

# LAMPOON

CULTURE    REVIEW

## Linus Borgo's mermaids: transness, disability, and bodily differences



Linus Borgo delves into mythological themes, depicting creatures like mermaids and other part-human-animal figures. «*I absorbed Catholic imagery, Celestial beings are ingrained in me*»

Linus Borgo: Yossi Milo discovered the artist during an open studio day at Columbia

By Ana Tess | June 27, 2024

Linus Borgo was born in Connecticut but moved to London when he was three. His mother is Swedish, and his father is Italian American. At 18, he returned to the United States for undergraduate studies in Rhode Island. Afterward, he relocated to New York in 2018 and has lived there since.

He resides in Brooklyn, where his studio is also located, specifically in East Williamsburg. Previously, he had a studio in Harlem while attending Columbia for graduate school. He signed with Yossi Milo Gallery right after graduating from Columbia in 2022.

Yossi Milo discovered the artist during an open studio day at Columbia. Due to a rule that prevented students from signing with galleries while still enrolled, he waited until graduation to formalize the agreement. This partnership has been significant for him, marking a pivotal moment in his career.

### **Linus Borgo, the artist's career and influences**

Borgo has already participated in major art fairs such as the Armory in New York, the Untitled Art Fair in Miami, and the Dallas Art Fair. However, he finds himself more comfortable visiting large-scale art fairs than participating in them.

Other artists influenced Borgo's work from an artist's early age. At 15, Borgo saw a David Hockney show in London, followed by a Lucian Freud exhibition. Both experiences opened his mind to figurative painting. Freud's work was unlike any he had seen before, characterized by a unique and intense style. Hockney's exhibition focused on later works depicting trees and forests, showcasing the use of color and paint handling that was new to him.

*«My parents have been incredibly supportive of me throughout my career, emotionally and financially, in every way possible. I know many people whose parents aren't pleased when they choose to pursue art, but my parents have always believed in my art career. I'm very grateful for that—I wouldn't have been able to do it without them. They exposed me to much art history as a young child, taking me to many exhibitions and nurturing my passion for art».*

### **Maria Lassnig – the feeling of being in a body**

Maria Lassnig is another artist Borgo admires, particularly her ability to paint the feeling of being in a body. Lassnig's self-portraits are not based on observation but on her internal sensations, creating a distinct and impactful style. Louis Fratino, one of the greatest painters of the moment, stands for Queer figurative painting influence for Linus Borgo.

*«I do work for myself without a specific audience in mind, but I do notice who responds to it. Many young trans people identify with my work».* Mainly, trans men identify strongly with his art early in their transitions. *«I'm often afraid of disappointing people, especially because many have an emotional response to my work. I never want to let those people down. So I have to not think about it while doing it».*

Friends, many of whom are fellow artists, also form a vital part of Linus Borgo's influence network. The few paintings artists create of others often feature these close friends.

### **Linus Borgo describes his relationship with his body as an ongoing, lifelong process**

It's constantly changing and will continue to do so. His work, particularly self-portraits, helps him navigate and understand these changes. Borgo has struggled with body image issues throughout his life, even before any significant events like his accident or surgeries. *«Doing millions of self-portraits is a therapeutic way of accepting my body image. Sometimes, it feels in flux. I am inventing a body image painting myself on canvas because otherwise, it feels amorphous in my mind».*

It took the artist several years to process body-changing events through his art. Grad school marked a pivotal period when Borgo began solidifying his work's themes and direction. His work continually evolves, mirroring

the inevitable changes in the human body. Each self-portrait captures a moment, reflecting subtle shifts like weight fluctuations or the gentle passage of years. This constant evolution ensures that his art remains a living document of his journey, an intimate portrayal of the ever-shifting landscape of his body and identity.

### **Linus Borgo's next solo show is set for next year at Yossi Milo**

The artist's next solo show is set for next year at Yossi Milo. Borgo has been delving into his memories restoring the past decade following a life-altering accident. Through his work, Borgo aims to piece together these fragments, creating a visual narrative that helps him reconcile and understand his experiences, much like continuing the healing process from trauma.

*«I wasn't raised in any specific religion, but I absorbed Catholic imagery growing up because of my grandfather. He was an art historian specializing in Italian Renaissance works, so celestial beings are deeply ingrained in me».*

Linus Borgo also delves into mythological themes, depicting creatures like mermaids and other part-human, part-animal figures. These beings are potent metaphors for transness, disability, and bodily differences. The mermaid, in particular, captivates him as a symbol of disability. He often portrays mermaids in confined spaces, such as a bath, to evoke the feeling of being trapped—a poignant representation of the limitations imposed by society or circumstance.

In his new work, the artist shifts towards a more direct and honest representation of his memories. This change reflects his deepening understanding of his story and identity, bringing a new level of authenticity to his art.

### **Linus Borgo: Dystopian theories**

A significant theme in Borgo's work revolves around the early methods of synthesizing hormones for transitioning, where substances from farm animals were used. This led him to imagine a dystopian future where trans healthcare is banned, forcing a return to these primitive, DIY methods. His piece "Haruspex" explores this idea further. Named after ancient Roman priests who predicted the future by examining the entrails of animals, the painting delves into the intersection of surgery and mysticism.

Having undergone numerous surgeries himself, Borgo is fascinated by the idea that doctors have seen inside his body, an experience he has only undergone under anesthesia.

His other idea relates to an alternative career path he might've taken. Borgo pursued figure skating and ballet as a child, even considering a dance career. After an incident, his path as an artist was almost pre-determined, leaving ballet as a hobby.

During a break from college after his accident, while staying in London, Borgo discovered a love for silk painting at a local art school. This experience led him to create numerous hand-painted silk scarves, each a testament to his artistic versatility. *«I enjoy fashion and have recently been catching up on a crocheting hobby. Maybe a knitwear designer would've been my other imaginary path?»*



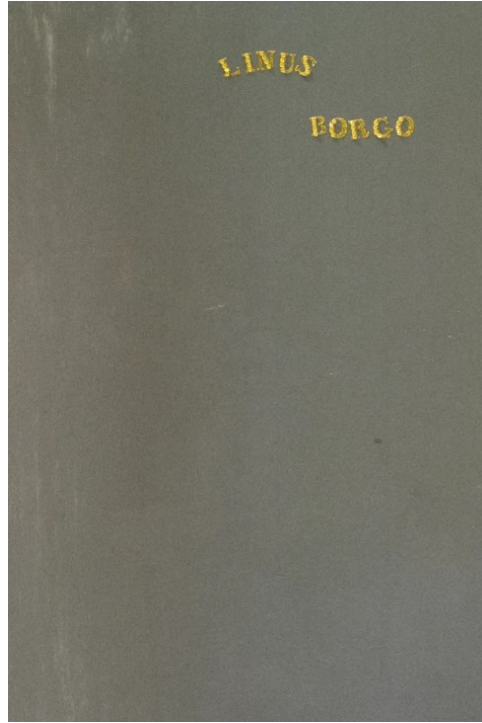
*Narcissus at the Halsey Street Oasis, 2023, Oil on Canvas, 82 x 103 IN. LNB. 23761*



*Linus Borgo, By Dayana Rivero*



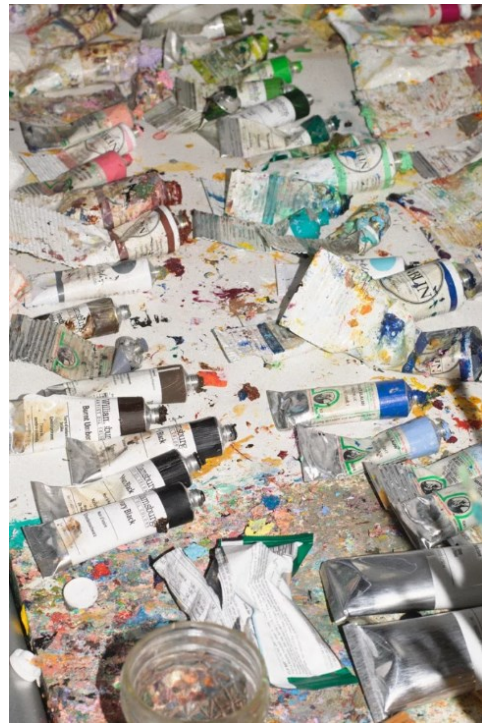
*Death is Like Taking Off a Tight Shoe*, 2023. Oil on Canvas. 84 x 63 inches



*Linus Borgo*



*Ooh Heaven is a Place on Earth*, 2022. 40 x 30 inches



Photography Dayana Rivero