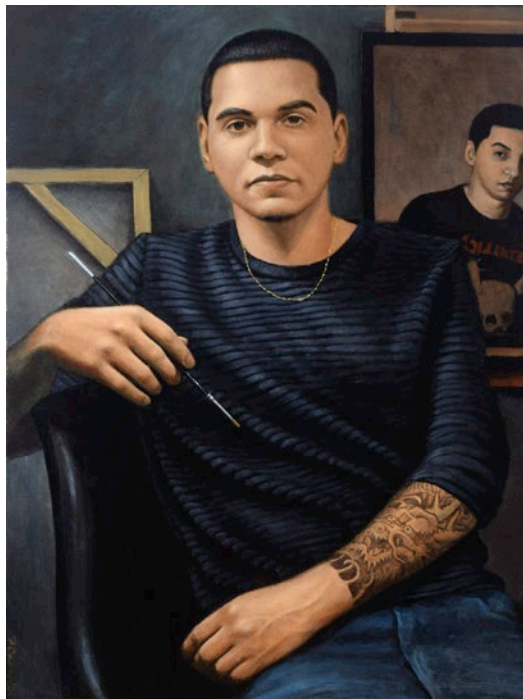


The Creator & The Muse



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Didi Menendez, the muse of PoetsArtists, asked members of the group to create portraits of other members for an upcoming exhibition. The results will be shown in the exhibition, co-curated with Sergio Gomez, titled *The Creator & The Muse*. It opens May 15 in the Zhou B Art Center at 33 Contemporary Gallery in Chicago.

One of the collaborations was between **Tanya Atanasova**, a Bulgarian artist working in Belgium, and **Alessandro Tomassetti**, a Canadian artist working in Spain. The two artists had admired each other's work and had struck up a friendship on social media. Atanasova recalls, when she first saw Tomassetti's work, "It struck me as elegant, modern, exciting,

vivid, sensual, extremely well executed and very spontaneous at the same time—it totally spoke to me in a language I was very familiar with." Tomassetti recalls, "I had been an admirer of Tanya's bold, complex, engaging paintings for a while." When the call went out for the current exhibition, the two artists signed up to paint each other.

She says, "From the beginning of the project, we wanted to go further than just painting our likenesses, so we created a whole concept around 'a modern-day person,' 'gender shift,' 'us,' 'intimacy' and so on. We decided to use the same composition, light and pose, but playing with the different personalities, so we had to take the reference photographs in the same setting. I flew to Barcelona, we tried

different things, we set our 'studio,' did the photo shoot and from there on we were painting separately."

He explains, "The early discussions about playing with gender in our portraits came about when Tanya pointed out that she'd be the first female model in one of my paintings. It hadn't occurred to me that this would be surprising to anyone but then I realized I had an opportunity to play with that expectation; my tongue-in-cheek response would be to dress Tanya as a man for my portrait of her. When she agreed, it just seemed natural that her portrait should feature me in feminine garb (we shopped for vintage pieces for my look and, wow, I had no idea how constricting and uncomfortable some of these garments could be!).



1
Joel Cadman, *Portrait of Artist Devon Rodriguez*, oil on cotton canvas, 24 x 18"

2
Megan Van Groll, *The Firestarter (Portrait of Ana Montoya)*, oil on linen, 36 x 24"

3
Alessandro Tomassetti, *Boudoir: Portrait of Tanya Atanasova*, oil on canvas, 27½ x 27½"

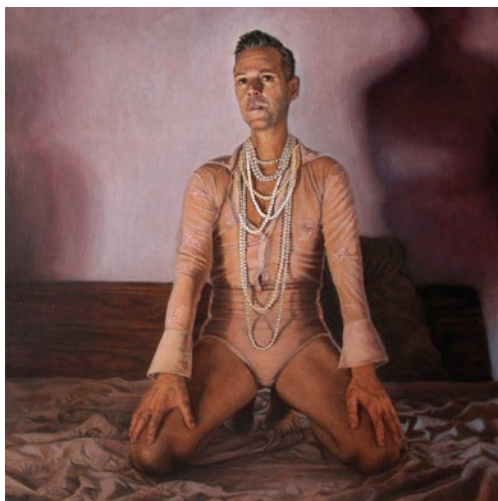
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Tanya Atanasova, *Boudoir: Portrait of Alessandro Tomassetti*, oil on Belgian linen, 27½ x 27½"

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"When Tanya came to Barcelona, we had the opportunity to take reference photos, some in my studio and then some on my bed," he continues. "When I saw Tanya on the bed in a broad-shouldered suit, shag haircut and crimson lipstick—visions of Annie Lennox and Joan Jett came to mind—I knew we were going somewhere special. I loved the sizzle of putting that kind of rock 'n' roll energy in an environment usually saved for lingerie pinups. I'd say her portrait of me works the other angle of the sizzle, where the setting, mood and accouterments are all right but the model is not who you expect."

Atanasova adds, "For me, this goes beyond painting a portrait. We shot these pictures in Alessandro's bedroom—it is so intimate and personal. You don't normally allow everyone into your bedroom/boudoir/soul. We went through a whole process of learning to trust each other." Tomassetti concurs, saying, "Working together under somewhat awkward and intimate circumstances forced us to open up and trust one another, grow our friendship and ultimately take our paintings in an exciting direction."

Other artists in the show include **Megan Van Groll**, **Ricky Mujica** and **Joel Cadman**. ●



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