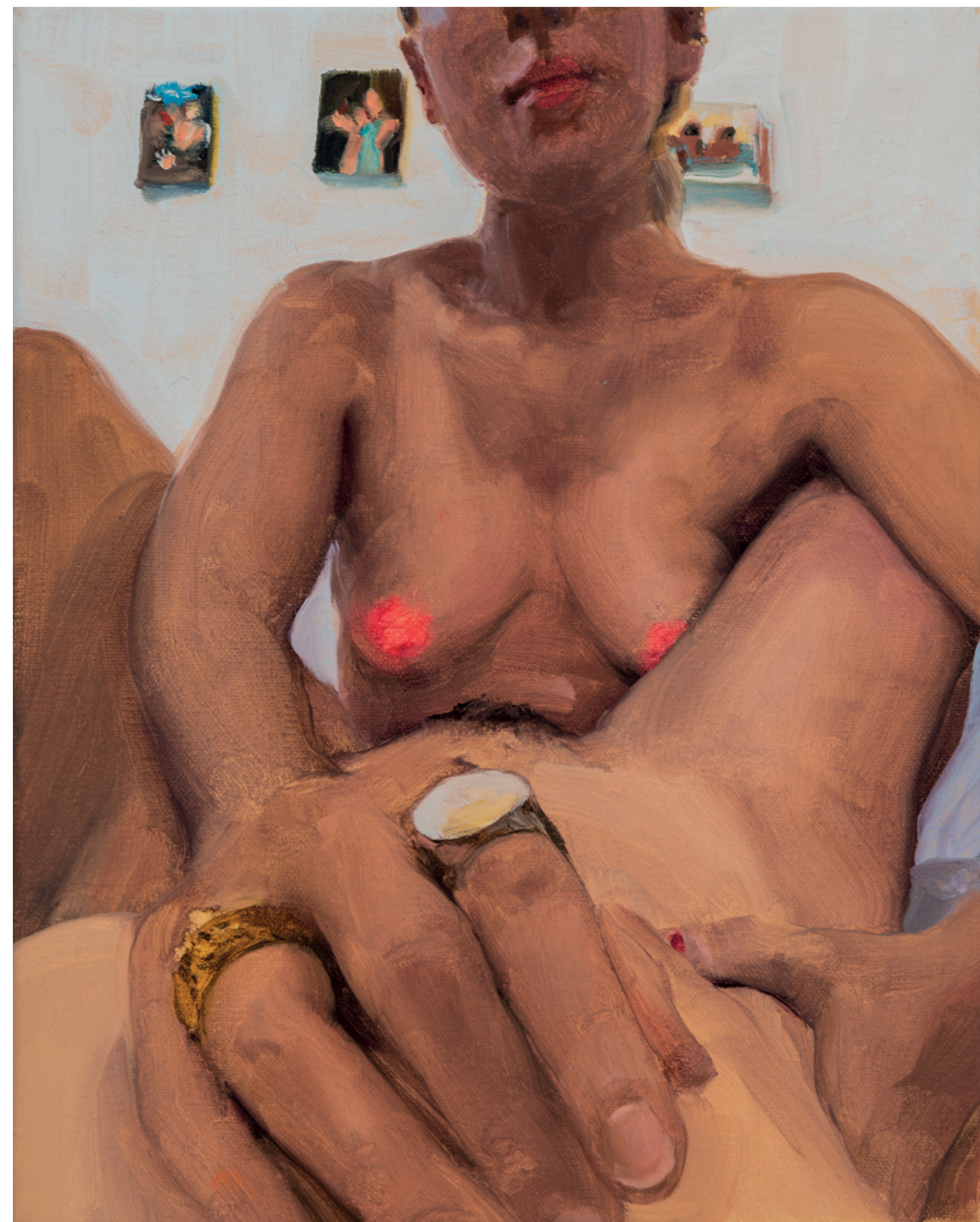


jenna gibbon

“I always had a kind of love experience with my subjects. Painting someone is a very loving process – it’s very physical and devotional. I want the viewer to have a love experience when looking at my paintings”. **love**

INTERVIEW BY OLIVIER ZAHM

ALL ARTWORK COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND FREDERICKS & FREISER, NEW YORK
PHOTO CARY WHITTIER



JENNA GRIBBON, *STUDIO BREAK*,
2019, OIL ON LINEN,
10 X 8 INCHES



JENNA GRIBBON, *TENDERNESS AND TRUST*, 2019, OIL ON LINEN, 8 X 10 INCHES

OLIVIER ZAHM — There are people in most of your paintings. And you always start from a picture that you took yourself, right?
 JENNA GRIBBON — Yes, the paintings start from a moment that's "real," whatever that means, that I capture with a photo. But I think a lot about memory and how we construct personal narratives. It changes the way we remember things to document our lives so much. It affects the way that we construct our personal narrative. So, there'll be a person who feels real, but then things will morph and shift in the image around the person because it's supposed to mimic the way that happens in our minds. A lot of them are my girlfriend or my son. In order to show you something that's in such close proximity to my own body, I choose to use the relationships in my life that are the most intimate... I want the viewer to have a love experience when looking at my paintings.

OLIVIER ZAHM — "Intimacy" is a key word for your paintings.
 JENNA GRIBBON — Intimacy and also empathy with the subject. That's one of the most compelling things in figurative work, especially something that's more like a portrait. If you're able to empathize with the subject, it's so much more compelling. In life, empathy helps us open our minds to all kinds of ideas because

if you can empathize, then you're much more open to learning about a person or an experience or something.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Empathy is transformative, in a way. So, is painting a very empathetic process for you?
 JENNA GRIBBON — Yeah, definitely. Even before I was painting mostly my girlfriend or my son, I always had a kind of love experience with my subjects. Painting someone is a very loving process — it's very physical and devotional.

OLIVIER ZAHM — So, it's your girlfriend and your son. No one else in the paintings?
 JENNA GRIBBON — No. I used to have a male partner, so there were some paintings of men in the past, but I'm much more interested in depicting the experiences of women. For one thing, I know more about those experiences, and I think that those stories are under-told.

OLIVIER ZAHM — So, you're exploring female psychology?
 JENNA GRIBBON — Yeah. And a lot of what I do is think about the positioning of the gaze, the perspective of the viewer, and my perspective, and the feedback loop that we enter into when we're looking at a painting. Because you're very aware of the artist's perspective, but then you see the subject also looking, and you wonder what the subject is looking at, and you experience what the artist

is looking at. For me, it's more interesting to think of the perspective of a woman and what we see and how we see it because so much of the history of painting has been about the perspective of the man: the male gaze.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Is it possible to see a difference between the male and the female gaze in painting? Is the way that you look more indirect?
 JENNA GRIBBON — You know, it's interesting because I have things in common with the male gaze, being a woman who's romantically interested in women. There are similarities. But living as a woman and having a woman's experience, I also have more empathy for my female subjects. So, they're less removed from my experience. I'm also coming from a place of understanding the subject's experience and knowing what it is to be a woman in the world who's looked at and depicted. The whole idea of the male gaze is that women have been conditioned to present themselves to be looked at. And I know what that feels like, but I also like to look. I also have a very scopophilic position myself. I'm interested in both those things existing at the same time.

OLIVIER ZAHM — This is a very important point about your paintings. We can really feel the difference, but it's hard to describe.
 JENNA GRIBBON — Yeah. Because the question is: how is

it different than a man who's objectifying a woman? Am I also objectifying women? I mean, the argument could be made that I am, but I think that empathy is the thing that makes the difference.

OLIVIER ZAHM — I see. You have a very classic, modernist, Impressionist style. Where does it come from? Is it your education or your own taste, or is it spontaneous?
 JENNA GRIBBON — I didn't grow up around a lot of art as a child, and then, as I got older, I became very interested in it. But I grew up in Tennessee, and I wasn't able to see a lot of painting in real life. I'd try to find art books, and I would copy paintings or look at drawings. I can remember, as a very young child, looking at something and trying to understand how the brushstrokes came together to make something. I think it's a sort of weird amalgamation of just looking at painting my whole life. But it's not necessarily from training. I didn't go to a school where I was studying anatomy and all that. I never really had academic training.

OLIVIER ZAHM — This is why your style is so diverse.
 JENNA GRIBBON — Yeah. For a long time, I would try to see how many different ways I could paint in a painting and put them together and make sense of it. That's quietened down a little bit, but I still have that in me, this desire to have a kind of fluidity. I feel like the language of painting can be used to time travel because you can take this painting technique from the 18th century and that painting technique from the mid-20th century and put them side by side, and then you're able to travel all these years within the same image. And you can speak to the experience of the passing of time or talk about history without using words, if you're traversing history with paint.

OLIVIER ZAHM — In that sense, you're a bit like Picabia — you don't stick to a style.
 JENNA GRIBBON — I love Picabia. Big hero of mine.

OLIVIER ZAHM — I have a portfolio of Picabia in this issue because I think he's

very influential for young artists. He used painting in a very free way — there's no taboo, and, at the same time, it's always kind of transgressive.
 JENNA GRIBBON — Yeah. And so playful, also. I think a lot about his Impressionist paintings. And they look kind of okay. They kind of pass as Impressionist paintings. But they're all painted from postcards, which is so funny because the Impressionists were so serious about being on site and capturing the light, and he was just using these bad postcard images to create an Impressionist painting. I understand the experience of doing that because I'll often try to make an almost quasi-historical painting, but from a bad iPhone image. It's a fun game to play. And why not? But then, you have these very academic painters who think that's blasphemy. That's not the way it's done, and you can't even use a photograph. But any of those rules are just nonsense.

OLIVIER ZAHM — And how do you choose your color? You're not afraid of bright, very joyful color.
 JENNA GRIBBON — I like it when color can be surprising, and it can have an anachronistic quality that takes you out of the time that you think you're in. So, again, it's about calling attention to time and history. You have something that looks like it could've been made in the 18th century, and then you put in some fluorescent color, and suddenly you're made aware that it's 2020.

OLIVIER ZAHM — So, in a way, painting is a time machine for you.
 JENNA GRIBBON — Yes, exactly. And it's a way to reexamine the history of painting and continue to love it and live in it, but also to modernize it and make it relatable. How do we bring the history of painting into something that feels more relevant?

OLIVIER ZAHM — And the beauty of it is that it's still the same technique. You start with the same tools as the Renaissance painter or the Impressionists.
 JENNA GRIBBON — Yeah, it's still just moving colored

dirt around on a piece of cloth, you know?

OLIVIER ZAHM — What would you say about love? Is it important in your life?
 JENNA GRIBBON — It should be the organizing principle of one's life. What's more important? In terms of daily interactions, it's always going to be improved if you can come to the interaction and find some way to access a feeling of love for another human being. So, I'd say it's extremely important, and it's extremely important in the way I approach my work. I always want it to be a love experience. Beauty and love can be a great Trojan horse. If you come in with beauty and love, people are open, and they let you in and spend time with the painting in a way that they wouldn't if you just tried to put all of your transgressive ideas on the surface as the most immediate thing. If the first read is about love and empathy, people will spend some time, and then you can have transgressive ideas embedded in the work, and they're much more likely to receive them.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Exactly. Because there's still something transgressive about your paintings. Each painting has a little secret. You really wonder what's going on, exactly. What is it? Is it related to your sexuality?
 JENNA GRIBBON — That's part of it. I don't think we've seen a lot of depictions of queer intimacy in painting that relates to specific people in this way. We're seeing more and more of it now. I'm not the only person who's doing this in this moment, obviously — there are a lot of us. But it's been pretty absent in the past. And so, that feels new, and maybe to some people what feels like something transgressive is actually just seeing something queer. And I also think the paintings reflect my internal world, and even though things might be built around the idea of empathy, I still have frustrations and anger and all these things that also come through.

OLIVIER ZAHM — But for me, it's not obvious that they're queer paintings — it's pretty subtle.

JENNA GRIBBON — Some are subtle. Some aren't. In some of them, it's very obvious. Sometimes, I'll have my girlfriend Mackenzie Scott's body, and then my body intertwined with hers in a very intimate way that wouldn't happen in a platonic relationship. But other times, it's more subtle or metaphorical, like the wrestlers aren't overtly queer. You don't know about their sexuality, but it's kind of like...

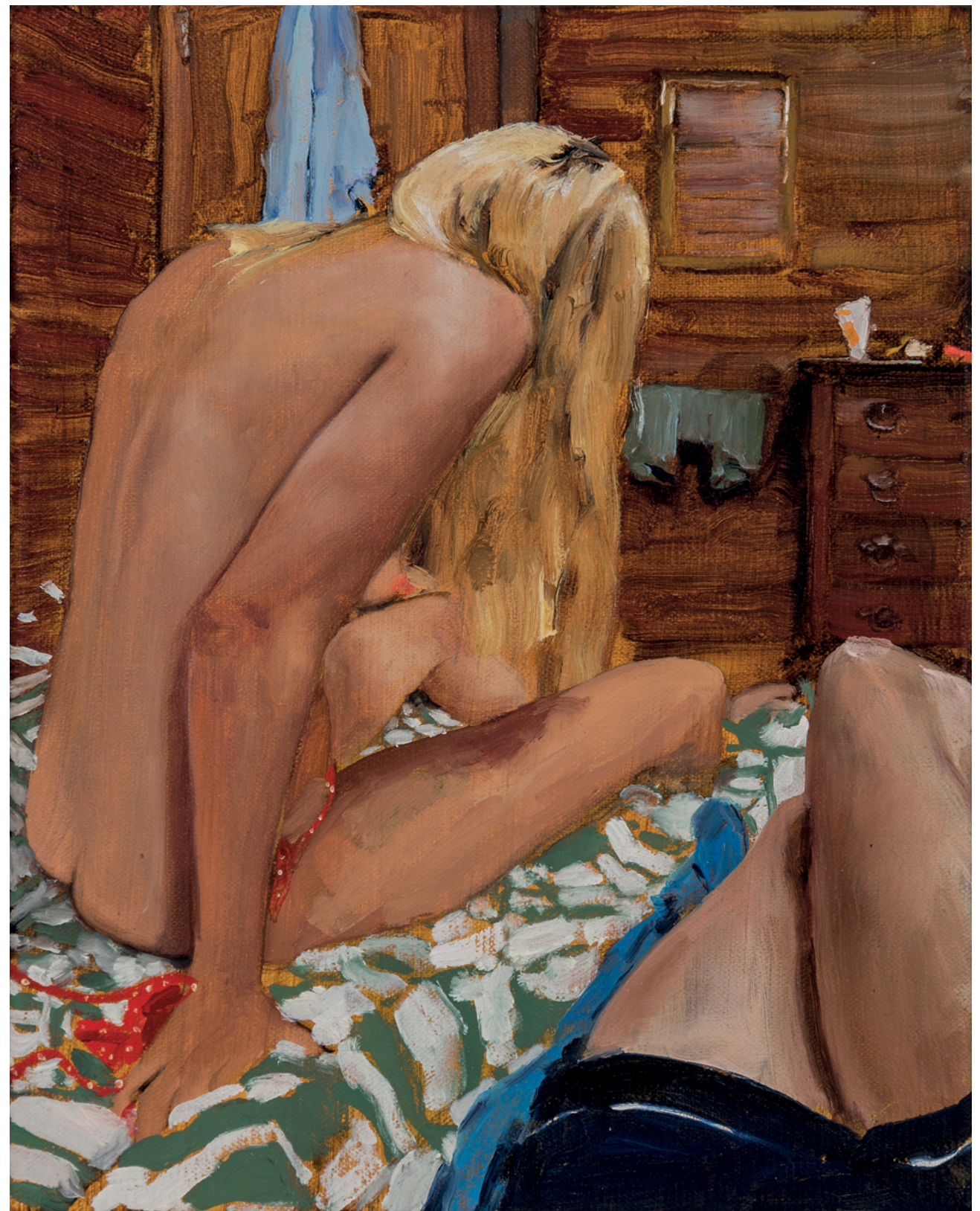
OLIVIER ZAHM — Are you only painting for the queer community?
 JENNA GRIBBON — In terms of queerness and those paintings, I do think a lot about these coded queer paintings from the past, like by Marsden Hartley or Paul Cadmus, where it's not something overtly queer happening, but it's made to be sexy in a way that a queer audience will find sexy. I was specifically thinking of queer women and hoping that they'll find those paintings sexy. But I paint the paintings for everyone, and there's just as much in it for me to have a male audience be able to understand my perspective as a female audience. Both things are super valuable.

OLIVIER ZAHM — What's your definition of love?
 JENNA GRIBBON — Love is the most universal thing there is, and it's something that other people provide a window to. Some people give us a very small window, and some give us a really big one, and I think that's our sensation of loving a lot or loving a little. The love already exists all around us, and it's this pervasive thing, but we can't always feel it and see it. Sometimes others help us feel it and see it and access it. It's so fascinating how another human being can suddenly transform your perspective on everything.

END



JENNA GRIBBON, *WHEN I LOOKED
AT YOU THE LIGHT CHANGED*,
2019, OIL ON LINEN,
16 X 12 INCHES



JENNA GRIBBON, *POST POST-
SWIM NAP*, 2019, OIL ON
LINEN, 10 X 8 INCHES