

RANTS & Raves



Melissa Van Cleave not only owns the most atypical art gallery in Fort Wayne, but she lives in the most unusual house as well. What makes her house unusual is that it *is* her art gallery. What makes her art gallery atypical is it *is* her house. Also, it's mostly nudes. Walk through Van Cleave's front door and one is awash in nudes. Paintings of nude women created by Van Cleave line her walls the way portraits of former headmasters line the walls of a boarding school. OK, maybe not in the same way. Van Cleave's paintings are sexy. But a person would be hard-pressed to brand them obscene or pornographic, although certain people seem to have to have a remarkably easy time getting just that hard-pressed. The artist's gallery/abode is no den of iniquity – it is as understated and comfy as a pricey spa. Van Cleave calls herself an erotic artist and it's not a label she uses lightly. She rejects the usual insipid naughtiness the word "erotic" has become saddled with. Van Cleave says she has used her art as a way of



growing comfortable with her own body and its imperfections. When she paints other women, she tries to capture something essential about them that the people being painted might not be fully aware of. "This is my journey toward accepting that I'm not in the perfect body," she says. "I realized I have a presence within me that makes a trivial matter of my particular body type. "People have said to me, 'Melissa, when you walk into a room, there is just something different about you.' That's because I have nourished my core." Van Cleave hopes to pass along what she has learned to other women by painting them. "I paint bodies that carry no shame. There is a sacredness inside women – a true essence, a true form – and I try to mirror that back to the people I paint." What is erotic to Van Cleave is glorying in all her senses. "It's being aware of life at all times," she says. Erotic means living life as fully as possible and taking nothing for granted, she says. It

is feeling exhilarated even when involved in the most mundane everyday activities. Van Cleave hosts periodic art shows/open houses in her residence. The last one attracted 150 people. If you want to know more about such things, you can e-mail Van Cleave at panacheftw@aol.com.

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