

STUDIO VISIT

In the Studio With Ivy Haldeman, the Painter Who Makes Hot Dogs and Empty Suits Human

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Haldeman wears a Gucci blouse, vest, and skirt; her own shoes.

Of the two hours I spend at Ivy Haldeman's studio in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, we spend the majority talking about hot dogs. The humble processed sausage—which, the artist notes, the World Health Organization classifies as carcinogenic—has been on Haldeman's mind ever since visiting La Boca, a vibrant, working-class neighborhood in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 2011. It was there that she came across a mural on the façade of a former convenience store that featured a hot dog in stilettos. Later, praying her "busted ass" digital camera would work, she returned to photograph it, but discovered that the building had just burnt down. She made a sketch from memory.

"There was something about it that was really striking," Haldeman recalls of the feminized hot dog. "When I first saw that image, I was like, Ha ha ha—this is funny. But when I came back to it, I was like, Oh—I *understand*."



What *did* she understand? Haldeman has trouble putting it into words. The immediate connection between her hot dogs and empty power suits, which are also a recurring motif in her work, is femininity. But it isn't quite that simple. Haldeman doesn't think of her hot dogs, with their long lashes and languid gestures, as women—in fact, she sees them as phallic. At one point, she covered her walls with hot dog people, "and I was like, *What have I done?*," she recalls, laughing. She now knows she did it because she was considering identity, a thought process that extended to the power suits. For her, they are an amalgamation of interchangeable members of the workforce—of no specific race or gender—who embody capital. Desire, sex, clothes, and even food are just cogs in the machinery of consumerism.





The suits also stem from Haldeman's discovery of joss paper, or "ghost money," which Chinese mourners burn in hopes that the belongings depicted in the sheets will join their late loved ones in the afterlife. Haldeman combined that inspiration with her love of Japanese line drawings—particularly those of the late 18th-century artist Kitagawa Utamaro, whose depictions of courtesans, in particular, were often simultaneously stately and whimsical.

Haldeman was born in Colorado, and raised by a mother who is a textile designer and a father who was in the military but eventually decided to make maple syrup and farm asparagus. The self-described "military brat" moved to New York City to study at Cooper Union. For almost a full decade, "there were always other jobs"—gigs as a nanny and proofreader, to name just two. In 2018, Haldeman was finally able to dedicate herself completely to her paintings, after she linked up with Downs & Ross gallery, which is currently displaying two of her pieces in their booth at Frieze and giving her a solo show, "Twice," in their Chinatown space.

"It's been an appropriately clichéd fairytale romance since my partner Tara Downs and I first met Ivy for dinner in Paris during the FIAC art fair several years back," gallery director Alex Ross says. "We fell hard for Ivy's richly researched allegories of desire and consumption and have been swayed by an imaginary of feminized alliances to be populated."



At about seven feet tall, the paintings Haldeman currently has on display are certainly not small: she describes them as “colossuses.” But she is currently working on a commissioned hot dog person that may stretch up to 20 feet—her most ambitious yet. “I don’t know,” she says, then pauses. “There’s something about a giant hot dog you aren’t gonna forget.”