

CAROLINE SHEPARD



Don't Tread On Me, 2022

Digital photo print on vinyl banner, 230 x 230 cm

American artist, Caroline Shepard created this provocative work as an act of resistance against the US Supreme Court decision in 2022 to revoke their landmark ruling in *Roe v. Wade* (1973) that the United States Constitution upholds the right to abortion. The Supreme Court decision of 2022 shattered the trust of many Americans in their legal system, enacting a regressive repeal of rights and civil liberties long held to be entrenched in the very identity of progressive America. In *You Know That You Are Human*, we present *Don't Tread On Me* – with its depiction of humanity in its comingled frailty and strength - as a statement against the subjugation of the female body. *Don't Tread On Me* is actually made to be trodden upon. It is a viscerally participatory work, forcing us to feel the discomfort of those first hesitant steps onto the delicate naked bodies of women piled at our feet; inviting us to empathize with women walked over and stepped upon throughout the ages.

ARTIST STATEMENT

In 1989 Barbara Kruger proclaimed “our bodies are a battleground” in response to the chipping away of abortion protections in the United States. In 2022, the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, the historic decision that protected

abortion access across the nation. 50 years. The course of my lifetime. What does forced motherhood mean? It means women are not autonomous. It means women in the United States are not equal citizens. But we are not alone in our move towards political extremism. From Afghanistan, to Poland and beyond, practically half the countries in the world have some form of restrictions on abortion. Why? We need only look back to the Third Reich to know that our bodies are controlled when fascism is on the rise, when power is threatened. By 1945, approximately 2 million German women were raped. Female bodily autonomy is continually violated during times of war, and yet where are the monuments? Where is the healthcare, or the compensation? Where is the recognition that we are targets in war? This isn't ancient history, this is Bosnia, the Ukraine. Think of the Yazidis, the Rohingya. The girls stolen by Burko Haram. "Culturally sanctioned" child marriage and forced marriage. Consider the murdered Transgender women across the globe. And the Tribal women in North America. When will it end? When we insist that all rape is not a justifiable byproduct of patriarchy, or war, or something that doesn't exist. Sadly, on January 6, 2022, the US witnessed more than just a right-wing rebellion as throngs of angry men waving "DON'T TREAD ON ME" flags stormed the capitol building of the United States, we witnessed Patriarchy armed and ready to fight for domination at the cost of democracy. Women's bodies have been walked over, abused and misused throughout History. Our bodies remain a battleground. We can feel the footsteps all over us, but where is the evidence? Positioned on the gallery floor, *'Don't Tread On Me'* dares the viewer to trespass the intimate lines of bodily autonomy. In the picture series, much like a memorial, it stands as a marker of the myriad untold stories, and silenced voices.

- Caroline Shepard

BIO

Caroline Shepard is old enough to have seen some things, and young enough to still be curious. Born and raised in New York City, they received a BA from Sarah Lawrence College under Joel Sternfeld and Gregory Crewdson, and an MFA at the School of Visual Arts, under Collier Schorr, Sophie Calle and Sarah Charlesworth - all of whom continue to influence. Their work has been published and exhibited worldwide. They are currently living in Berlin.