

*In The Mood for Nude* • published in the April 2010 issue of *Hipfish* ©Elia Seely

Traditional, exceptional, reviled, and revealed—the nude human figure in art is a subject of beauty, controversy, and exploration. Reflective of a society’s attitudes towards sexuality and the human form, the depiction of the nude, particularly the female, has changed drastically over time. As attitudes and ways of seeing evolve, so does the representation of the human form in art—or perhaps the exploratory vision of the artist changes the way we see. While it can be difficult to expand our ideas about what is art, or what is an ‘accurate’ representation of the body, exposure to new ways of seeing is essential and provocative. Our reactions to art are visceral and individual; how may a piece both compelling and disturbing in its combination of nude form, suggestion of violence, and altered reality encourage us to sit with our own attitudes towards ourselves, gender, and culture? How does a piece that depicts the body as fragment juxtaposed with objects of everyday reality help us to question our own perceptions?

Clearly the human body is a tantalizing subject. Astoria artist and CCC nursing student Gillian Hall says, “It is poignantly illustrative of the human condition – our fascination with the human form. We see it, just as we see everything else: in context with only ourselves. But we are only creatures like all others, wandering naked from point to point to point. Perhaps this is why our form is so compelling. It represents our true vulnerability: ourselves withdrawn from all context and standing naked and still to be captured by somebody else.” Hall has a piece in the current 2010 *Au Naturel* show at the Clatsop Community College Art Center Gallery, one of 61 pieces selected for this fourth annual exhibit celebrating the human figure in art.

*Au Naturel* opened February 25<sup>th</sup> with a packed reception. Awards were announced and there was also honor given to Laura Russo, who juried the show as one of the final acts of her life. The beloved and dedicated Russo passed on February 11; the opening was an opportunity for an expression of respect and love for her, as well as a celebration of the art. Russo was a knowledgeable juror, and approached the task of choosing pieces for the show with integrity: “I wanted to present a range of approaches and sensibilities. I specifically looked for work that I felt displayed technical proficiency and, because of the traditional subject matter, I was also drawn to work that presented a unique or innovative vision of the nude.” Five hundred pieces were submitted by 158 artists from 29 states, in addition to international submissions from Canada and Europe. The 2010 exhibit represents 55 artists from 17 states.

The show is satisfyingly diverse. From small pieces on slate to larger than life dramatic diptychs, charcoal and Conti crayons to oil and mixed media, there are works to inspire, inform, and challenge the viewer. And the exhibit provides an exceptional opportunity for artists; as local artist Nicholas Knapton states, it isn’t always easy to find a venue for this type of work. “The show also creates a platform for those involved to show their work and have it recognized by those who appreciate the figure in art.” Clatsop Community College was one of the first community colleges in Oregon to begin to use live models, and the college continues to have one of the best small visual art programs in the Northwest. The *Au Naturel* show is a natural extension of the importance CCC faculty have placed on figure drawing. Royal Nebeker, juror for the inaugural 2007 show, expressed his enthusiasm for the concept of the *Au Naturel* exhibition: “This [show] is a particularly significant accomplishment when one realizes the relatively remote geographic area served by the facility. Bringing this quality of artwork to the campus will be educational and greatly enjoyed by the student body and local community. It is an example of the vision and leadership the art faculty constantly provides for our region.” Kristin Shauck, faculty for the CCC Art department and Director of the show, says that the response to *Au Naturel* over four years has been

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phenomenal. The exhibit draws from Portland and Seattle, as well as pulling in large numbers of the local community. In addition, the body of work chosen for the exhibit has a positive impact on students at CCC. Shauck explains, “When I conceived of this show five years ago, I was thinking of the show primarily as a means to bring figurative artwork from all over the country and the world right here to our very own gallery for our students to study and learn from, and it has been so exciting to see how the students have responded to and engaged with this show. I have really seen the students’ level of dedication rise.” Revenue from the submission fees goes for the cash awards to winners, to the Purchase Award, supporting the artist recipient for the Solo Show Award, and of course the administrative and PR expenses of the show. While *Au Naturel* is not yet self-sustaining, Shauck has hopes that it will become so.

Drawing from live models has a long tradition in the visual arts. Even in pre-historic art we find depictions of the nude form. The Greeks practiced it, and by the 13<sup>th</sup> century drawing from life was an established practice. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, aspiring artists spent hours drawing from live models before they moved on to painting and sculpture. Although women were certainly used as models as early as Greek times, they were not typically allowed to attend life drawing studios as students until after the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This has happily changed, and many of the works featured in this year’s *Au Naturel* show are by women artists.

But why draw from a live model? Judy Sorrel, coordinator of Hoffman House Studio life drawing group has this to say: “Life drawing is an excellent way to develop drawing skills in general, and is interesting in that I find it to be a sort of collaboration with the model. It is the whole person one is relating to, not just the physical body.” Armin Mühsam, Associate Professor of Painting and Drawing at Northwest Missouri State University, believes that the discipline of life drawing and painting continues to have relevance for the contemporary artist. “For a representational artist like me,” he explains, “drawing the human figure from life, that is, the examination and appreciation of the figure’s proportions, lines, rhythm and tension, keeps the senses sharp and continually hones the feeling for significant form that is so important for my studio practice.” Mühsam’s art appears in this year’s show, and he had work in the 2009 exhibition as well.

The *Au Naturel* exhibit is free and open to the public. Special thanks to the Cannery Pier Hotel, the Wet Dog Café, and the Red Hare. The CCC Art Center Gallery is located at 1799 Lexington Avenue in Astoria and is ADA accessible. The gallery hours are from 8:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, and Saturday from 11:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. The gallery is open on Sundays and holidays by appointment only. Please note that special Spring Break hours between Monday, March 29 and Saturday, April 3 are from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. For more information, please contact Kristin Shauck at 503-338-2472.

### **Award Winners**

- 1 - Jessica McCoy, *Bathroom II*, oil on board, Claremont, CA
- 2 - Martha Ferris, *The Red Room I*, pastel on paper, Vicksburg, MS
- 3 - Anne John, *Rain Forest*, mixed media on canvas, Vancouver, WA

### **Purchase Awards**

Todd Smith, *Evening Swimmer*, oil, The Dalles, OR

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Rhonda Grudenic, *Monica Enclosed State II*, intaglio, Gearhart, OR

### **Solo Show Award**

Grazyna Adamska-Jarecka, *Equilibrium*, acrylic on plastic, Ames, IA

### **Workshop Series Awards**

Grazyna Adamska-Jarecka: Painting Workshop, Ames, IA

Efram Wolff: Printmaking Workshop, Vashon, WA

Armin Mühsam: Drawing Workshop, Maryville MO

People's Choice Award: Penny Treat, Lotus Flower. Long Beach, WA

### **Coastal opportunities for Life Drawing**

#### **Bay City Arts Center, Bay City**

Wednesdays 6 – 9pm, \$15 per session or 5 session punch card for \$50

Clothed and nude models

All skill levels welcome, some instruction available

Contact: Jason at [bcaclifedrawing@gmail.com](mailto:bcaclifedrawing@gmail.com) or at (503) 679-6520

#### **Hoffman House Studios, Manzanita**

Sundays 10am – 1pm, \$15 per session

Nude models

All skill levels welcome

Contact: Judy Sorrel at 503-368-7868

#### **Clatsop Community College, Astoria**

Winter and Summer term drawing courses focus on life drawing. See the CCC catalog for details.

Nude models

Contact: Kristin Shauck at 503-338-2472 or [kshauck@clatsopcc.edu](mailto:kshauck@clatsopcc.edu).

#### **Alabaster Jar, Astoria**

Wednesdays, time TBA, \$7 per session or monthly for \$25

Nude models

All skill levels welcome

Contact: Jamie Boyd 503-791-9435, or Alabaster Jar 503-325-8632