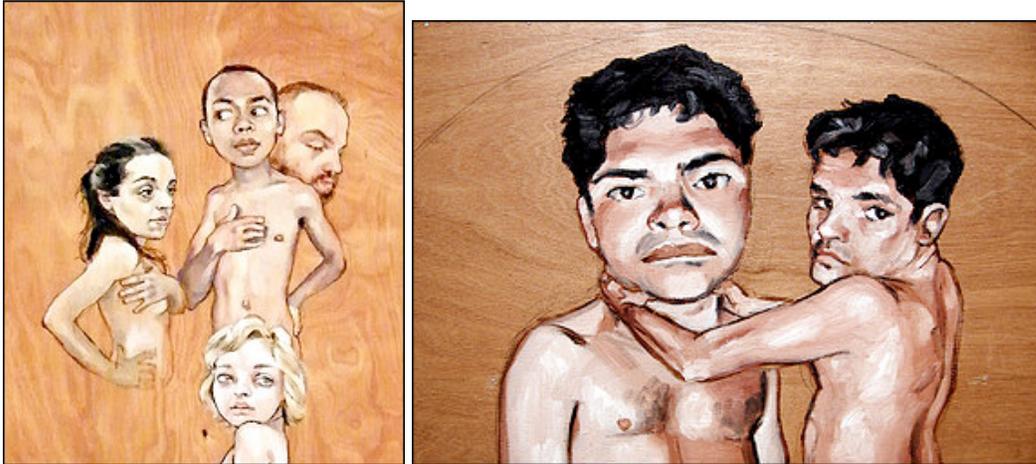


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Exhibit review: 'The Very Queer Portraits of Heyd Fontenot' at U-Md. Art Gallery



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A visit to the current exhibition at the University of Maryland's Art Gallery might have you thinking about "The Joy of Sex." **THIS STORY**

Stark reminders of ourselves

The Story Behind the work: Goats and other animals join people in the works of artist Heyd Fontenot

Don't worry. "The Very Queer Portraits of Heyd Fontenot" is not an erotic art show. But, yes, there's lots nudity, including one picture of a man in an obvious state of arousal. No one is having sex, though parents might want to think twice about taking the kids.

It's just that the paintings and drawings by the Austin-based artist -- depicting, for the most part, the defiantly average bodies of his friends -- are rendered in a style that's more than slightly reminiscent of Charles Raymond and Chris Foss's once-controversial illustrations for the 1972 sex manual (illustrations that were based, incidentally, on photos of the then-hirsute Raymond making love to his wife). There's a matter-of-fact, almost clinical ordinariness to the fleshy folds and occasional bulging tummies in Fontenot's art.

Then there are the bobbleheads. Let me explain.

Sometimes Fontenot paints just a face. He has real talent. His portrait busts are among the best works in the show. You feel you know his subjects, though you've never met them. But whenever the artist does the full figure, the head and the eyes are noticeably, even grotesquely, oversize. They register as people -- real people -- but they're also somewhat alien, like the offspring of a liaison between an earthling and a little green man.