infused the photographs with a golden hue. Nehdaran adopted the golden brown and blacks of Friedlander's prints refusing to add white pigment, refusing to allow the subjects to pass, though the canvas seeping through might have appeared white. Nehdaran manipulates the paint, charges the colors and infuses the texture to philosophize about the conditions of women in Storyville, their need to conceal and announce.

As with many of the non-white prostitutes of Storyville, Nehdaran is fair, having green-blue eyes which characteristics do not give away his Jewish Iranian heritage. Jews, usually of Eastern European heritage, were the fourth category in the Blue Book listings of prostitutes in Storyville. He can no doubt identify with the mixed racial boundaries and consequent availability of employment restrictions of the women in Storyville as numerous lists attest to both the Jewish and Black drops of blood identifying people, barring them from and ghettoizing them in housing and employment. Storyville was a ghetto where prostitution, an acceptable form of employment, regulated and remunerated was racially stratified, with white

women only available to white men, and Jews, Octoroons, Quadroons, and Blacks, listed as such in the Blue Book, identified and segregated.

The story of Storyville's prostitutes is one told by a physically damaged Creole photographer, featuring women of beauty and damaged circumstances, showing the economic and social power exerted by men to control and corral the power and camaraderie in the sex industry by women and to control their own bodies and minds. These photographs and the paintings after the photographs remind us that sex is not only physical, but very much an act of mind and empathy. In a place where Carnival allows participants to assume roles that are not theirs, the costly clothes of prostitutes, their surroundings, the trappings of power and wealth are masquerades perpetuated by Bellocq, Friedlander and Nehdaran. Bellocq's photographs show what he and the prostitutes wanted them to be, and as one associating with them, what he wanted to be, part of their milieu. Similarly, the white creaminess of their bodies, and the Black coffee-colored skin against perfectly curled hair was a world he may have wished to enter and could imagine. In this exhibition, Nehdaran's portraits and Storyville itself refuses to enable a fantasy of white male power, instead emphasizing true beauty of body and soul. Nehdaran's paintings are not pornographic, do not titillate, but rather demand empathy and concern. In New Orleans, the French influenced South where women were deemed genteel, and prostitutes were photographed as non-aggressive, so as not to disturb the gendered order, Nehdaran's portraits quietly influence a new order, portraying an old, accepted way of life where women held power over their bodies, minds and lives. All of them, Gertrude Anderson, Countess Willie Piazza, who was not a Countess, Mme. Lulu White, the wealthiest Madam of the grandest house in Storyville, Mahogany Hall, who was neither white nor French and insisted on her West Indian heritage, Ms. Ella Schwartz, Gertrude Dix who married political boss Tom Anderson, gaining a fortune, Emma Johnson, lesbian owner of the "House of All Nations"; and all amusements, who identified herself as the "Parisian Queen of America" though born in the Louisiana bayou of Acadian forebears, Adele, possibly E.J. Bellocq's only lover, the many unidentified prostitutes in Storyville, E.J. Bellocq, Lee Friedlander and Dara Nehdaran were and are of their times, and now, beautifully portrayed, of ours.

While many might think that the issues at the turn of the 20th century have seen progress, we find ourselves well into the 21st century facing political and social attacks as autonomy over the individual's body is threatened, income of the working class is often insufficient to cover basic needs, racial animosity is high, identity questioned, and voting and representation at all levels is challenged. What is left and in fact mirrors the plight of Storyville women, and in fact all of humanity since the beginning of time, is the human resilience and ability to thrive while being constrained and having limited options. The conversation is neither historical nor obsolete as it continues to be relevant today.



Nancy Nesvet is an Artist, Curator, and Arts Writer. Most recently, Nancy curated a show at the La Biennale Arte 2022 in Venice, Italy and held an Artist and Writer residency at ACI in Umbria, Italy. She has also curated and had her work featured in shows in Massachusetts, Maine, New York, Connecticut, Maryland, Washington, D.C. and Perugia, Italy. She has a BA in Art History, and an MFA in Studio Art from Maine College of Art and Design.

SPILLMAN | BLACKWELL is a gallery and consultancy featuring a diverse roster, ranging from emerging to seasoned talent, and from local, national and international artists. Conceived by longtime friends with a combined 30 years of gallery experience, SPILLMAN | BLACKWELL seeks to promote its artists locally and beyond, with a focus on being an artist-centered and community-accessible space. A graduate in art from Xavier University with a focus in painting and photography, Leslie-Claire Spillman has worked as a gallerist and professional photographer in New Orleans for nearly two decades. Amy Blackwell graduated from Southern University and A&M College with a concentration in History, relocating to New Orleans to apprentice at Silverman Studios under the late famed sculptor Dr. Arthur Silverman. Spillman, the longtime Director of the renowned Soren Christensen Gallery in New Orleans, curated hundreds of shows for the space during her tenure there. Blackwell, also at Soren Christensen Gallery for over ten years, honed her logistics, installation, and exhibition design experience there. Together, Spillman and Blackwell have a combined skill set that covers every aspect of the gallery business, with extensive practice in their respective areas of expertise, and in 2020 established a gallery bearing their name in the heart of the New Orleans Arts District.



Dana Nehdaran was born in Isfahan, Iran on the anniversary of his maternal grandfather's death in 1982. He took his given name, Rahmatollah, from his grandfather who was an art, antique and rare gem merchant; however, he has always been known by his Persian name, Dana, meaning wise. His grandparents' home held a marvelous collection of paintings and antiques, and his mother and father were arts aficionados, traveling the world to view noted institutional and residential collections. As a child, Dana took great wonder and inspiration from this family's passion for art and became motivated to study painting after discovering an uncle's discarded box of art supplies at his grandmother's house. His mother recognized his passion and talent, nurtured by sharing images from her world travels, and enrolled Dana in private art classes with Hassanpour, a well-known artist who taught Dana fundamentals of art that would eventually lead him to study painting at the Soureh Art University in Shiraz. One of his first series, "Esther's Children" was shown in Tehran, Dubai and Los Angeles. It was well received, and all of the work is now in either private collections or museums. He moved to New York City in 2015, where his first American series was "Fe26", as it is the Periodic table identification of the element, iron. There Dana concealed iron powder in manipulated patterns between layers of white paint, revealing the beauty subsequently by water and other methods of oxidization. In addition to "A Preservation of Light", Dana is also working on more than 100 New Yorker portraits where he randomly selects real people to pose for him. Of the more than eight series that Dana has created, all have a focus on the tension between past and present, including A Preservation of Light. Dana has been a member of the Iranian Painter Association from 2007.



DANA NEHDARAN (B. 1982)

Education

2007 - BA Painting, Soureh University, Shiraz, Iran

2002 - Associate degree, Carpet design, Isfahan, Iran

Solo Exhibitions

2022 – A Preservation of Light, Spillman Blackwell Gallery, New Orleans, LA, USA

2016/2017 - Agitations of Pleasure, Shirin Gallery, Tehran, Iran

2013 - Esther's children, Rira Gallery, Dubai, UAE

2011 - Esther's children, Shirin Art Gallery, Tehran, Iran

2010 - My Mona Lisa, Nar Gallery, Tehran, Iran

2008 - The Inside Layers, Morteza Momayez Gallery, Iran Art Organisation, Tehran, Iran

Group Exhibitions

2020 – Self-reflection, High Line nine Gallery, New York, New York, USA

2019 - Material Culture, Elga Wimmer Gallery, New York, New York, USA

2018 - Art Brief IV, SOMArts Culture Center, San Francisco, California, USA

2018 - A Tale of Two Cities, Bonhams, Auction House, Los Angeles, California, USA

2018 - A Tale of Two Cities, Kamil Art Gallery, Monte Carlo, Monaco

2018 - The World is My Home, Advorcartsy gallery, Los Angeles, CA, USA

2017 - Art Show for a Cause, Mim Gallery, Los Angeles, Ca, USA

2017 - Art Brief III, The (UN)DRAPED WOMAN, Arena 1, LA, Ca, USA

2017 - The First Bayaan, Bayaan Art Gallery, Isfahan, Iran

2017 - Red, Negar Art Gallery, Tehran, Iran

2017 - Perception, Fereshteh Book City Gallery, Tehran, Iran

2016 - States of Being Abstract, Elga Wimmer Gallery, New York, USA

2016 - Art Brief II: Iranian Contemporary North America, Los Angeles, California, USA

2016 - Untitled, Smash Gallery, San Francisco, USA

2016 - On Figures, Vista Gaallery, Tehran, Iran

2016 - The Young Artist, Sareban Gallery, Tehran, Iran

2014 - Eraser, Shirin art center, Tehran, Iran

2013 - History Game, Etemad Gallery, Tehran, Iran

2012 - WONDERLAND, Shokouh Art Gallery, Tehran, Iran

2012 - Opening RIRA gallery, Dubai, UAE

2012 - Jinn (painting), Seyhoun Gallery, Tehran, Iran

2012 - Haft Negah (painting), Farhangsara Niavaran, Tehran, Iran

2012 - Magic of Persia, Art Exhibition & Auction Gala, Salsali Private Museum, Dubai, UAE

2012 - Iranian Contemporary Artist (painting), Middle East Art Gallery, Tehran, Iran

2011 - 1st Modern & Contemporary Visual Art Auction, Tehran, Iran

2011 - Cutting Edge Artists (painting), Mellat Cinema Gallery, Tehran, Iran

2011 - Iranian Painter Association (painting), Contemporary Arts Museum, Isfahan, Iran

2011 - The first Tehran painting market: Barg Gallery, Tehran, Iran

2011 - little dancer (painting), Henna Art gallery, Tehran, Iran

2010 - Young Avant-garde (painting), Mellat Cinema Gallery, Tehran, Iran

2010 - Encyclopaedia Iranica (Charity Art Exhibition), New York, USA

2010 - Auto-portraits II, Silk road gallery ,Tehran, Iran
2010 - Untitled (painting), Art Center, Tehran, Iran
2010 - Untitled (painting), Neel Gallery, Tehran, Iran
2009 - 1001 Colours (painting), Canvas Gallery, New York, USA
2009 - Colours for the Green (painting), Mellat Cinema Gallery, Tehran, Iran
2008 - Global Generation Freiburg Group Exhibition, Freiburg, Germany
2008 - Untitled (painting), Nar Gallery, Tehran, Iran
2007 - Photography Expo, Esteqlal hotel, Tehran, Iran
2007 - Eternal Papers (photography), Contemporary Arts Museum, Isfahan, Iran

Professional Experience

2010/2013 - Graphic design for Ofogh-E-Bina Journal (Tehran Jewish Committee)
2008 - Painter for stage/set for feature film, 'The Remember', Iran
2007 - Painter for stage/set for TV series, The Forbidden Fruit, IRIB, Iran

Membership

2007-Present - Member of the Iranian Painter Association

Competitions

2012 - Selected for 9th Image of the year Festival, Short Film Category for 'Last Supper' Iran Art Organization, Tehran, Iran
2011 - Selected for short list of MOP CAP, Traffic gallery, Dubai, UAE
2008 - Selected for Damoonfar Festival, Tehran, Iran
2006 - Selected for Damoonfar Festival, Tehran, Iran

Art Fair

2018 - If so, what? San Fransisco, CA, USA
2016 - Art Miami Basel, Miami, Florida, USA

Biennial

2017 - Venezuela, Caracas

Museum

Salsali Private Museum, Two Pieces from Esther's Children series, Dubai, UAE
DD Art & Cultural Center, Six pieces from The Inside Layers series, My Mona Lisa series, Esther's Children series and Agitation of Pleasure series, Mazandaran, IRAN

Awards

2004 - Winner of Special Prize in Persian New Year Photography, Isfahan, Iran
2003 - Winner of Special Prize in Sketching, Hafezieh Competition, Shiraz, Iran

Auction

2017 - artnet, Advorcartsy gallery, Los Angeles, CA, USA
2014 - Third Tehran Auction, Parsian Azadi Hotel, Tehran, Iran
2013 - Second Tehran auction, Parsian Azadi Hotel, Tehran, Iran
2012 - First Tehran auction, Parsian Azadi Hotel, Tehran, Iran





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