

# maake

## Lindsay Burke

Lindsay M Burke (b. Ames, Iowa, 1991) is a painter living and working in Brooklyn. She received her B.F.A from the University of Iowa in 2014 and her M.F.A from Hunter College in 2017. In 2016 she attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine and was a participant in the Shandaken Paint School Residency in 2018. Recent exhibitions include a solo show at Marinaro Gallery in New York and group exhibitions at Art Los Angeles Contemporary, LA; Thierry Goldberg Gallery, New York; The Flag Art Foundation, New York; Underdonk Gallery, Brooklyn; Helena Anrather Gallery, New York.

### Statement

My work questions the value of an image in the hastily evolving contemporary visual culture. Traditional figurative images, similar to those preserved in classical frescoes and relief sculptures, are layered and repeated, evoking digital screen culture and the accumulation of content. I examine the antithetical relationships between these enduring frescoes and today's overexposed and physically impermanent imagery. I also question whether one becomes numb and desensitized by the imagery repeated in endless browser windows, social media apps, and the 24-hour news cycle.

My process makes use of contrasting ideas. I've utilized a mineral fiber paste that allows the work to build up and create a slight relief; the resulting texture is similar to a wall or slab, much like the fresco's plaster surface. And like plaster, the fiber paste offers absorbent qualities for wet and dry media. I deviate from this traditional base in the use of airbrushed compositions and opaque acrylic elements.

As with previous bodies of work, this recent exploration focuses on gender-based power dynamics and sexuality but also thinks about the human potential for emotion, creation, destruction, violence, pain, and desire.



Heavy Heart, 2018, acrylic, graphite and pastel on paper, mounted on panel, 21 x 22 inches

Donahue, Andreana, "Interview with Lindsay Burke," *maake*, October, 2019.

## Interview with Lindsay Burke

Questions by Andreana Donahue

### **Hi Lindsay. What are some early memories of your introduction to art or art-making while growing up in Iowa?**

I am the youngest child in a family of four daughters. Because there was a significant gap in age between myself and my older sisters, I remember spending a good amount of time entertaining myself within a busy household. For a short period of time, I was obsessed with making drawings of mermaids and turning them into paper dolls. I developed a format for the body and tail and would then cut them out and glue the figure to a popsicle stick. I made many of them. I remember the pride I felt using scissors, a relatively 'dangerous' act for a young child. As an adult, I can close my eyes and visualize the manic mermaid faces, produced with the dexterity of a 4 or 5-year-old. The drawn and cut elements contained some of the emotional energy that still resonates with me.

Despite my struggle to learn to read, I spent an enormous amount of time studying the illustrations of children's books. We had many books in the house, and I would stay up for hours at night with a giant stack at the end of my bed. I believe these illustrations were instrumental in developing a preference towards visual communication.

### **Are there any other makers in your family? Can you talk about your decision to pursue a career as an artist?**

There are no traditional makers in my family, but I would describe every member of my family as creative. I am lucky to say I was always encouraged by my parents to make art. My mother went out of her way to facilitate art-focused activities for me. This included trips to the craft store, classes at the Octagon Art Center and a private lesson with an Iowa State student who taught me to paint in oil. My first still life included a glass shell, a birdhouse, and a beanie baby.

For all the support I had from my parents, when it came time to apply to college they made it clear that I was to receive a 'well-rounded education' that would provide me with practical career options, such as art education, art conservation, art therapy, and art history. An art school was not an option. I always knew I was an artist but at the time felt very passive to the idea of designing my future. I would say it was not until I moved to New York that terms like 'pursue' and 'career' really even entered my vocabulary.

### **How did your recent grad school experience at Hunter impact the trajectory of your work?**

Being accepted to the MFA program at Hunter College and the subsequent move to New York no doubt changed the trajectory of my work and life. It helped me establish a consistent studio practice and gave me a better understanding of what an art career could look like. The program served as an introduction to critical discussion and emphasized the importance of community. I was incredibly green when I arrived and found the demands of the program and the cultural shift to be very overwhelming. In terms of my work, I completely stopped painting and spent most of my time drawing. I bought a cheap roll of paper and made large charcoal drawings on the floor of my studio. Eliminating color and restricting my materials helped me explore a new visual language. I look back at that work and see a lot of energy and genuine expression.



**How did your recent grad school experience at Hunter impact the trajectory of your work?**

Being accepted to the MFA program at Hunter College and the subsequent move to New York no doubt changed the trajectory of my work and life. It helped me establish a consistent studio practice and gave me a better understanding of what an art career could look like. The program served as an introduction to critical discussion and emphasized the importance of community. I was incredibly green when I arrived and found the demands of the program and the cultural shift to be very overwhelming. In terms of my work, I completely stopped painting and spent most of my time drawing. I bought a cheap roll of paper and made large charcoal drawings on the floor of my studio. Eliminating color and restricting my materials helped me explore a new visual language. I look back at that work and see a lot of energy and genuine expression.

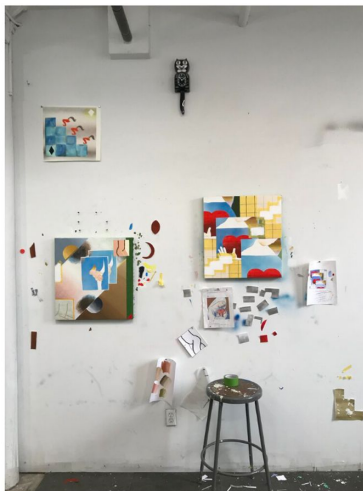
**You're currently based in Brooklyn. Do you feel your work reflects any aspects of living in New York?**

For a long time I have found no direct relationship between my work and New York. However, I have noticed a shift in my treatment of space and composition that relates to the aesthetics of a more urban environment. Lately my impulse has been to stack, overlap, layer, and frame in my paintings — to navigate a shallow but dense visual field. New York contrasts greatly to the expansiveness of the Iowa landscape. My existence here is fragmented. I understand it through the cumulative buildup of fragments of sky, structure, imagery, and interaction.

What cannot be understated is the importance of community to my existence as an artist. I feel incredibly lucky to be surrounded by so many rigorous conversations in New York and for the residencies I've participated in. I am continually learning from my peers and constantly amazed at their brilliance. These relationships have a huge impact on my work.

**Can you tell us about your current studio and daily routine?**

I try to pack as much studio into the daytime hours as I can. Lately, I begin my day with coffee and the Brian Lehrer Show, cleaning up from my previous session in the studio. When I really get to working, the amount of debris I create is laughable. Some days it takes me a while to get into a rhythm, to not give in to distractions, and to shake off any hesitation. I usually take a break in the evening to exercise and make dinner. If I am smart, I will go back at night, even if just for an hour or two. This helps me maintain a sense of connection. More and more I am thinking in terms of momentum. How do I build momentum in the studio? Generate energy? Build a practice that helps me achieve a state of flow? I also see going to openings and visiting galleries/museums as studio time; sometimes you just need to get out of your own head!



Work in progress at Lindsay's Brooklyn studio

Donahue, Andreana, "Interview with Lindsay Burke," *maake*, October, 2019.

**What role does research have in your creative practice? What sort of source imagery are you typically pulling from?**

I seem to have periods of time where I fixate on an image or object and actively reference it in my work. When this happens, the work usually speaks to me first. It could be something I saw years ago, like Piero Della Francesca's *Madonna Del Parto*, a fresco whose postcard reproduction has traveled from studio to studio with me, collecting paint splatters. Francesca's mask-like faces have manifested in my work many times over the years, and now it is the slit down the center of the pregnant Madonna's belly that fascinates me.

On a recent trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, I wandered into the wing of Assyrian art and found myself totally arrested by the stone relief panels. Dramatically lit, the scale, posture, and repetition of the male figure overpowered me. Yet as I stayed with the work, the dominance started to wear away. The description of the bodies and their gestures became incredibly sensual. Hands delicately grasping fruit, articulation of muscle, adornment of the body and a silent exchange between men. My experience with the space totally flipped. When I began to integrate the male body into my work, it was important for me to find examples that, on the surface, read as hyper-masculine but would allow me to find ways to crack the façade.

In both of these examples, I am interested in the permanency and site-specificity in the traditions of fresco and relief sculpture, their reliance on a wall or structure. I think of these works as the complete opposite of how an image operates in contemporary visual culture — think, tap-tap, scroll, repeat — how the image is replicable, moveable, accessible.

**Can you share some insight into your overall process?**

I spend a lot of time making small cartoons that act as sketches for larger works. This is also a way for me to warm up. They are made with graphite, colored pencil, and gesso. I have notebooks full of them. With these works, I always feel that I am casting a net into the future. They express an image in my head that lies somewhere between a vision and something concrete. Sometimes they contribute to a larger work, sometimes not.

If I am working on paper or canvas the process is usually the same. With canvas, I apply three layers of gesso and two layers of fiber paste, sanding between each layer. This is time consuming, and I don't really enjoy it. After the surface is prepared, I cover it with frisket film and sketch with marker. This takes a long time, as I am constantly adjusting the drawing, using isopropyl alcohol and a rag to erase areas that aren't working. I notice my brain working in a unique way during this stage, very procedural. I am considering the series of moves ahead of me: what moves will be made first and how to preserve a sense of light. I also use tape, collage, and the markup tool on my phone to strategize moves. However rigid the preparatory stage may sound, the execution of the work is actually very improvisational.

For my first show at Marinaro Gallery, all the works were made on paper then mounted on panel. The mounting process is pretty intense but, if done successfully, looks really good in the end. When working with the airbrush on paper, I feel like I can best access the sensuality of flesh. There is a softness in the way the paper receives the particles. I like this hyper-sensuality because it pushes me toward the grotesque. I find our culture's obsession with perfection and youth to be grotesque and see it manifested in the digitized body.

Donahue, Andreana, "Interview with Lindsay Burke," *maake*, October, 2019.





Lindsay's Brooklyn studio

**Can you talk about your ongoing interest in “digital screen culture and the accumulation of content” and how this manifests in your work?**

I am interested in using the screen format as a stage. Although it has a dense history in art, our idea of the screen is now so commonplace. It is a visual field to arrange our thoughts, our interests, and our desires. It is a platform for communication and learning but also misinformation and delusion. Visually, I'd like to congest the space, creating a sense of tension or anxiety. I use the aesthetic of stacking browsers to speak to an overwhelming of the psyche. I'm thinking about the way an emotional or anxious state can build, sometimes to the point of snowballing. The repetition and stacking become a visualization of this.

**You work across drawing and painting, including graphite, pastel, mineral fiber paste, and airbrushed acrylic on paper or canvas. Can you elaborate on your selection of materials and relationship with drawing?**

Drawing has remained at the core of my practice for the past five years. It was in a figure drawing class at the University of Iowa that I really began to understand the principles of art – space, form, value, light, contrast, composition, etc. Our professor introduced us to the works of Balthus, Bonnard, Corbet, and Piero Della Francesca. We had in-depth discussions about how the paintings were operating spatially and psychologically. I am amazed how these discussions have stuck with me.

Donahue, Andreana, “Interview with Lindsay Burke,” *maake*, October, 2019.

I am attracted to the immediacy of drawing and the low-risk nature of paper. I can make decisions freely and quickly. I work well with the additive and subtractive methods learned in the tradition of drawing. I find I don't always have the temperament needed for paint. At this point, I find more confidence in working with dry media such as pastels, graphite, and colored pencils, but the difficulty of these drawing materials is that they can be more fragile.

Airbrush seems to act as a middleman for me between drawing and painting. When I began working with the airbrush, I thought of it as a drawing tool because it made marks similar to what I could achieve with a stick of charcoal. After awhile, I discovered that I could create tension by using a masked edge and play with depth by placing elements in or out of focus.

I originally started working with fiber paste, a product made by Golden, because I was hoping to replicate the qualities of paper onto the surface of stretched canvas. However, I quickly found the texture, highlighted by the spray of the airbrush, reminded me more of the surface of a stone or concrete wall, much like the fresco and reliefs I was already referencing. Experimenting with rough and smooth textures became a new priority.

**Can you talk about the influence classical figurative frescoes and reliefs have had on your work?**

With classical figuration, be it fresco, sculpture, or relief, I observe a devotion to the idealized form. To me, idealization of the human body is a slippery slope — weird and dangerous territory. I find notions of stereotypical femininity and masculinity to be destructive and believe idealization is the root. Referencing classical figuration was a way to communicate this idea.

I am not so interested in the historically idealized female form at this point. Maybe it is too close to home, too much a part of the struggles I've had with my own body, or too boring because idealization of the female form is so rampant. But the male form felt undiscovered to me. The hyper-masculine form embodied a toxicity I was trying to understand at the beginning of the Me Too movement. This idealized exterior was like a mountain that was one step away from crumbling, and I was drawn to this extreme.

**In what ways do you address gender and art historical power structures?**

With my last body of work I felt compelled to examine a gendered power dynamic that was embedded in everything I had experienced — in popular culture, politics, history, and my personal life. I began by painting the male form as a way to understand masculinity. In these works it was important to blow out the scale of the male body, exaggerating a sense of big-ness, yet at the same time compromise it by cropping or fragmentation. These compositions asserted themselves. Like a power stance. I included clenched fists, firm strides and striking hands because it felt important to address the subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle violence present in masculine depictions. I was interested in the pain of toxic masculinity. A pain that is directed outwards, towards others, and inward, towards self.

I also thought a lot about trespass. What it is to have a body with physical, social and psychological vulnerabilities. The works involving trespass relied on compositions that suggested boundaries and the crossing of boundaries. I find that I am drawn to make work involving intense emotions and in 2016 and 2017, I was overwhelmed by the repetitive trespass against the female body and spirit.

Donahue, Andreana, "Interview with Lindsay Burke," *maake*, October, 2019.



**A few years ago you were working primarily in black and white, but slowly introduced more color over time. Can you talk about the evolution of your work and how you see it progressing in the future?**

I see my relationship to color less as an evolution and more as a continual back and forth. I still have a difficult time with color, and every time I branch out with a palette, I have the urge to retreat back into black and white. There's something about the monochrome that feels like a stabilizing force. It has a unique energy. But I guess this is how change happens, two steps forward, one step back.



*Three that Strike and Three that Praise*, 2018, acrylic and graphite on paper, mounted on panel, 21 x 22 inches

**How would you describe your approach to editing? What happens to work that you determine is unsuccessful?**

Editing is tough but important. The first example of editing that comes to mind is the process of adjusting and erasing that happens when finding/creating an image. Everything is drawn by hand, no projection or gridding. This takes longer, but I am interested in the fault of the hand and an in-the-moment edit. I will edit in an individual work but also edit myself. I am trying to be more aware of my tastes as an artist, to work with them and against them. Self-awareness is such a long game. So is one's ability to edit. I'd like to be better with both.

An unsuccessful piece is one that is not active, is lacking intention, is indecisive, is underbaked, is timid. In the past, I have let unsuccessful work leave the studio to be exhibited and regretted it later. The hope is to have learned from those mistakes.

Donahue, Andreana, "Interview with Lindsay Burke," *maake*, October, 2019.

In contrast, successful work gives me the sense that I am channeling a powerful energy, like I'm making something bigger than I can understand at that moment, or that I'm doing something I haven't done before. This state is somewhat inconsistent but I always strive for it without the expectation of a constant flow. I also feel most successful when I turn toward ideas or impulses that make me nervous, exploring my edges.

**Your statement mentions that you “question whether one becomes numb and desensitized by the imagery repeated in endless browser windows, social media apps, and the 24-hour news cycle.” How do you feel our current visual culture has specifically altered the experience of looking at or exhibiting art?**

This is about our potential to feel and a void that exists within an endless scroll. I question if all-access, all-the-time is a valuable thing. I find the idea of 'unlimited access' terrifying. I also wonder how we process emotions in such a diluted existence. Does more content correlate to more empathy? Does more information correlate to more emotional wisdom? As it pertains to making, I start to question the power of a single image. What is essential and what is filler?

I probably feel as most people do, that social media has sucked intimacy out of the viewing experience but, at the same time, is a useful platform for connection, visibility, and opportunity. I don't want to be too critical, but for me, social media has led to anxiety and depression. I am also suspicious of a culture that elevates rapid production and branding.

**You currently have work included in *A Fairly Secret Army* at wild palms inn Düsseldorf and *Buddy System II* at Deanna Evans Projects in New York. For the latter, you were asked to show work alongside a buddy of your choice. How did you approach selecting the other artist and preparing for this exhibition together?**

I was very excited to be invited to participate in the group show “Buddy System II” with Deanna Evans Projects. The premise of the show is that each of the four selected artists invites a friend in the art world or someone who inspires her. I chose the latter and reached out to Lauren Luloff through a direct message. I had been following Lauren's work since I moved to New York and was excited about how she has recently incorporated plein air painting into her practice. Luckily she said yes, and we had a great time meeting at the opening.

**In the past you've attended Skowhegan as well as the Shandaken Paint School. How have these residencies shifted your perspective as an artist or otherwise affected your practice?**

Both residencies had a huge impact on my life and practice. Acceptance to Skowhegan came at a really tough point in my life; it allowed me to escape the city and dive headfirst into my work. It was a very productive period in the studio. The community and environment were like nothing I had ever experienced before, especially coming from the Midwest. I learned so much from my peers and their varied practices. Some of my closest friendships were formed that summer.

Donahue, Andreana, “Interview with Lindsay Burke,” *maake*, October, 2019.



Paint School was less immersive in its format but was equally influential to my practice. I was one of 12 fellows who met twice a month for a period of six months. We also met for studio visits and to see shows together. The program is localized to New York City and entirely devoted to the subject of painting. Shandaken did a great job selecting a diverse group of candidates with varied approaches to painting. Both residencies had incredible visiting artist lecture series.

**What non-visual works of art are important to you - from film, music, or literature?**

"Force Majeure," "Melancholia," "Phantom Thread," "How Should a Person Be?" by Sheila Heiti, Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan Series, "Exit West" by Mohsin Hamid, John Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath," "Night Studio" by Musa Meyer.

**Who are some other contemporary artists you're excited about right now?**

Dana Schutz, Dana Lok, Bridget Mullen, Fin Simonetti, John Edmonds, Anna Glantz, Amy Sillman, Michael Stamm, Charline Von Heyl, Sascha Braunig, Deana Lawson, Victoria Roth, Heidi Hahn, Carissa Rodriguez, Sanya Kantarovsky, Ben R Browne, Chris Offili, Louis Fratino, Camille Henrot, Elizabeth Jaeger, Julia Haft-Candel, Rebecca Morris.

**What are you currently working on? Do you have any upcoming exhibitions, residencies, or other news you'd like to share?**

I'm working towards my next solo show at Marinaro Gallery, scheduled for May 2020 and will be in residency at The Macedonia Institute in September.

**Thanks so much for taking the time to talk with us!**

*To find out more about Lindsay and her work, check out her [website](#).*