

Kimberly Tate, Fine Arts

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Breaking away from patriarchal tradition: Re-envisioning the female nude in feminist contemporary painting

The traditional treatment of the female nude in Western imagery has reflected societal conventions of regulating women's bodies and has been a powerful tool in framing femininity. For this project, I have produced 3 pieces in oil; two were produced in collaboration with other women and one is self-reflective. This body of work involves reconstructing traditional power dynamics of the artist-model relationship within the art making process as well as making space for women interject their own definitions of themselves. There are three parts to the exploration. Firstly, in the studio, my collaborators were challenged to reclaim control over their bodies. By choosing their own strength-emphasizing poses, they were asked to explore female-defined aesthetics and regulations. My role in the collaboration was to empower their role in the process as well as make a space for their voices. Secondly, I made several pieces in which I painted straight into the image I saw on one-foot square mirrors. These are artifacts of personal exercises in regulating my image and reflecting on the way I view myself. Finally, in an effort to gain deeper understanding of the relationship, I positioned myself in the role of the nude model. The experience of exchanging roles introduced an entirely new dynamic in the development of my work. I was reminded of the gendered conventions of aesthetics that I tried to remove from my studio, thus revalidating my work. As a result of this inquiry I have discovered new avenues for exploration. I am just beginning to explore my artistic potential, and I foresee a long trajectory of work on the subject of women's self-definition and the reconstruction of studio dynamics. I want to expand my collaborative efforts to women of different demographics to facilitate the contribution of more experiences to the artistic discussion. There is also an interest in planning an outside-of-the-studio activist effort to raise awareness among other artists and models about these issues.