

# Art Therapy

Pinup portraits capture the diva in every woman

writer Jessanne Collins

WHEN PLAYGIRL ASKED COLORADO ARTIST Iman Woods to create a self-portrait to run with this profile, she was nervous. At first she considered declining, but a conversation with a therapist friend convinced her it was time to practice what she preaches. "It was so liberating!" she says. "That was such a point of growth for me, doing my own portrait, seeing myself and feeling beautiful."

Woods, 27, has made a career out of making other women feel beautiful. Women of all ages—from their 20s through their 60s—and of all sizes and races, come to her home studio in Denver to have her do their portraits in vintage pinup girl style. Woods has been painting since grade school but for the last two and a half years, her art has a therapeutic mission. "My whole point of focus is how can I better help women feel better about their bodies," she says. "Pinup art is the perfect medium for helping women feel sexy."

Getting decked out in false eyelashes, pincurls, red lipstick and fancy flowers is...a bit like a slumber party.

After a period where she struggled with her own body image, Woods, who was working as a portrait photographer and artist in Orlando, Fla., began experimenting with using camera angles and lighting to accentuate the positive parts of her subjects' bodies. Pinup art is founded on these techniques, and after Woods entered a local pinup art show, she realized she'd found her calling.

She set out to make pinup glamour accessible to every woman, in the form of custom portraits. Interested clients first undergo an extensive consultation. Woods assesses the client's tastes, and tries to pinpoint her favorite and least favorite body parts, so she knows how to tailor the shoot. At the same time they get to know each other, so that the client feels comfortable with Woods and can let her guard down when its time for the camera to come out

Pinup princess Iman Woods with her self-portrait



On the day of the shoot the client is treated to two hours of hair and makeup. Getting decked out in false eyelashes, pincurls, red lipstick and fancy flowers is a big part of the process, which, Woods says, ends up feeling a bit like a slumber party. The shoot itself takes another three hours, with lots of costume changes from Woods' wardrobe of vintage clothes and accessories. "I try to make the whole thing as much of an experience as possible," Woods says. "We don't take enough time to celebrate our bodies. We all pick ourselves apart."

Indeed, Woods requires that her clients check any negative issues they have with their bodies at the studio door. She's found that telling women they aren't allowed to remark upon or worry about their bodies for the duration of the session has a liberating effect. "People really let go and let themselves enjoy feeling pretty, they let go of feeling critical of themselves," she says. And this effect has a way of lasting even after the session is over. "Every time they see that painting, an echo of that beautiful feeling comes back."

After the session, Woods digitally processes the best shots

and lets the client choose her favorites, which Woods then transforms into hand-painted acrylic portraits. "To really make it look like it came from the 40s or 50s, to have it have that dreamy quality of the perfect skin, the perfect hair, the glowing girl, you have to paint it," she says.

She might spend as much as 60 hours on one painting, but all that work is worth it for the end result. More than one client has told Woods that her portraits work "better than Viagra." Often customers tell her that they went about their day feeling pretty after the shoot—without even seeing the photos. Husbands have written to thank her for capturing their wives at their sexiest. Women have said they can't wait to pass their portrait down through their family—so their grandkids can see how sexy grandma was.

Feedback like this is how Woods knows she's done her job. "When you have a picture of yourself that you love, every time you look at it it makes you happy and everytime you show someone else it makes you happy," Woods says. "And anything that makes you happy is good for you."

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