



Sarah Kurz, *You're Loving It*, 2010, oil on canvas, 16 x 20"

Portrait of a Lady

Jordan Buschur, Sarah Kurz, Helle Mardahl,
Christopher Milne, HuskMitNavn,
Marc Seguin, Alix Smith and
Virginia Inés Vergara

February 10–March 20, 2010

Opening reception:
Wednesday, February 10, 6-9pm

Allegra LaViola Gallery is pleased to present *Portrait of a Lady*, a group exhibition exploring the relationship between women and portraiture. Comprised of works in a variety of media and sizes, the exhibition seeks to question the role of representations of women and examine how artists are challenging the traditional notion of portraiture.

Jordan Buschur's ethereal and mysterious women gaze out at us from within lush vegetation or flowers, beckoning us at the same time as they withdraw with unfocused eyes. Drawing on the language of American advertising, Buschur's superficially flat women appear to be the cardboard cutouts of perfection. Echoing Buschur's approach, Sarah Kurz's women are paused in film still seduction, at once aware of our gaze and defiant of it, despite their cotton candy surroundings. A similar uniformity unfolds in the works of Christopher Milne, where women pose in perfect outfits, surrounded by an unchanging interior landscape that holds them even as it threatens to envelop them.

The women of Danish street artist HuskMitNavn betray concern with a wavered brow or curled lip, their hesitancy a defiance of the happy mask that women are asked to wear on a daily basis. Helle Mardahl's portraits go one step further; her women are plunged into despair and defiance, at once a carnival sideshow and the main attraction, no longer able to pretend that everything will be all right.

Marc Seguin's portraits of international femme fatale Mata Hari are haunting for what we cannot see. A white shape obscures the woman's face, allowing us to appreciate her luscious body and fantastic costume, but keeping secret the identity that was ultimately her demise.

Alix Smith's portraits call into question the traditional portrait. Whereas historically women in portraits were depicted in formal poses that revealed their class, status and wealth, these modern versions approach the idea of the portrait through the theatrical element, asking: who are these women and what do we know of their lives?

In Virginia Vergara's photographs of decaying advertisements, the faces, hands and nails of women become a portrait not only of the women themselves but of what we see when we look at these displays. The fractured light on the aging paper stand at odds with the rapturous countenance, letting us know that, as always, beauty will fade.