

“What Vintage Playboys Have to do with Fine Art and Sexual Empowerment”

By Jodi Taylor / 2017



Walking into Kathryn Macnaughton’s studio, you instantly feel that special energy of creative spaces. Propped up against the walls are pieces that the Toronto-based artist is currently working on as she preps for an upcoming show in Vancouver, British Columbia. As we walk around checking out her piles of records and art books and mags, Macnaughton tells us a little bit about how she first got into the art world: “I started painting when I was really young. I did an oil painting course—I think it was first year [of] university in the summertime, in Italy,” she explained. “I came back and did illustration for school [OCAD University], but I kind of did abstract work on the side for myself because I liked it. I didn’t think I could have a career doing it full-time—I just continued down that road for ten years, just doing it on the side, [then] decided to take it full force. I would say I was 18.”

Hugely inspired by the female body, there is a ton of movement within her work. “I’ve been doing work like this—it’s been imbedded in me since I started school. I like the idea of putting that sexual liberation in my work,” she told us. “The female figure is very important in my work, and the shapes that are created. When I went to school for illustration, I did graphic design, and I think a lot of the influence comes from graphic shapes, which take on the shape of the female form.”

This is why we weren’t at all surprised to see stacks of vintage *Playboys* next to the artist’s record player, which she confirmed are major sources of inspiration to her—she often references the posture and body types of the women pictured as they are more classic than what we see today. Taking in Macnaughton’s not-yet-finished work lined up along the walls, you can clearly see those references reflected in her work. Yet paintings that look finished and absolutely stunning to us are labeled as “not even close” by the artist. “I’m never satisfied. I guess that’s a good thing because I am always trying to do better work—I’m completely addicted to it. It feels like I’m always trying to figure it out. Yesterday, I spent twelve hours in the studio, not even leaving once, from 8:30 AM to 8:30 at night. I get addicted to it because I’m so hard [on myself]. I think everything sucks, but I’m trying to make it better.”

Joshua Liner Gallery



So how does Macnaughton truly know when a piece is finished and ready to be shown off? “It’s a feeling. This feeling I get is really nice. It feels like there’s satisfaction there—I feel so happy,” she tells us. “When I don’t get it and there is nothing else I can do, and the piece is done, I’m really upset. Sometimes it just doesn’t happen. I think I have to realize that not every piece I do is going to be the best thing ever. I have to think of it as a process, as an idea and process that I’m working through, and you have to move on to the next one.”

Like we said, there wasn’t a piece in the room that didn’t look art-show-ready to us, but as the saying goes, “You’re your own worst critic.” As we sipped on some peppermint tea before leaving, Macnaughton told us a little bit about what she is currently focusing on. “I’m working on a show for Bau-Xi, it’s July 8th [in Vancouver]. I’m almost done [with it]. Then I’m painting four chairs for a charity auction called *Eva’s Initiatives*—it’s for helping women’s shelters.” A gifted artist who also gives back to her community? Watch this space.

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