

Nude paintings attract attention, discussion

by Elynn Pak
Staff Writer

A man and two women peer into the window of an art gallery exhibiting larger-than-life paintings of a heavy, naked woman posing in compromising positions.

"Why would you want to paint something like that?" asks one woman.

"Why would you want to pose for something like that?" asks the other.

"It's like, 'Hey baby, check me

out,'" the first woman says.

It sounds like the start of a bad joke, but the five-foot-tall, \$3,000 paintings displayed at Fraser Gallery in downtown Bethesda have garnered attention. Some people gawk, and others blush and recoil, but many are talking about the art.

"I want to know why there are no pictures of naked men," said Michelle Celedonia of Olney, an employee of a nearby office with a sense of humor. "...I can look in the mirror and get that."

Celedonia, her husband Joe, and Gina Fink of Bethesda, stood outside of the windows of the gallery on Friday, and said the paintings may be inappropriate for passersby with children or the kids from a nearby day-care center who play in the court in which the gallery sits.

"Bethesda is not that type of place to hang this up," said Fink, who also works nearby. "Bethesda is an uppity place."

See **Paintings**, page A-13

Thanksgiving schedules

Today's Gazette is being delivered a day earlier than usual due to the holiday. In addition, government offices, courts, schools and libraries are closed Thursday. Thursday and Friday's trash and recycling will be picked up a day later. Public transportation will operate on Sunday schedule. Public parking will be free.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2003 • 25 CENTS • WWW.GAZETTE.NET

The Gazette

PAINTINGS

Continued from A-1

People have checked out the art, whether it is the passerby pressing his nose against the glass or the smokers on cigarette breaks sitting on a nearby bench. Some people seem not to care, as they quickly glance at the paintings and walk away.

The tsks-tsks seem to be kept outside, because owner Catriona Fraser said she has not directly received negative feedback about the exhibit, which opened Nov. 14 and will run through Dec. 10.

"Everything has been positive," said Fraser, who has owned the private gallery for two years, and has maintained another in Georgetown for eight years. "I haven't received any negative responses. ... It's not an issue for me."

She acknowledged that she has indirectly heard negative comments about the exhibit.

She said nudity in art has existed for centuries, and there is nothing out of the ordinary about the paintings. She bristles at comments that suggest the paintings are comparable to images found in pornography magazines.

"It isn't degrading," she said. "None of the images are sexually explicit."

She said it is aggravating to hear people who use children as an excuse to denounce the artwork. She said oftentimes children are too young to understand the images and some are old enough to appreciate the art.

Fraser said art students from Walt Whitman High School in Bethesda recently visited the gallery and studied the brushwork and use of colors of the 50-piece exhibit. "There was no tittering or laughing or pointing," she said.

She said some may not like the paintings because they feature an imperfect woman and her pubic area, unlike typical figurative paintings of beautiful, sculpted models.

Fraser — who is on the advisory board of the Arts and Entertainment District in Bethesda, chair of the Trawick Prize, and organizer of an artist market — said the exhibit is not meant to shock people and raise eyebrows, but to showcase original fine art of local artists who deserve attention.

Jeff Bulman, the owner of the Original Pancake House next to the gallery, said a few of his customers have complained about the paintings. However, he said the privately owned gallery has a right to display the art.

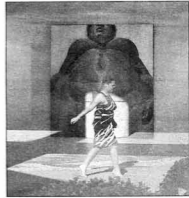
"They felt it was inappropriate, that it should be covered up," he said. "But it was a few people. It's all hearsay."

He said the gallery has exhibited other explicit pieces, but never garnered complaints like the paintings of the nude woman.

"I said those are some strong paintings," Bulman said of the first time he saw the paintings. "I wasn't upset by it."

Tonya Lee, a director at Sugar Plums, day-care center on Edgemoor Lane, said she has not heard complaints from parents or the center's caregivers about the exhibit.

She said children, usually 1-year-olds in strollers, are taken to an area



Olivier Douliery/The Gazette

An unidentified woman walks in the courtyard in front of Fraser Gallery in downtown Bethesda Friday, as her reflection in the window obscures a painting that is part of an exhibit attracting attention. For information about the exhibit, log on to www.frasergallery.com.

playground and through the courtyard twice a day. Lee said the children are probably too young to notice the artwork, and are more likely to notice animate objects such as birds and people.

Fraser said her gallery has represented Scott Hutchison of Westover, Va., the artist who painted the work, for nearly five years.

"Should it make people uncomfortable if it's not an ideal model?" asked Hutchison, a 30-year-old adjunct professor at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

"...In all of my work, I'm scared of it being boring," he said. "I don't want it to be a blah figure standing there."