

On The DL

Gender Portraiture Project

by Tami Fertig

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Opening reception Fri., Oct. 12, 5-8 p.m., exhibit runs through Nov. 2, AIRSPACE, 4013 Chestnut St., 215-694-9718, www.inliquid.com/features/40street/gallery.php

Lauren Griffin wants to take your picture. Not only that. She wants to have a conversation about gender norms and stereotypes while setting up the shot. As part of her ongoing "Gender Portraiture Project," Griffin — AIRSPACE's current 40th Street artist in residence — has created a temporary photography studio at the West Philly gallery, and is inviting you to stop in, pose and chat.

Though open to everyone, the project has thus far attracted people who don't fit in or, at least, don't think they fit in — a situation Griffin knows all too well. As a kid, she played with Tonka trucks and matchbox cars, climbed trees and made bows and arrows. "I always had to go next door to play with the boys because the closest thing my parents would buy for me was a Barbie camper," she says. Indeed, the project stems from Griffin's own desire to come to terms with feeling out of place. And, in the spirit of being open and accepting, she encourages participants to dress as any gender persona and pick any fantasy setting. ("One subject wanted to be seen in the Victorian era," she says.)

In addition to showcasing several of Griffin's previous works on paper, the exhibit features six new portraits, framed or mounted on wood panel, with more to be added throughout the month. Though the conversations are not included in the pieces, Griffin hopes to eventually print or record them. "My goal is to have a critical mass of stories and portraits reflecting gender variations and to show how class, family, personal taste, body type, age and whatever other qualifiers are placed on us affect us," she says. "I want to inspire dialogue about how societal expectations rule our gender."



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