

Jenna Gribbon: Regarding Me Regarding You

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Jenna Gribbon's paintings pay homage to the moment when light touches skin. Her brush strokes capture these similar and never the same moments in intimate portraits of those close to her. Next to her friends and son, Gribbon's girlfriend is prominently featured in her sensual paintings. Putting these personal scenes into the public gallery space, Gribbon understands her paintings as 'commentary on the voyeuristic nature of the world.' Rarely finishing a work within one sitting, Gribbon's paintings are often built on the basis of photographs as a means of how we memorise and thus experience. She states: 'My work is concerned with the way we construct personal narrative.' For a complete read of her work, the painting's titles are key. Drawing on the works of Mary Cassatt, Karen Kilimnik, Joan Semmel and Edouard Manet, Gribbon's paintings of those closest to her vividly capture instants of pure joie de vivre.

The experience of seeing and being seen is a central part of Gribbon's work. In contrast to Laura Mulvey's argument that 'analyzing pleasure, or beauty, destroys it', Gribbon states: 'I have no desire to destroy the viewer's pleasure, or my own. I am more interested in delivering that familiar "old painting experience" that most of us will admit to enjoying, as a means of posing uncomfortable questions or making the viewer hyper-aware of their own role as consumers of beauty.' Her paintings carefully examine the implications and responsibilities of looking through what she calls a 'scopophilic feedback loop'. This becomes clear not only in the works' subject matters and titles such as 'Ritualized looking' or 'Midday watch' but also in the artist's own appearance in her works. While Gribbon comes into the painting 'Me, a lurker' as a dark shadow, the work 'Hey! Up here!' writes the image's author into the picture through its title and the sitter's gaze towards the viewer. In both ways, she highlights the made character of her work, implicating herself in the voyeuristic dynamic of her own creation.

Gribbon's depictions of nude bodies question traditional viewing regimes in the patriarchal canon of art history which she grew up with. To a striking extent, Gribbon's paintings negate the binary of an active creative male gaze and a passive beautiful feminine object. Paintings such as 'M traversing a phallic shadow' or 'My girlfriend in a short skirt, a row of men between us' reference and challenge what Mulvey termed 'the language of the dominant patriarchal order.' Repeatedly, the fluorescent pink nipples of her nudes have been highlighted as Gribbon's trademark. Forcing the viewer to focus on a body part of heightened sensitivity which while being socially accepted in painting and sculpture is frequently censored in mass media, her paintings reflect on differing viewing habits in the public museum, contemporary art gallery and on social media. Audre Lorde argued that 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.' Though Gribbon uses the master's tools, she applies them differently, questioning the functioning of the tools themselves.

by Marie Meyerding