

**JOHN CURRIN**  
**Untitled**10 April - 10 May 1997  
35 Heddon Street, London W1

In the past few years John Currin has become known for his portraits of menopausal women, ineffectual men and buxom young girls. He has spoken of his need to get away from the neutrality associated with figurative painting, and it is his intention in these works to present a 'centred image', which instead of hiding behind strategies of appropriation or pastiche, foregrounds an impediment to the viewers' unthinking consumption of the image.

Commenting on his painting 'The Bra Shop' (1997), Currin has said: 'I had already received a small amount of criticism about my sexism, and I wanted to make something that I wouldn't have to worry about being termed sexist – because the image is so sexist that it's sort of beyond repair'.

To this end he deploys a wide range of techniques derived from various antagonistic figures from the history of painting, such as Emil Nolde and Francis Picabia. Another unifying factor in these paintings is the rendering of the faces, where the crudity of the handling of the paint is in direct contrast to other elements in the image, which often evoke French Genre Painters such as Chardin or Fragonard.

Norman Bryson has noted that:

'Currin's amorous male is stuck forever in the position Freud described in his paper 'On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love' (1912): the prerequisite of sexual pleasure is the 'psychical degradation' of the sexual object – the arousal of desire is possible only when accompanied by copious measures of contempt.'