



OUT OF THE BLUE

EMERGING ARTIST SEFFA KLEIN,
GRANDDAUGHTER OF THE LATE YVES
KLEIN, IS LIVING PROOF THERE IS MORE
TO A LUMINARY'S LEGACY THAN THE
MASTERPIECES HE LEAVES BEHIND.

WRITTEN AND PRODUCED BY **ALLISON BERG**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **SAM FROST**

“I WAS ALWAYS SURROUNDED BY THAT BLUE,”

says Seffa Klein, granddaughter of the renowned French visual and performance artist Yves Klein. Yves, a pioneering figure in the postwar European art world, is best remembered for the transformative effect of his work and for patenting a singularly recognizable, vivid ultramarine hue, International Klein Blue (IKB). “I always had a sense that I belonged to this larger family within the art world. My grandfather’s work has created a beauty that echoes indefinitely.”

Racing between gallery openings inside the freshly-minted DTLA creative campus that is 1700 South Santa Fe, organic minimalist artist Gisela Colon pulls me aside for a succinct introduction: “Have you met Seffa Klein, Yves Klein’s granddaughter?” The reference rolls off Colon’s tongue effortlessly. Though the long-brown-haired, icy-blue-eyed Klein smiles warmly, I can’t help but wonder how the 23-year-old UCLA graduate feels about embarking upon her own journey with such an esteemed artistic pedigree.

Researching Seffa’s work, background and ancestry, it doesn’t take much footwork to confirm that she is the daughter of artists Kathy Klein and Yves Amu Klein, granddaughter of Yves Klein and Rotraut Klein-Moquay (Rotraut married curator Daniel Moquay after Yves’s death), great-granddaughter of famed French Tachisme painter Marie Raymond and the great-niece of sculptor and op artist Günther Uecker. While Seffa is not defined by any of her art royalty relatives, there is no denying she is advancing a four-generations-long artistic vocabulary based on ontology, spirituality and coloration that goes well beyond Yves’s signature blue.

Yves’s *Monochromes* have propelled my own deep passion for modern art, as they have for millions of other art lovers globally since the 1940s. Yves mixed custom blue, pink and gold leaf recipes to produce

provocative monochromatic paintings, sculpture and *Anthropometries*, paintings created by utilizing naked models’ bodies as paintbrushes. “I have met several people who say they have turned toward the art world after seeing one of his shows,” says Seffa of the icon. “His blue is relatable to anyone who has ever been lost in the expansive sublimity of the ocean or sky. That depth reminds them of times they have glimpsed the truth. His work offers a space for contemplation and transcendence without the esotericism and sterility of minimalist work.” Seffa suspects her grandfather, who tragically died of a heart attack at the age of 34, was always acutely aware of his own mortality and that this awareness led to a deep appreciation for life. “That vibrant IKB stimulates the senses. It affirms one’s own existence in this world and beyond,” she says.

Two months after Yves’s death, Seffa’s father, Yves Amu, was born. Yves Amu grew up to become a robotics sculptor, designer, scientist and astrophotographer, who told bedtime stories to young Seffa about atom structure and building circuits. He often handcrafted strange and beautiful devices, such as a flashlight with different LED light channels that she could switch around to mix colors. “I was infinitely entranced,” Seffa recalls fondly. He raised Seffa in Phoenix with her mother, Kathy, a prolific artist who has produced several bodies of work, including intricate floral mandalas, computer punch card collages and tapestry-like compositions of lipstick kisses on paper. When she was about 10, Seffa relocated to Northern Arizona with her mother. It was in this tranquil environment that Kathy taught her how to meditate, a practice that has transformed Seffa’s life and values. Any action or thought that doesn’t contribute toward building a larger spiritual object is uninteresting to her. This ideology has shaped Seffa’s art practice.

For Seffa Klein, who finds inspiration in her studies, dreams and visions, art is a way of knowing the world.



“A funny thing happens when you look for the truth in art, science and meditation; certain sensibilities arise repeatedly across generations,” Seffa observes. It is through this lens that her family’s influence becomes undeniable. Her mother has always experienced very accurate psychic dreams, and similarly, Seffa shares, “I don’t feel like I make conceptual choices. Instead, I am driven to accomplish a mission by pursuing the ideas and visions I have about the nature and structures of reality. It’s an urgency I feel daily.”

In addition to dreams and visions, Seffa’s work is informed by her studies in art history, music, astronomy, chemistry and physics. Art has become her way of knowing the world. She embraces logic along with the mindset of connectivity, discovery and growth, exploring the architecture of being and non-being. Seffa believes people can find agency in contemplating the structure of our consciousness and how it is layered between worlds. “The creation of great art comes from somewhere beyond the mind and uplifts the world by bridging it to the unseen,” she explains. “I think we are all able to interact with so much more than the ostensible. It’s in letting go of my own certainty, my own ideas of control and intellect, that I have been able to receive knowledge in the most magnificent ways.”

As a teenager, Seffa grew very close to her grandmother, Rotraut. “She recognized me as an artist in a deep way,” she relays. A pivotal moment occurred when they traveled together to Art Basel in Switzerland. It was here that Seffa was inspired to pen her first artwork, a system for the automatic composition of music. Soon after, on her 18th birthday, the two spent the entire day painting together in Rotraut’s apartment in Montparnasse—the place where Yves created so much of his own artistic magic. Seffa’s systems have since evolved

into dissociating colors and those that disassemble her association with the value of digits. In this regard, her *SK Bricks* series proposes to reconceptualize the smallest units of meaning and progress. She aims to construct an ideological empire with her practice. “I want to see and comprehend a better operating system for self and society,” she says.

Her largest body of work to date is made of exotic metals on fireproof woven glass blankets. These *Fire Blankets* derive their color naturally from the metal itself through a controlled oxidation practice. She considers them portraits of an updated system for self-location and access to information. The most significant aspect of this series is *Multiple Displacement Theory* (2017), which employs geometry as the language of absolutes. “The circle and the square are depicted as the emblems of two worlds. The square represents our physical, sensorial, upright, 90-degree reality, and the circle is a connection to the origin egg, the celestial sphere and infinity,” Seffa explains. “Through the lens of the square alone, we face crises of truth and meaning. In these *Fire Blanket* compositions, one never supersedes the other. Interwoven, they portray a unified lens through which to see reality as a non-dichotomous information space where the ‘circle world’ constantly offers its knowledge to the square.” She is further contemplating nature and symbiosis with works that include flowers and plants embedded in the metal when it is molten.

Though Seffa never met her grandfather, she has always been surrounded by his artwork and has attended many of his shows. She feels she interacts with the idea of him and is cognizant of his accomplishments. “His energy is still so present in his work and in my grandmother’s profoundly enduring love for him,” Seffa says. “Rotraut has always been willing to share beautiful



A moment in Seffa's studio.

“I ALWAYS HAD A SENSE THAT I BELONGED TO THIS LARGER FAMILY WITHIN THE ART WORLD. MY GRANDFATHER’S WORK HAS CREATED A BEAUTY THAT ECHOES INDEFINITELY.” -Seffa Klein



Yves Klein, *Untitled Blue Monochrome (IKB 231)* (1959)

vignettes of their extraordinary love story and lifestyle—she seems to have experienced the whole thing as though it were poetry.” Early on, Seffa was concerned she should pull away from any artistic inclination that might have resonance with Yves’s art. Now, she understands hers is completely different work that hardly calls him to mind formally. “I realized that nature’s lexicon belongs to everyone, and Yves’s output was expansive. I can’t imagine he would have wanted it to cause me to contract away from anything I was driven toward through my practice,” declares Seffa.

Despite the differences in their work, one can easily draw parallels between the two artists, such as their shared interest in meditation—perhaps best evidenced through Yves’s *Monotone-Silence Symphony* (1947-1961)—their use of fire, as exemplified through Yves’s *Fire Paintings*, and their shared passion for the study of coloration. In both the art world and her personal life, Seffa realized from a very young age that people would treat her differently

depending upon their preconceived notions of her family pedigree. This realization has helped her to become detached from people’s perceptions. The majority of Seffa’s youth was spent in rural Arizona where her grandfather was not well-known. However, she experienced a dramatic shift in perspective during her frequent summer trips to her father’s old family house in the South of France, where the local school is named after Yves Klein and everyone knows exactly who she and her family are. “It made everything feel impermanent and contrived,” confides Seffa. “Only the trees and the creek flowing through our land could suggest to me who I really was.”

Uncannily grounded in who she is—especially considering her years—and confident in her own unique art practice, Seffa is also aware of her place within her family’s artistic legacy. “I hope to uplift humankind for the benefit and delight of any being who may stumble across us in the future, near or far.”