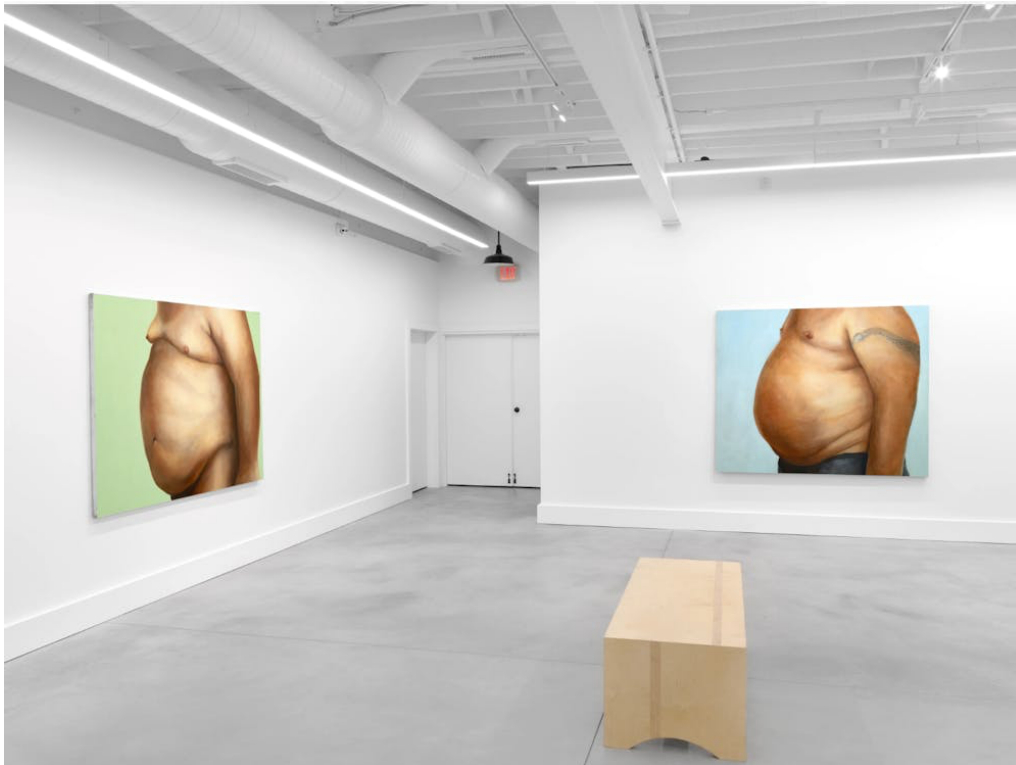


THE SPECTRUM

ARTS

Local artist tackles objectification of women: ‘What if I objectified men?’

Joan Linder’s exhibit, “Belly,” depicts male bodies with “different shapes”



Joann Linder's latest exhibition explores the reversal of the male gaze | Images courtesy of the artist and Rivalry Projects, Buffalo, NY

By **MYLIEN LAI** - February 26, 2024 | 9:11pm EST

Paintings of naked men line the walls. The subjects are arranged in various poses: in one portrait, a man looks confidently at the camera, hands planted on his hips while in another, two companions unabashedly look at each other.

Titled “Belly,” the showcase by Joan Linder — hosted at Rivalry Projects from Jan. 12 to Feb. 23 — transposes the lens through which females are objectified onto men by positioning them in suggestive and vulnerable poses. One piece in particular, “All Fours,”

shows a man bent over on all fours, alluding to the most common sexual position taken by women in pornography.

“I wanted to see if I could make paintings as a woman that were not about women as subjects,” Linder said. “I wanted to take what I learned and turn it on its head.”

While some of the subjects’ faces are shown, most are kept anonymous. Only their potbellies are known to the audience.

She drew her inspiration from a famous 1989 exhibit titled, “Do Women Have to Be Naked to Get in the Met. Museum?” by the Guerrilla Girls to raise awareness about how the art world often prizes a woman’s nudity over her accomplishments.

“Could I make paintings of men, and could I take the same ideas?” Linder said. “What would that look like? It was kind of a question, so it was an experiment.”

The exhibit’s answers to these questions are the culmination of years-long research begun in the 1990s. Linder accumulated a collection of photographs and sketches focusing on men’s bodies and roles within society, ranging from heads of companies to hunters.

“I had a lot of fun making these paintings,” Linder said. “I felt like I was really poking at something here. It’s kind of like dancing around a painting and thinking, ‘Ha ha ha.’” Despite the crude topic, the nudes are painted in soft strokes of pastel colors, depicting Linder’s efforts to keep the subjects’ dignity intact. The imperfect body shapes are drawn with kindness and a casual acceptance of their appearances, regardless of whether the body is marked with a tattoo or has pubic hair.

The artwork subtly explores the acceptance of female bodies contrary to the ideals often emphasized in the media as it counters the stereotypical picture of the “perfect” male body.

“If you strip the clothes off, the bodies have different shapes than ideal shapes,” Linder said. “I was really interested in the vulnerability that is part of that. What does it mean to portray something that is powerful, but maybe also vulnerable?”