

DESPINA STOKOU

The story behind an artwork, in the artist's own words

I MADE THIS PAINTING in New York after superstorm Sandy. There was an article on CNN's website about the aftermath in Chelsea galleries and there were dozens of pages of comments from civilians, which were—even taking into consideration the usual bitchiness of these forums—overwhelmingly negative. “These rich, overprivileged, pretentious, millionaires pouting . . . they should have brought the works upstairs . . . Only artists would not have thought to take precautions . . .” Things like that. The text on this painting is taken directly from the comments. They deal with (not unreasonable) questions of insurance, which leads to questions of the value of art and the artist's position in society. Commenters asked questions that ranged from the funny to the obscene to the legitimate, like, “What does American art tell about our story?” Or another, not very legitimate, question: “How will an oil painting protect your family when the Muslims come?” What I find electrifying in this is how the very idea of art is used with such admiration in one context—the world I'm familiar with—and at the same time with such contempt in another. As one of the commenters asks, “How do you determine what is real?”

I paint the way I write, starting at the top of the page, and going down. The words are painted, scratched, or collaged on canvas with paper, which in turn is cut, scratched, and painted with crayon, chalk, marker, or spray paint. It's a series of layers and decisions to be made. MP

Untitled (How is an oil painting going to protect your family), 2012. Oil and mixed media on canvas, 94 x 80 in.



Despina Stokou's debut solo exhibition in the U.S. is on view February 15 through March 16 at Derek Eller Gallery, in New York.