

[Back to regular view](#) • [Print this page](#)

Box of photos inspires 'Women in Love'

(<http://www.pioneerlocal.com/oakpark/entertainment/1640070,entertainment-west-myntti-070209-s1.article>)

July 2, 2009

By [STEPHANIE FOSNIGHT](#) Contributor

River Forest artist Laura Myntti was browsing through an antique store when she came across a large box of carefully collected photographs from the 1930s, '40s and '50s. As she rummaged through the box, she discovered photo after photo of women gazing into the camera as if sitting for a portrait.

"They were ordinary, they weren't stylized babes in a commercial photograph," she said. "Yet they were looking so lovingly and so longingly at the camera."

Intrigued, Myntti bought masses of the photographs and brought them home to her studio.

"I had to have some," she said. "I wasn't sure what I'd do with them but I knew they had inherent value."

It was these photographs that inspired Myntti's latest exhibition of etchings, "Women in Love," on display through July 5 at Expressions Graphics gallery in Oak Park.

"These photos had a humanity and anonymity that was beautiful, instantly fascinating and real," said Myntti, who has tried to steer clear of perpetuating gender stereotypes and objectifying women during 25 years as a professional artist working in paint, printing, photography and other media.

Why, then, does Myntti assume that the real women who inspired her etchings were, indeed, posing for the anonymous photographer with looks of love?

"That's what they were, women in love," she said. "As a woman, I can see it and it wasn't a stretch at all to come up with that conclusion."

The women sitting for the photographs were doing so because of some special moment, Myntti reasons. And why not love?

"It was much less common then for people to possess a camera and be out there shutterbugging," she said. "These were such great images that I wanted to explore them in my own way and share them."

Myntti therefore set about translating the images into etchings, making great use of perspective and patterns to convey an earlier era. The result is a parade of women, old and young, attractive and ordinary, who do, indeed, stop the viewer with their compelling expressions.

"Woman in Love" features a laughing woman sitting under a night sky as a handlebar-moustached man behind her caresses her head. "Woman in Love No. 2" appears to be an older lady, who stares at a spot just behind the viewer with an expression of tender serenity.

"Not all of them show unbridled joy," said Myntti, noting that "Woman in Love No. 8" is a portrait of a woman who is lying facedown on her bed. Next to the bed is a table with a telephone, and a window open to a winter sky. The subtext is clear.

"We've all felt longing, too," she said. "This woman is in love, but she's not a foxy babe. Her hair is in a bun and she's wearing saddle shoes. I really like her normality. She's a real human."

While the original photograph was of a woman lying on a beach, Myntti has moved her to a bedroom that rich with patterns, reminiscent of a Matisse painting. This work was extremely popular at the gallery in Paris where Myntti first showed the collection last spring.

"The French people were going crazy for my use of patterns," she said. "They thought it was such an un-American technique, but I spend hours designing patterns."

Myntti has lived in River Forest with her husband and children since moving here in 1998, after long stints in cities like Boston, New York, Paris, Anchorage and London.

"I've lived in Chicago longer than anywhere else in my life," said Myntti, a noted portrait painter who also has work in the permanent collections of museums all over the world. "It's one of the best cities in the world."

Reception to her "Women in Love" exhibition has been very strong, with her etchings nearly selling out at the gallery openings both in Paris and in Oak Park. For her next project, Myntti is turning to another box of found photographs, these of college-age women canoeing and climbing trees.

"They look educated, but still not sexed up," Myntti said. "We don't usually see women like this in the images that bombard us these days. These are wholesome pictures."

Pioneer.com: [Blogs](#) | [Send feedback](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [About Us](#) | [Advertise With Us](#) | [Media Kit](#) | [Make Us Your Home Page](#)

Pioneer Local: [Subscribe](#) | [Subscriber Services](#) | [Online Photo Store](#) | [News Archives](#)

Affiliates: [YourSeason.com](#) | [RogerEbert.com](#) | [SearchChicago - Autos](#) | [SearchChicago - Degrees](#) | [SearchChicago - Homes](#) | [Local Area Jobs](#) | [Centerstage](#) | [North Shore Magazine](#)

Express Links: [TV Listings](#) | [Video](#) | [Yellow Pages](#) | [Buy Photos](#) | [Communities](#) | [School Report Cards](#) | [Eating In](#) | [Restaurant Reviews](#)

Partner: [BlockShopper.com](#)



© Copyright 2009 Digital Chicago, Inc. | [Terms of Use](#) • [Privacy Policy](#) • [Submission Guidelines](#) • [Advertise With Us](#)