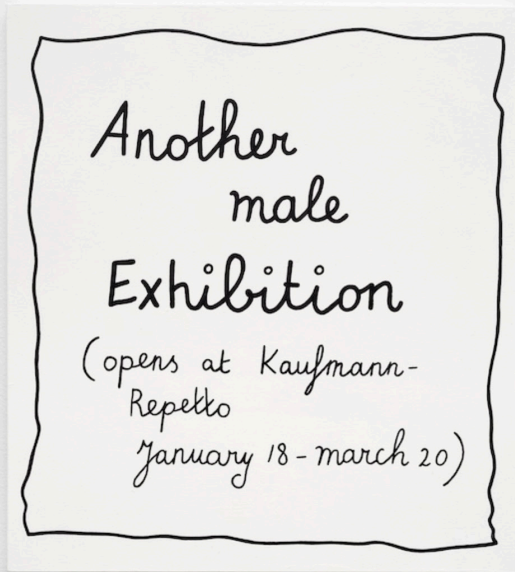


THE UNIBROW



DAILY BROWS

Lily van der Stokker Made the Great Show!

AN ESSAY ON THE DUTCH ARTIST'S NEWEST BODY OF WORK AT KAUFMANN REPETTO, NEW YORK

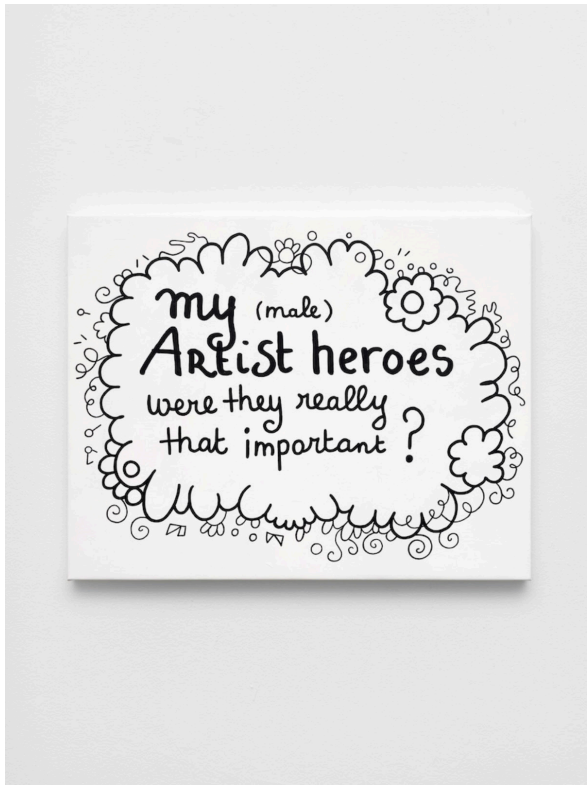
The crisis of masculinity is a topic of debate everywhere you turn these days. In online social spaces, on podcasts both niche and widely popular, and in broader mainstream media, pundits and personalities alike offer takes on subjects like the male loneliness epidemic or plummeting testosterone levels.

It turns out that Lily van der Stokker, a Dutch artist who has made a career examining the aesthetic constructs of femininity, has been musing on the topic of men and the systems that platform them before the subject had been exalted to its current fixation in the cultural zeitgeist. Van der Stokker directly confronts the theme in her recently opened show *Male Art Exhibition, Great Show!*, at New York's kaufmann repetto gallery. The body of work was developed after van der Stokker uncovered a forgotten letter she wrote to the curator Leontine Coelewij in 1994. In it, she expressed her frustration at the reticence of the curator to support her idea for an exhibition that explored male superiority in the artworld, opting instead for a sort of gender-blindness that purports only to consider artistic quality, while ignoring the systemic advantages that men enjoy. Van der Stokker's current show examines the politics that have historically enabled such structures to flourish, while poking at male anxieties around exclusion in a corrective moment that strives for greater inclusion of women and minorities.

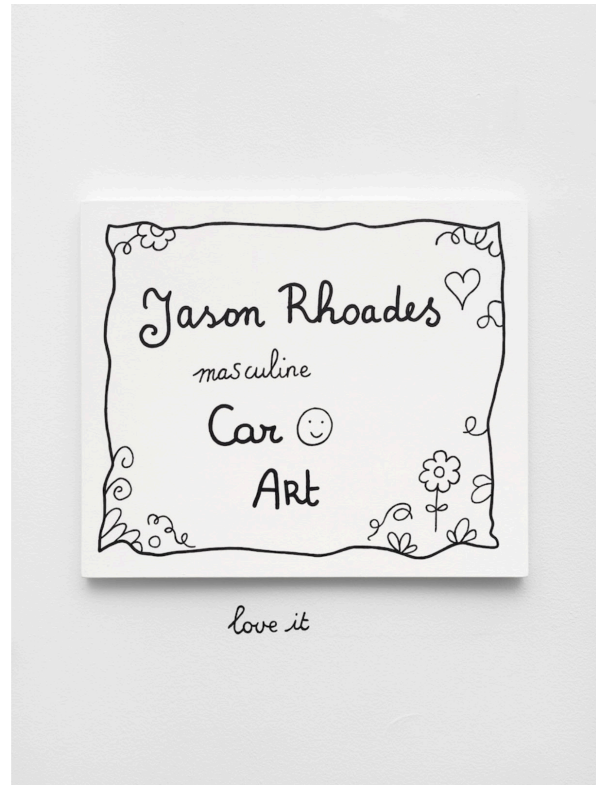
Lily van der Stokker has been creating her unapologetically ornamental work since the 1980s. Manifesting as paintings, sculptures, drawings and the format she is most known for – grand-scale paintings directly on the wall – van der Stokker has been inextricably tied to concepts of femininity for her use of curlicues, graphic floral elements, exuberant color, and optimistic snippets of text. *Male Art Exhibition* marks a turn in the target of the artist's gaze, highlighting the double standards that insist on essentializing the work of women and societal codes of femininity as inherently trivial while unquestioningly ascribing the status of genius to the work of men.



mondrian, 2026 acrylic on wall 290,8 x 815,3 cm / 114.5 x 321 in installation view, kaufmann repetto, New York
 Courtesy of the artist and kaufmann repetto Milan / New York Photo: Olivia DiVecchia



artist heroes, 2026 acrylic on canvas 39 x 50 cm / 15.3 x 19.7 in installation view, kaufmann repetto, New York
 Courtesy of the artist and kaufmann repetto Milan / New York Photo: Olivia DiVecchia



jason rhoades, 2026 acrylic on mdf and wall 30 x 25 cm / 11.8 x 9.8 in installation view, kaufmann repetto, New York
 Courtesy of the artist and kaufmann repetto Milan / New York Photo: Olivia DiVecchia

Upon entering the gallery, visitors are greeted with two texts. One, painted directly on the wall, reads “Coming up: *White male artists over 60* Exhibition at Stokker Jaeger. Arnoud Holleman, Peer Veneman, George Korsmit, John Körmeling, Great show,” while the other, a painting on MDF panel, reads “Another male Exhibition (opens at Kaufmann Repetto January 18 – March 20).” The first, an as-yet unrealized show at van der Stokker’s recently established nonprofit art space in Amsterdam, includes the names of her male artistic peers. Along with the fictional kaufmann repetto exhibition announcement, the texts cheekily combat the countless male-only group shows of the past, calling out the identity markers of whiteness and maleness that would not be explicitly noted in almost any other similar context.

Past the entryway are two large wall paintings that name famous male artists. In one, a grand circle of bulbous, baby blue and white flowers surrounds mid-tone gray text that reads “Mondrian: boyish art with rectangles.” Cutting the Dutch Modernist heavyweight down to size, van der Stokker likens the grand project of abstraction - stripping art to its most fundamental elements - to boyish hubris and a preoccupation with the strict geometric structure stereotypically associated with male qualities like rationality, order and logic. Van der Stokker’s text teases the artist, while also literally framing him in a floral wreath, a craft commonly associated with a feminine penchant for seasonal decorative adornment.

Opposite this wall is a painted half-circle of similar flowers within which van der Stokker compiles names of male artists – listed are Mike Kelley, Pablo Picasso, Francis Bacon, Chuck Close, Matthew Barney, Ed Ruscha, Chris Burden, among many others. The mural is a tongue-in-cheek homage to the looming figures of Modernism and Post-Modernism, with a full exclusion of women and next-to full exclusion of artists of color. Rising from the floor of the gallery, the painting entombs the whiteness and maleness of the artworld in a burial mound out of which the metaphorical flowers of femininity, softness, and optimism may grow. With these murals, van der Stokker releases the burdensome weight of art history and its obsessive insistence on male brilliance.

Accessing the lower level of the gallery, visitors encounter works that prod and provoke more directly. A group of paintings includes snippets of black text like “Jason Rhoades: Masculine Car Art,” or “I am a me-too crazy lunatic and only want to punish men and destroy them in public (yeah),” a phrase culled from van der Stokker’s research on women in the Epstein files. Like the aforementioned Mondrian wall painting, van der Stokker also pays tribute to male artists, while simultaneously deflating their position as grand figures of history. In the drawing *Machismo Top Ten (In Blue)*, hearts, smiley faces, and flowers adorn a top ten list of male artists and van der Stokker’s corresponding thoughts on each: “Anselm Kiefer (big!),” “Richard Serra (bigger),” “Julian Schnabel – (money),” and “Jeff Koons (so tidy).” One imagines that these descriptors rebut the ways in which van der Stokker’s works have been distorted in years past – “girly,” “cute,” or “fun,” as disparaging stand-ins for “frivolous” or “unserious.”



Lily van der Stokker, *Huh*, 2018, installation view, SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, GA. photo courtesy of SCAD



Lily van der Stokker, *Huh*, 2018, installation view, SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, GA. photo courtesy of SCAD

While text is paramount to the provocations in this body of work, van der Stokker also engages with common gendered aesthetic choices, namely color. Several works in *Male Art Exhibition* are executed in monochromatic swaths of baby blue. Similar to previous shows like *Huh* at the SCAD Museum of Art in Savannah, GA, in 2018, in which the artist presented a gathering of explosively pink monochrome works to explore the nature of the feminine, van der Stokker plays on our commonly held beliefs about the aesthetics of binary gender. By choosing a pale blue for a show about men, rather than perhaps, a bold, fiery red, van der Stokker refers not to conceptions of strength, but to a color most commonly associated with boyhood. By using this signifier, the artist lampoons the very binary structures that seek to keep bodies and behaviors in constrictive gendered boxes and convince us of inherent qualities of sexes.

While the conceptual focus of van der Stokker's recent work has shifted from the feminine to the masculine, the artist continues to challenge the hierarchies that assert arbitrary value systems on gender. Approaching the subject with characteristic wit, humor and sincerity, she probes at the societal biases that, consciously or unconsciously, privilege men. In a moment defined by a repudiation of feminist values, Lily van der Stokker responds by questioning the role that misogynistic systems have, and continue to play, in the art world and beyond, as she asks in one of the paintings in *Male Art Exhibition, Great Show!*: "My male artist heroes: were they really that important?" —Ben Tollefson

"*Male Art Exhibition, Great Show!*" is on view through August 8, 2026 at Kaufmann Repetto New York