

Tinder Renders More than Hook Ups in Alexandria Lira's "F*CK BOYS" Series of Male Nudes

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by Pat Rogers

Artists making nude portraits have traditionally relied on professional artist models, lovers, marriage partners, friends or willing acquaintances as subjects of their work. Alexandria Lira's portraits of male nudes in "F*CK BOYS" makes use of models but integrates the experience of a brief sexual encounter and ponders the current state of intimacy. All of the men in the series were found through Tinder: a social media app where scouting for sexual hookups is the norm and begin with a snap judgement and swipe of a screen.

Each man agreed to be photographed in their homes for the sake of art and male empowerment—sans sex—as the encounter moves from messaging to an initial meeting in a public place. Afterward, the pair meet at the man's home and the art session begins. A pose is struck with the surroundings as they find it (no cleaning up the place!). This naturalistic aspect is an integral part of the photography session and the eventual portrait.

All the men are photographed with a cell phone using existing light, the artist explained. The natural lighting also helps infuse realism and heightens the personal nature of the nude portrait. After the session, Lira selects the most intimate and raw photo and prints it large-scale onto canvas. She picks up her paint brush and transforms the photograph into a mixed media work that incorporates the "emotional temperature" of the man displayed during the encounter as well as heighten whatever clues she can discern while there, she said.

From the get-go, the men understand that sex isn't part of the process and they will be photographed nude for a future portrait that will become part of the commercial art world, Lira said. Still, the possibility of sex hangs in the air during the photo session. "Even though I'm clear that I'm an artist and I'm there to make a painting, some of them think there may be a possibility I'll change my mind," she said. "I haven't had sex with any of the men in the 'F*CK BOY' Series. That's not what the meet up is about."

Still, the sexual charge is important and is something she weaves into the paintings, she said. Equally important is making portraits that reveal something about the nature of contemporary relationships in an era where multiple sexual partners can be easily found on apps and impersonal hooks up are as close as a click on a phone or computer keyboard, Lira said.

Dating apps notorious for casual hook ups and Social Media have impacted what defines intimacy, she continued. The series aims to relay the reality of dating and trying to meet people in mega cities like New York and LA. There's an abundance of people and possibilities and choosing partners for sex can come across as the same as shopping online for clothes or music or whatever is sought at the moment, she said.

"All of the subjects in "F*CK BOYS" were found on Tinder," she said. "It's so easy to find people for hook ups. You don't like one person, so what? There are hundreds of people out there. For some, these apps mean that there's no real reason to get to know someone. There are hundreds of options out there so why bother? It seems some people hardly even notice the person they're having sex with; they're already thinking about finding who's next."

The full "F*CK BOYS" painting series to date debuted on April 13, 2019 at Roman Fine Art in East Hampton, NY. The exhibition was extended to remain on view through May 20, 2019. A few select paintings had previously been exhibited in several galleries including those in Brooklyn.

All of the paintings in the Roman Fine Art exhibition feature male nudes with many reclining in classical poses. The show also displays objects Lira kept as "souvenirs" from each session that were installed on pedestals in the center of the gallery.

The men in the series appear to be anywhere from their late twenties to early forties and are mostly slender. Each distinct, the portraits are noteworthy from the interplay and tension between figure and setting. The figures are painted in an express and loose manner with the setting—and the objects within—remaining in realism to counter the staged setting of the nude.

Lira knows she's walking into charged territory with the "F*CK BOYS" series. She understands that she's taking risks while meeting strangers at their homes where sexuality is stoked. She also understands that she's exploiting these men by asking them to strip to their birthday suit for free for the sake of art (which they each readily agree to, she points out).

The challenge of all these aspects is one she embraced by way of moving her art to the next level, she explained. Previous to "F*CK BOYS" she painted soft atmospheric abstract works or geometric abstract infused by graphic pop. An art mentor encouraged her to dig deep and make art that was personal, unique and challenging as way of making art that matters. Coming on the heels of a bad break up, exploring the dating scene from the point of view of a social scientist or anthropologist clicked with the Southampton, NY native, currently based in Brooklyn.

The series was an intriguing one for Lira and has led her to a new series of portraits. Continuing using Tinder, she's making paintings of married couples with open marriages who find sexual partners through the app.

With "F*CK BOYS" still on view, Lira took some time to remember and reflect on her favorite paintings and encounters. Continue scrolling to see the art and explore the "F*CK BOYS" series from the artist's point of view.

“Are you Hungry? (DAVE)” by Alexandria Lira, 2018.

“I chose Dave because the idea that I was photographing full nudes of a professional photographer who is kind of well-known in the Industry ‘on my I-phone,’ was pretty hilarious to me,” wrote Lira in an email. “It was funny how he was so open to it.”



“Are you Hungry? (DAVE)” by Alexandria Lira, 2018. Oil on digital print canvas, 60 x 45 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

“ANONYMOUS” by Alexandria Lira, 2018.

“I chose anonymous because he was this guy who had a very pretentious vibe about him and it was very difficult for him to cope with all of this exploitation by a women,” wrote Lira. “So to numb the idea that this was happening, whippets, gusslin, a bottle of wine and loads of pot were his poisons. It was an interesting turn out to see his poses come out so vulnerable mixed with the intoxication.”



“ANONYMOUS” by Alexandria Lira, 2018. Oil on digital print canvas, 60 x 45 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

“Got some Jack Kerouak (MATT)” by Alexandria Lira, 2018.

“I chose Matt because he had this interesting awkward, quirky demeanor about him—working in ‘film’—so he said,” Lira wrote. “His room was what targeted the aura of his pose. It was a cubicle size (could have been an old closet) with a bunker bed, surrounded by mounds of very cool books everywhere. Being able to capture this awkward persona in the midst of it was so unique.”



“Got some Jack Kerouak (MATT)” by Alexandria Lira, 2018. Oil on digital canvas, 60 x 45 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

“I ride bikes (VLAD)” by Alexandria Lira, 2018.

“I chose Vlad because he was the first subject I photographed,” Lira wrote. “That being said, the whole shoot was very anxiety ridden with a formula that turned out super rich when shooting him because it was all so new and exciting; not to mention that my process when painting the first piece was extremely difficult. I kept layering over different colors and strokes in order to get the overall feel to become what I wanted to perceive in relationship to the rest of my work.”



“I ride bikes (VLAD)” by Alexandria Lira, 2018. Oil on digital print canvas, 60 x 45 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

“How far will you go? (MICHAEL)” by Alexandria Lira, 2018.

“I chose Michael because he never mentioned what he did for a living,” Lira wrote. “He was living in this Bushwick janky-style apt but it has its quirks. Mind you, the minute I walked in, the apt was filled with weed smoke amidst the fact that he was still smoking his jay. So I decided to join forces and smoke with him while shooting him in all this atmosphere that was happening. He had very chill vibes and that really brought such a zen look to his shoot.”



“How far will you go? (MICHAEL)” by Alexandria Lira, 2018. Oil on digital print canvas, 60 x 45 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

BASIC FACTS: “F*CKBOYS” is on view through May 20, 2019 at Roman Fine Art at 66 Park Place, East Hampton, NY 11937. www.romanfineart.com. Alexandria Lira lives and works in Brooklyn. She grew up in Southampton, NY.

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