

PEOPLE
ARE
TALKING
ABOUT

REVISIONIST HISTORY
GIRLS AT THE POOL,
2005, A PHOTOGRAPHIC
STILL FROM SUSSMAN'S
NEW WORK, WHICH WAS
INSPIRED BY DAVID'S
1799 PAINTING, BELOW.



costume
drama

With a nod to the sixties,
an artist reimagines
a neoclassical painting
in modern Greece.



Eleve Sussman first made waves in the art world when her lush video *89seconds at Alcázar* was unveiled at the 2004 Whitney Biennial. The ten-minute piece, based on Velázquez's painting *Las Meninas* (c. 1656), uses exacting period detail to bring the Spanish Infanta and her retinue to life. "On the surface, it's very, very beautiful, seductive, and accessible," says Whitney curator Chrissie Iles. "But when you go underneath the quiet spectacle of it, there are a lot of interesting ways in which she's unfolding the narrative." Sussman's new film, **The Rape of the Sabine Women**, also began with a painting—Jacques-Louis David's 1799 *The Intervention of the Sabine Women*. But rather than setting the scene in ancient Rome, the 45-year-old artist shot her film in modern-day Greece and Berlin, and based her aesthetic on the clean, stylized look of

1960s New Wave cinema. The feature-length work premieres at the Thessaloniki International Film Festival in Greece this month before coming to New York, where it will be shown by Creative Time during the 2007 Armory Show.

Born in London and raised in Turkey, India, and Massachusetts, Sussman originally considered starting in classical times and moving forward through history. But when she and her ensemble arrived in Athens, they were struck by its wealth of sleek postwar buildings. "Greece is full of amazing modern architecture that's really overlooked," Sussman says, "because people go there expecting antiquities." Costume designer Karen Young felt the same way. "People were constantly referring to Aristotle Onassis, Maria Callas, and the 1960s as being a really vibrant time in Greek culture," she says. "That made us think of doing something more modern."

Young kept the men in slim, three-button dark suits and moved the women from the sedate, ladylike 1950s to the more stylized utopian perfection of the 1960s. Installed in a dramatically spare modernist house, the abducted women are dressed in bright A-line shifts, Callas-style sunglasses, and lavish jewelry to suggest "sixties trophy brides," says Sussman. Here, Young notes, each scene was so carefully planned that "we actually placed where the clothing was in the frame." This care intensifies the shock of the final battle scene, in which the garments are ripped to shreds. "All the perfect design, the perfect hairstyles, the perfect architecture—it all disintegrates," says Sussman. "It parallels the cyclical nature of our being and the fact that history keeps repeating itself."

—CAROL KINO

pata >268