

Culture's approach to nudity explored

By **EVAN GILLESPIE**

Tribune Correspondent

SOUTH BEND

Part of the enjoyment that artist Lorin Hesse gets from her work comes, she says, from "a sense of naughtiness in getting away with something."

That spirit of playful rule-breaking is apparent in the paintings and mixed-media works currently on display at the Spurious Fugitive gallery on West Colfax, but there's not much that's surreptitious about Hesse's canvases, all of which are much too bold to have their meanings slip quietly past anyone.

The work at Spurious Fugitive consists of a selection of large canvases, all of them painted in an exuberant palette; in some, the acrylic paintings have been augmented with paper collage and polymer transfers. The pieces fill the small, simple gallery space with a riot of color.

Hesse's goal with the paintings is to address our culture's tendency to sexualize nudity in general and the female body in particular, imbuing even the most innocent of nudes with a sexual and potentially controversial undertone. To this end, Hesse combines images of women from vintage men's magazines with advertisements, commercial graphics and bits of text. She invites the viewer to make connections between the various elements in her pictures, constructing meaning on their own as the connections occur.

Sometimes, the connections are obvious. In "Racks," a nude mother and child smile benignly from the center of the canvas, but they are juxtaposed with a slab of meat — a rack of ribs — that turns the innocent image into a commentary on the sexual objectification of the woman's body, both via her association with the inanimate meat and the implied slang term for her anatomy.

In "Adam Rib Steak," a nude woman eats an apple while two boys look on, an image that seems to have come from an old nudist magazine. The other components of the picture, including a cover from an "Adam" girlie magazine, suggest a silly treasure-trove of associations: Adam's rib, rib steak, Eve and the apple, and probably a few more that viewers can amuse themselves trying to identify.

Elsewhere, the statements are subtler but also more disturbing. In "Prune," the ubiquitous nude is faintly overlaid with a comic-style ad for an Easy-Bake oven, in which a little girl boasts, "Daddy says I'm the best cook in the whole world." Even the purely graphic elements of the paintings are not without meaning. A motif of concentric circles suggests breasts, while the floral backgrounds of the paintings resemble wallpaper, a fitting decoration for the assumed domestic habitat of the women depicted.

Hesse obviously has fun creating her work, and the viewer can't help but have fun looking at it. It's a guilty pleasure, however, because there are serious issues lurking beneath the brightly colored surfaces — but making the viewer feel a little guilty is probably just what Hesse was trying to get away with.

On exhibit

"Lorin Hesse: Solo" continues through Nov. 27 at the Spurious Fugitive: A Postmodern Gallery, 114 W. Colfax Ave., South Bend. Hours are from noon to 9 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday and noon to 5 p.m. Sunday. For more information, call (574) 232-2377.