



Artist specializes in private property

By Mary Jo Palumbo

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Looking for a unique, exotic gift for your man?

How about a portrait of his privates?

A Somerville artist working under a pseudonym is launching an unusual business venture. For \$5,000, she's offering to draw a large-scale, detailed, realistic portrait of your man's testicles. And she's hoping her work will soon hang in the homes of some adventurous Boston-area couples.

"Suppose it's Valentine's Day and you want to give an interesting, unusual present," said Belle Wether, 50, who runs a nonprofit construction consortium under her real name. "You could hire me to do a portrait of his balls. It's a loving, eclectic, intimate gift. And it's not offered anywhere else, as far as I know."

Wether has named her new business Corner Pocket Art. The artist holds a studio photo session with clients, and creates her drawings from the photographs. A portrait takes between 60 and 100 hours and is ready in three months.

The drawings are 8 feet tall and meticulously detailed.

"They are beautiful and ugly, intense and sensuous," said Wether. "They're so big, they're a bit scary. They look like they might eat you."

Portraits of nude women have graced art museums for centuries. Wether believes it's time to focus on the men.

"Why is the sexual aspect of bodies - particularly male bodies - not considered beautiful and worthy of our gaze?" said Wether, who lives on Prospect Hill. "What is it about men's bodies that aren't suitable for delectation? Why do we have a prohibition against this?"

Wether expects the portraits to go places. She hopes to exhibit her work at the year-old Museum of Sex (MoSex) in New York as well as galleries in Manhattan, Provincetown and South Beach, Fla.

Friends cheer her on as brave, but others have not responded as favorably.

"People aren't sure if it's OK to look at, or if it's OK for me to be doing it. They turn away or they put their hand over their mouths. Or they look to see who's watching. People laugh. Why laugh?"

"A lot of women love it. Men don't like it as much."

So far, the artist has completed several portraits of men who range from business types to students to construction workers to the unemployed.

What fascinates Wether is how unique she finds each portrait.

"Just like the palm of the hand, every part of a human being is distinctive," said Wether. "We just aren't tuned in to thinking about that. There is a great deal of difference in skin texture, size and shape. Each has different qualities, like moody or bright or dark and interesting."

For Wether, Corner Pocket Art isn't just an unusual business venture but an opportunity to explore issues of gender and sexuality.

"In American society we've really lost track of what sustains us," said Wether. "We think the calculated, manufactured, squalorous bump and grind of Justin Timberlake and Janet Jackson is sex. We've lost touch with what things really are. We're not willing to enter that fragile vulnerable place where we can be with our sexual selves. To become truly intimate with something, we have to acknowledge what it is in all its fullness, which includes ugly parts or the parts that we're not comfortable with."


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