

A high art _ paintings

The assman

By Brent Gregston





The late painter John Kacere turned women's private parts into sensual works of art

American painter John Kacere began his career as an abstract artist, inspired by the likes of Joan Miró and Paul Klee. In mid-life, in 1963, he became a completely different artist, not just figurative but hyper-real. He began painting women with such technical skill and in such painstaking detail that it simply looks like photography – but only beautiful women and only their crotches, thighs and butts. He kept at it for over 30 years, until his death in 1999.

A number of other American artists turned from the abstract to pop art in what came to be known as photorealism. But no other artist became such an adamant one-trick pony. Andy Warhol may have had a thing for Campbell's Soup cans but he moved on to other subjects. Kacere never did. "Woman is the source of all life, the source of regeneration," he said to explain his obsession. "My work praises that aspect of womanhood."

Kacere is a thigh/tummy/rear end man. He doesn't do breasts. He never paints a

fully naked woman. Instead, he uses his technical ability to freeze a pair of butt cheeks in time, immortalizing them in translucent panties. Or capturing a woman in midsection: thighs in nylon and vulva in frou frou beneath a garter belt. Yet, within the self-imposed limitations of his genre, Kacere doesn't lack for variety: his work is a complex counterpoint of fabric, skin and shape. It's meatier and tastier, for some palates presumably, than Warhol's condensed beef soup and clam chowder.

These paintings are a reminder, if any were needed, that the female body is in a highly fetishized category all its own. Are the models' buttocks and thighs a universal signal, an invitation to coitus? Do they represent a platonic ideal of female body parts? Are they just cheesy?

Sofia Coppola said Kacere influenced her when she crafted the opening shot of Scarlett Johansson's pink panties in *Lost in Translation*. The movie captures Johansson from behind, just as Kacere would have painted her. But she then wakes up and wiggles her girlish tush.

In artspeak, Kacere is considered a photorealist, though he himself rejected the label. Gallerist Louis K. Meisel coined the word photorealism in 1969. He used it to describe the work of American artists trying to reclaim the value of the image in a world overwhelmed by photography.

It's safe to say no artist has done more to reclaim the image of women's booties than Kacere.