

## REDEFINING FEMALE NUDITY IN VISUAL ART – {ARTISTS TO WATCH / EXHIBITION / GROUP SHOW}

By Andrea Zlotowitz / March 23, 2016 / Artist To Watch - Series, Design, Galleries, Mixed Media, Painting, Visual Artist

I recently had the privilege of seeing an exhibition at Garis & Hahn on the Bowery in New York City. The exhibition, which opened on Friday March 11th, is called "Beyond the Gaze: Women Painting Women" and features work by four female artists seeking to redefine the traditional artist and model relationship by re-imagining the portrayal of the female model. While each artist's creative ideas and colors complimented each other extraordinarily well, the four women in this exhibition each presented their own unique perspectives of female identity.



The most familiar depictions of the female nude are typically studied in art history; scholars have discussed how Edouard Manet painted *Olympia* with her famous outward gaze and they have observed how Titian's *Venus of Urbino* revealed the purest form of female vulnerability and delicacy, among many other historical examples. Society has seen the nude portrayed many times over, emphasizing form and every part (ahem, genitalia) that physically makes a woman a woman. This exhibition, however, isn't like that. In these works, typically male-centric depictions of the female body are replaced with painterly gestures and a more colorfully abstracted approach that suggests the open-endedness of female identity. The four artists — Sarah Faux, Tatiana Berg, Jay Miriam and Sarah Awad — reveal more than just the female form but also the emotions and vulnerabilities experienced in womanhood

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Sarah Faux's work is comprised of large canvases covered with massive patches of color and abstraction. Using thick brushstrokes and bright (yet soft) colors, Faux emphasizes curvature, the sparkle and glitter which many women adore, as well female strength and power by means of strong purple and gold hues. Similarly, Tatiana Berg's work is very abstract and gestural. Her paintings look as if she could have been painting a nude right next to Pablo Picasso. Her works reveal ideas of secrecy and privacy along with lust, female presence and desire.





Jay Miriam's works were some of my favorite in the show. Her painterly hand is stunning and the variation of colors and line work combined to form her content is really beautiful. The figures are painted with large exposed breasts with very red nipples and darkened, yet soulful, eyes. In her work *Woman and Her Headless Parrot*, the woman is reclined with her legs wide open and her exposed genitalia in the center of the canvas. This work appears to refigure similarly influential works by older masters such as Henri Matisse (with his *L'artiste et le modele*, 1919-21) and Egon Schiele (with his *Reclining Female Nude with Legs Spread Apart*, 1914). The poses are similar yet Miriam doesn't show the woman as an object in a specific setting but as part of that setting.



And lastly, Sarah Awad's works were striking. It appeared that thick paint was applied onto her canvas before she added critical details on top; her end result is the figure of a nude woman. Several of her paintings were nearly identical. Her head is at the bottom of the canvas and her legs are flying across the top. Her left nipple is exposed and her right breast disappears into the colors. She uses a palette of soft pastel tones along with darker swaths of paint that intercept the delicacy of the lighter colors, especially as the figures appear in a state of flux, perhaps falling or caught in a moment of turmoil. They are fluid and in each of her works, it seems that she is reflecting on the strife and stresses which many women face.



This exhibition replaces the traditional role of male artist with female model with female artist and ideas of feminism (including the role of the female model). It is, in a sense, a feminist exhibition. It is an exhibition that merges female strength and power with traditional art history. It is more than claiming female strength and power and beauty and vulnerability and delicacy, it physically shows it.

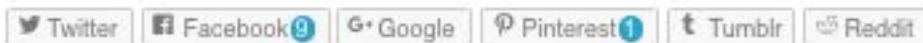
The fact that these works subtly reference traditionally historical works does not surprise me; the historical artist and nude is really the only bit of art history that has been consistently gendered, the history of man as spectator and woman as spectacle. However, if this exhibition places women in both roles, as maker and model, then the female model no longer acts as a show pony, a prize, an object of visual affection. A woman painting a woman is then a painting about identity, curiosity, and understanding of our bodies and emotions. It is the climax to a movie. It is the epiphany we have when the light turns on and a great idea is revealed. These paintings are the great ideas, the epiphanies, the climaxes (sexual pun intended) for these female artists.



This exhibition was expertly curated and forced your eyes to bounce from vibrant work to the next and ponder the images before you. These are not "obvious" works to analyze yet their softness makes them approachable and easier to confront.

"Beyond The Gaze: Women Painting Women" is on view at Garis & Hahn until April 17th, 2016. Garis & Hahn is located at 263 Bowery, New York, NY 10002. Galley hours are Wednesday to Saturday 11:00 AM to 6:00 PM.

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