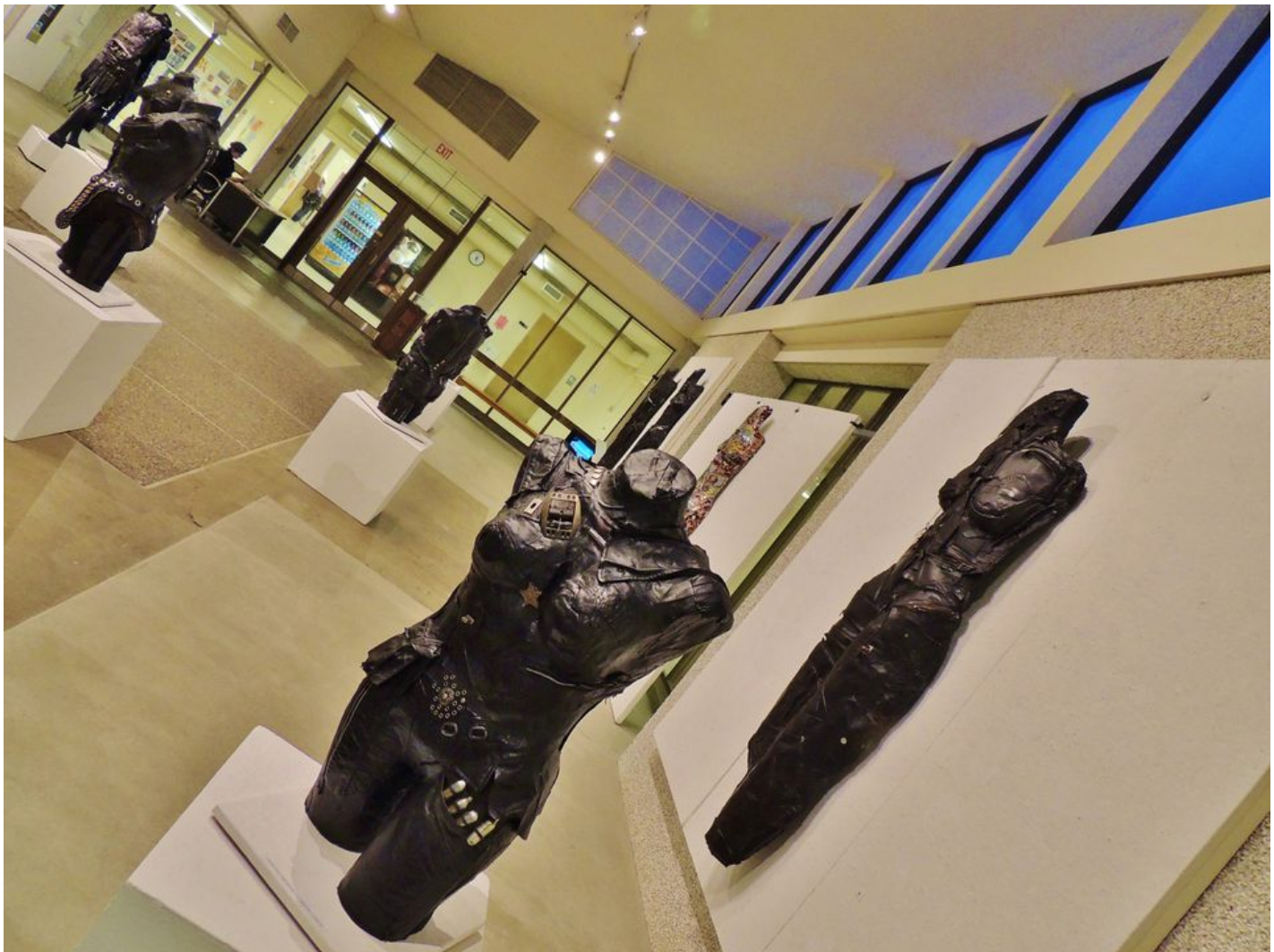


Blogs / Arts in the Valley and Beyond / Art Alley and Gender Fluid Art at Robert Graves Gallery

# Arts in the Valley and Beyond

## Art Alley and Gender Fluid Art at Robert Graves Gallery

by Rodney Daut | Jan. 23, 2013, 3:29 p.m. | Comment



Well, what can I say. I had intended to open with a discussion of Art Alley in Wenatchee – I can't say how many times I have passed this alley by without ever having noticed the chalk board like sign high up on the wall across the alley from the back of Davis Furniture, that reads, Art alley 1993. Having just come from Simply Unique where Martha Flores and me have some of our art showing, I turned down Yakima Street toward Columbia Street and spied this sign.

So; I stopped to go in the alley and see for myself, there I was surprised to find a collection of murals most notably by Jan Cook Mack that were indeed from the early nineties. There were a few other smaller works there and some painted over patches that looked as though



murals may have been covered up. I found myself wondering about these and one time soon I will have to contact Jan and learn more about the history of this twenty year old project.

But, the really big art event and story this week is the Linda Stein exhibit at the Robert Graves Gallery. The show is titled the 'The Fluidity of Gender Sculpture by Linda Stein'. Last night was the opening reception at the gallery with a presentation by the artist at Van Tassel Hall.

I have to say that John Crew and the board of Robert Graves Gallery definitely succeeded in fulfilling their mandate to bring to Wenatchee Valley art that we would otherwise not be available to us here in the valley. Linda's leather sculptures are intriguing and her skill in bringing together found objects of various materials molded around mostly female looking mannequins were impressive to say the least. I have to say, that with the title of the show such as it was, I really wasn't quite sure what to expect, but I did find myself wishing she would have brought some of her metal, wood and stone pieces which can be seen at: <http://www.lindastein.com/gallery/index.php?s=sculpture&g=3&n=211>.



Whether her mostly leather based sculptures in the 'Fluidity of Gender' series truly capture the essence implied in the title of the show one will have to judge for oneself.

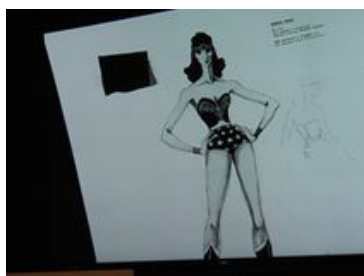
The other pieces in this show which predominantly feature comic book images of Wonder Woman on molded body forms that are part of her body swapping armor wearable art series are mixed media pieces. Some of these are on mannequins others hung as wall art convey the theme that really seemed to dominate and which was so much the subject of her talk.



These pieces are built of everything from wood, metal and acrylicized metallic paper to leather and vinyl - some with Velcro straps for use as wearable art. The word bubbles in the comic book pictures express the theme of the need for heroes who are good and non violent who stand up to bullies and defend the weak all with the accompanying theme that women can do these things as demonstrated by the super hero Wonder Woman.



Linda is clear in her presentation to express that the Wonder Woman that she is inspired by is the original Wonder Woman of the 1940's WWII era as originally portrayed by the comic book hero's creator William Moulton Morton, who, Linda is clear to point out, never killed her enemies and would often talk them out of their bad behavior. Linda is very specific on the time frame of the era of these comics that she is fascinated with as apparently after the death of Wonder Woman's creator, she went down some different paths and even became a sex object which is diametrically opposed to the themes that Linda most values in the early incarnation of this female super hero. She also holds up the non-violent nature of her hero to Wonder Woman's male super hero counterparts.

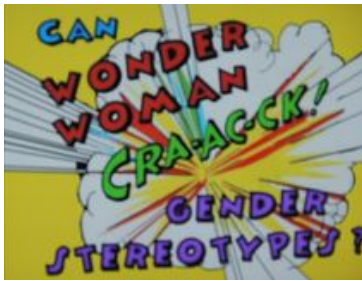


Now, I was never a really big fan of comic book super heroes male or female. But, I do recall as a child watching Adam West as Batman battle a whole collection of bad guys along with his faithful sidekick Robin the Boy Wonder. What I recall most on this violent vs. non-violent hero theme is that those recurring arch enemies always seemed to get away to fight another day and I really don't recall anybody being killed by either good guys or the bad guys for that matter. But, then that was 60's TV not the actual comic books which I did not read.



Again, I am no expert on comic book super heroes, for that I must defer to my adult children and their respective husbands and wives who are all into the comic book hero thing and often attend Comic Con conventions in San Diego and elsewhere. So; to learn more on this subject I had to do a little research.

I was fascinated and a bit surprised to learn for instance, that Wonder Woman's creator, a psychologist known for his development of the lie detector, created Wonder Woman with the help and inspiration of his wife Elizabeth and their mutual Lover Olive Byrne. Well, I guess



one could say that the Wonder Woman character had origins from the gate that were definitely in keeping with the 'Fluidity of Gender' theme of this show.

Furthermore, though, I never bought into the late eighties and early nineties theme of 'men are bad and women are good', I was a bit surprised that not only was Wonder Woman not the first female comic book super hero, but that at least one of her predecessors and contemporary, 'Black Widow', was a bringer of death. In fact she was a human emissary of Satan himself who would KILL evildoers with the simple touch of her finger sending them to her master and leaving her Black Widow trademark on their foreheads. YIKES!



Further research on the subject of comic book super heroes led me in another surprising direction... that being that there have been so many female super heroes and that a number of super heroes of the past twenty years or more have come out in their respective comic books as gay. Huh! Go figure. This all in a time when super heroes in comic books and in the movies have been becoming progressively more violent, less clearly 'GOOD' with lots of hang ups and problems such as alcoholism. WOW! I have really missed the boat when it comes to super hero evolution.



Well, maybe I haven't really missed anything... if you know what I mean. After all I, for one, still love watching old Roy Rogers films and the original Hawaii Five-O on Netflix which I enjoy for the fact that the good guys are the good guys and the bad guys are the bad guys. This in comparison with modern shows I have learned about where the 'hero' can be, for instance, a serial killer – are you kidding me! I have heard the defense of said show, which I will not do the honor of naming here, that it has "great writing" and the character channels his serial killer instincts to kill other serial killers and bad guys." GEEZ! PALEAZZ! I have been challenged on my refusal to watch such a program on principal with the refrain "what do you want unrealistic stories where they get the bad guy in 45minutes" YES! Actually, I do.



The sad truth for all this gender fluidity in our modern age is not that people can be who they are or want to be, but that the once sacrosanct notions of the innocence, goodness and non-violent nature of the female gender has been shattered over and over again. Whether it is a female soldier demeaning a prisoner at Abu Ghrab as fairly pointed out by Linda in her presentation last night, or the violence of female gang members right here at home in America or the kind of bullying, that any of us who have worked in the school system has seen, of fourth grade girls being so utterly cruel to certain of their peers that it seemed the physical bullying of their male counterparts would be less destructive – bruises after all heal. But, the damage from the emotional degradation of the online gossip network whether on Facebook or its predecessor as the social network de jur, My Space, which was popular when I counseled kids in elementary schools, can last for years perhaps a life time.



In the end the art was intriguing and thought provoking as you can see from my musings here. But, has everything thing that Title IX and the other hallmarks of the 'girl power' movement been valuable. This is perhaps not a fair question. I for one appreciate that my daughters can have it all... for one a Ph.D., a husband and family, and for the other her own business, a husband who helps with the kids and with her business. For this empowerment of women, I'm all for it. That women have to be super heroes, or men having to be super heroes for that matter... not so much perhaps.



For me, I want to see less emphasis on violence and conflict in general, male or female, as the answer to anything and more on the need to listen, understand and communicate to solve problems. To accomplish that, I'm not sure that gender has to really come into the matter at all- it's just what humans need to do if we are to go on into a better future.

All in all an enjoyable evening spent with so many artist and art lovers from our valley... with the added treat of a professional dancer wearing one of the wearable pieces while doing a

dance with qualities of Native American Fancy Dancing and Contemporary dance. A good night out indeed.







