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Matt Sesow at MOCA DC

"What's So Terrible About Being Beautiful"?
June 2005, Washington, DC

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Art Show Questions Modern Notion of Beauty

Four Washington Artists Take Different Approaches to Common Theme at MOCA DC

When you first meet him, you can't help but notice that Peter Photikoe, the spirited curator of the exhibit "What's So Terrible About Being Beautiful?", has an outline of a star shaved into the left side of his head. Like the artist himself, his exhibit challenges onlookers to see beyond the surface into the meaning behind people and beauty.

Located in the Museum of Contemporary Art, a small ground-level gallery in Georgetown's Canal Square, the exhibit assembled by Photikoe features his photographs and the works of three other Washington artists: Matt Sesow, Andrew Wodzianski, and Joyce Zipperer. Although each artist has his or her own style, their works in this exhibit address the same subject: beauty.


Photo by Photikoe

Photikoe says the idea grew out of his fascination with fashion photography. He grew up in a household full of women and fashion magazines. Although he always has admired the work of photographers like Irving Penn of *Vogue*, (whose platinum prints go on display on June 19 in the National Gallery of Art's West Building), Photikoe thinks fashion photography has become progressively more shallow since Penn snapped his models in the 1950s and '60s. Today people are bombarded with images of "perfect" women, and people no longer see the models as humans. With the exhibit, Photikoe hopes to reintroduce depth and humanity into the notion of beauty. Visitors can expect the works to zero in on a wide range of specific themes—such as deformity, religion, bondage, commercialism, costume art, mask iconography, and homoeroticism—in the larger context of beauty.



Painting by Sesow

Here are four works that illustrate what's on view at the exhibit:

Photikoe's photographs of women incorporate the usual elements of fashion photography, such as lighting and makeup. But he places his models in compromising, offensive positions to force the audience to react. His works ask: Have we been so bombarded by fashion photography that even degrading images like this do not offend us? Are we willing to see the subject as a human or do we only see her as a model—a prop within the lens frame?

Matt Sesow, a former IBM programmer who lives in Washington, uses a modern painting style to address people's preconceived notions of beauty. Many of his paintings are influenced by childhood trauma—an accident when he was eight led to the amputation of his left hand.



Painting by Wodzianski

Maryland Institute College of Art alum Andrew Wodzianski uses a classical painting technique to portray himself in bizarre situations. Masks, and their role in hiding beauty, are central to his work.



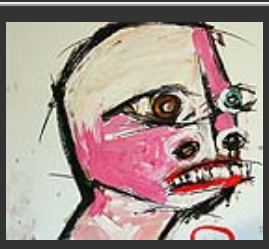
Sculpture by Zipperer

Joyce Zipperer, a Springfield graphic artist, painter, and costume and clothing designer, creates sculptures of women's undergarments from metal and metallic fabrics. Her work, like this corset, raises questions about the relationship between beauty and constraint.

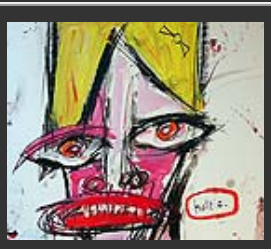
I left this exhibit with more questions about society's view of beauty than answers. But if Photikoe's goal is to spark discussion and challenge traditional views, his exhibit is a success.

All of the works in the exhibit are for sale and range from $200 to $3,500. Admission is free; the exhibit runs through July 1 at the Museum of Contemporary Art (1054 31st St., NW; 202-342-6230; www.mocadc.org).

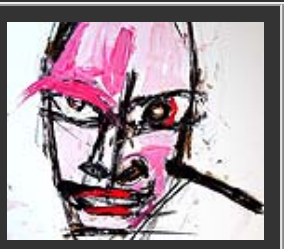
–MARY CLARE FLEURY



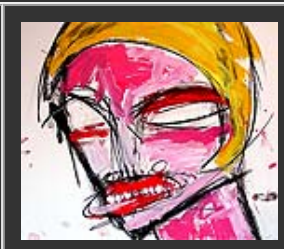
"babe."
18" x 24"
oil on watercolor paper



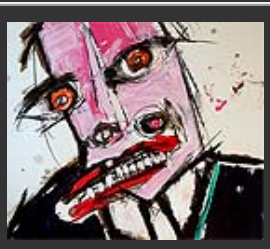
"hottie."
18" x 24"
oil on watercolor paper



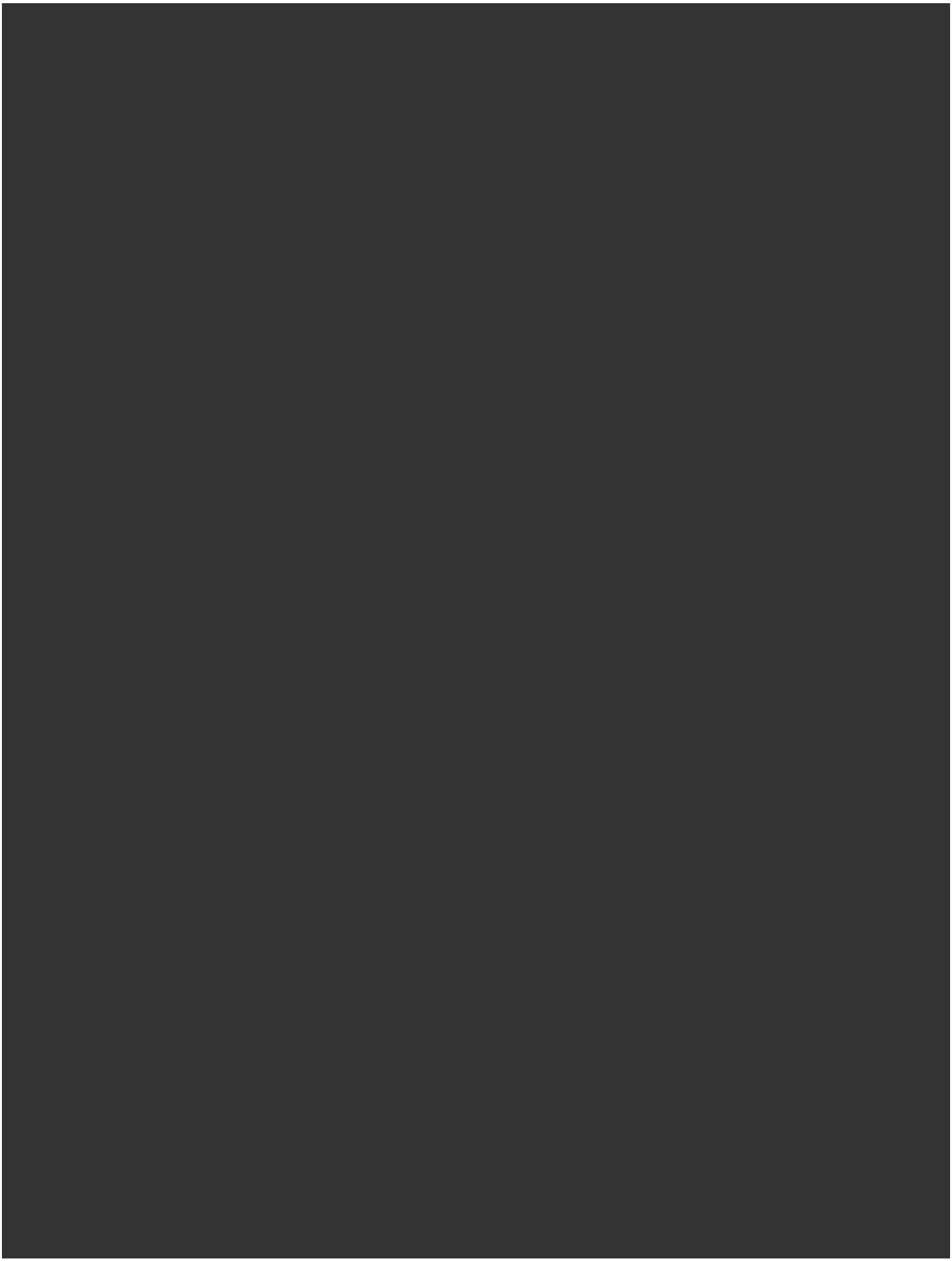
"handsome."
18" x 24"
oil on watercolor paper

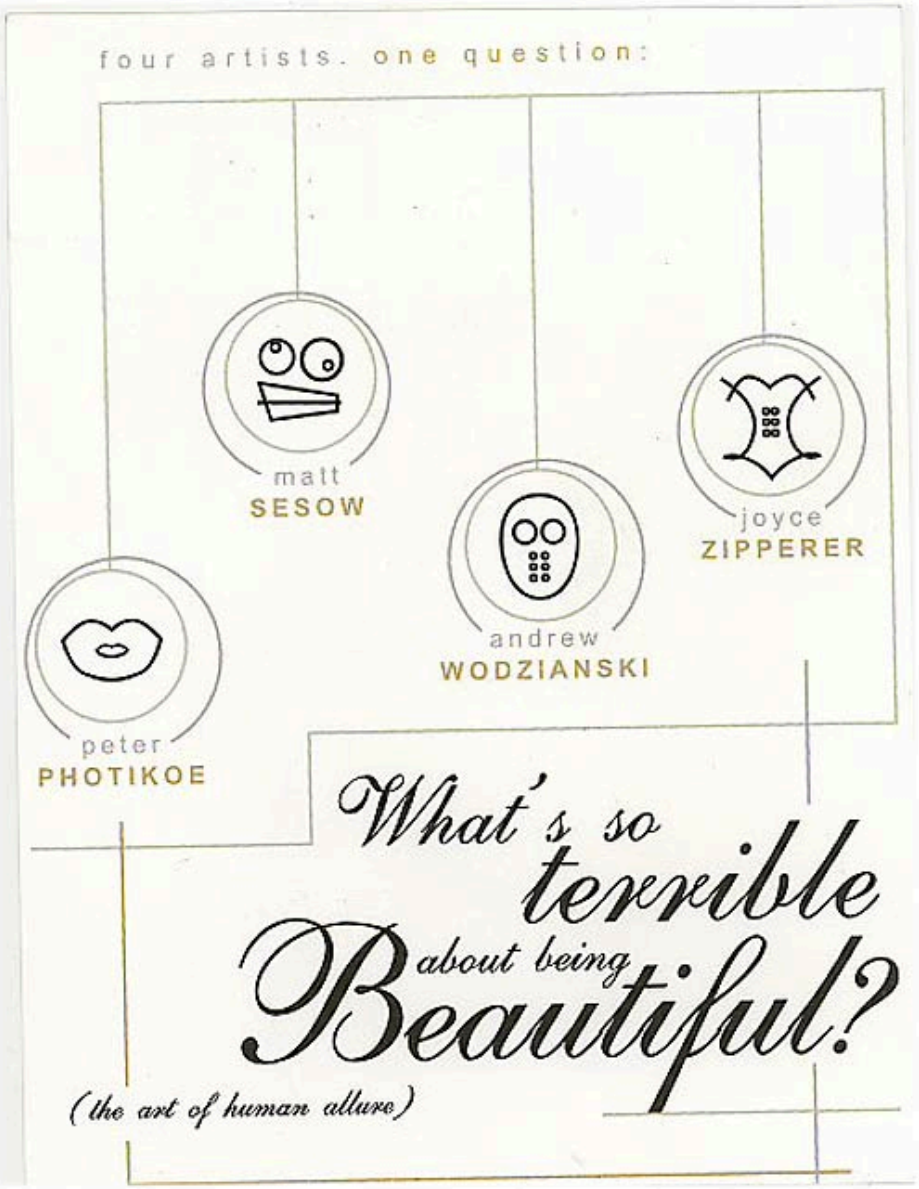


"beautiful."
18" x 24"
oil on watercolor paper



"perfect catch."
18" x 24"
oil on watercolor paper




four artists. one question:
matt
SESOW
joyce
ZIPPERER
andrew
WODZIANSKI
peter
PHOTIKOE
What's so terrible about being Beautiful?
(the art of human allure)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