

Deployment
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Photos by Don Seabrook

Katherine Schettler dances among the body armor art for the opening reception of "Fluidity of Gender," an exhibit by New York artist Linda Stein showing at the Robert Graves Gallery.

Strength in sculpture

Robert Graves Gallery welcomes provocative new show

BY RACHEL HANSEN
 World staff writer

WENATCHEE — Dyanna Flores' eyes scanned the thick, leather-clad torso propped on a pedestal at the Robert Graves Gallery. The sculpture's broad shoulders and sewn-on bullets implied manliness. Its curvaceous waist and bust boasted femininity. Gender aside, Flores said the first thought that came to her mind was: There's a lot of emotion here.

"I've never seen anything like this," said the 18-year-old Wenatchee Valley College student. "Just the darkness of it; it has a lot of feeling, a lot of character."

There wasn't a neutral reaction in the room as students and teachers perused the 13-piece show over the past two weeks. Seven-foot tall figures — shrouded in muted black leather — towered above the floor. One wall glittered with silver-metal armor, printed with clips of Wonder Woman comics.

"It's fascinating. I'm intrigued by the ones that use old comic book pages," said Seann Wilson, 17. "And the leather suit with the NYPD emblem reminds me of action movies

If you go

What: "The Fluidity of Gender," reception
When: 5-9 p.m. Tuesday, on display through March 14
Where: Robert Graves Gallery at Wenatchee Valley College
Cost: Free
Information: 682-6776

I've seen."

Katherine Schettler took a deep breath and said she felt, "Power. Different kinds of power." She said the Wonder Woman figures reminded her of indigenous power. She then nodded to one of the black leather torsos. "In that one, I see corrupted power."

A dancer and former faculty member, Schettler later put on one of the wearable Wonder Woman pieces and danced for the opening reception Jan. 3.

If it sounds a little avant-garde for the Wenatchee Valley, that's exactly what the Robert Graves Gallery is going for. Created by New York artist and feminist Linda Stein, "Fluidity of Gender" is the gallery's biggest show of the season.

"This is the kind of show that people should see because it makes them think," gallery president John Crew said. "The idea is to get as many students involved at any level, and this is very sophisticated. I have a master's degree in creative sculpture and even I can't fully comprehend some of these."

When Stein first mailed her proposal to the gallery, Crew wrote off the show as unattainable by such a small gallery.

"She was the one who changed my mind,"



The piece "MasculFem 681" by Linda Stein, who will talk about her work at the gallery Tuesday.

Crew said. "She's not just an artist trying to promote a career, she's an artist who has something to say that's important, and not just in New York but in small communities, too."

The student senate at Wenatchee Valley College also donated money to help bring the show to the gallery, Crew said.

"I like very much going to small conservative towns because those are the places where I can be most provocative and most helpful to people that are struggling to make their way in the world," Stein said. "I want to be there, more than Manhattan or Los Angeles, where they may not hear my point of view as often."

Stein will make an appearance Tuesday to talk about the art, her childhood in the Bronx and the issues that inspire her work — diversity, bullying and gender constrictions. She'll also talk about how she was duped into

a fake interview with Sacha Baron Cohen for the movie, "Borat" in 2006.

"People that are bullied for racism, sexism, ableism and homophobia, those four categories seem to get a lot of bullying and I would like my work to speak to those in more need of empowerment," Stein said. "Hopefully, the work will address everyone."

A professional artist for 40 years, Stein's work evolved from sculptures of weapons and tools in the '80s, to blade-like sculptures in the '90s and early 2000s. Her style dramatically changed after the World Trade Center attacks on Sept. 11, 2001. Her Tribeca studio was just a few blocks from Ground Zero.

"I was in my studio working with my staff and the police came and evacuated us," Stein said. "We spent the whole day running away from the trade towers. I couldn't get into my

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Photo by Rachel Hansen

A close-up of the Linda Stein sculpture, "Arrow Knight 670," made with acrylicized metallic paper, archival inks, leather, Velcro and mixed media.

Stein

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studio or my apartment for eight months. I stopped doing sculpture."

She took notice when the images of 9/11 heroes were predominately men. Women were often depicted as widows or victims.

"When I went back to doing sculpture, all of a sudden it took on a more figurative form," Stein said. "Slowly but surely, it started looking as if

it were a warrior."

First, she produced "Knights," a series of full-body figures made with found items, metal, stone and wood. "Fluidity of Gender" was built on that work but focused more on leather, metal and wearable pieces.

"It's unusual that I allow people to touch them, but it's very important to me," Stein said. "In the three years we've been doing this exhibit, nothing has broken."

She said she works on two or three pieces at a time, and often takes six or seven months to complete them.

Stein uses a mix of welding, stitching, drilling and epoxy work — all while listening to biographies on audiobook to help keep her focused.

"I generally don't plan it (the sculpture) except for having a general size, and maybe just a feeling for the shape." When it's finished, the result "comes as a surprise to me as much as to the viewer," Stein said.