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**F**or artists, the greatest challenge has always been to capture the soft curves or rippling muscle of flesh and form convincingly. During the Renaissance, breathing life onto canvases or cutting it into marble was considered almost magical. Now with so many artistic forms available, figurative art can be overshadowed.

Artist Kate Marshall revisits figurative art applying a new and unexpected twist. Mindful of the many ways in which women or types of women, are portrayed, she plays with the archetypes and stereotypes, re-examining them and their perpetual recurrence. Good Girls are softly plump; their elegant features in classical middle distance gaze drawn in paint on nostalgic pastel backgrounds. Their beauty equals female perfection, the runnels of paint Marshall allows evoke a sadness and a poignant reminder of all that remains hidden behind a perfect smile. Custard Venus is serene in Botticelli stillness; Parma Violet Pair confer closely like a couple of Jane Austen gossips. Only closer inspection shows the echo of the ice cream scoops of female flesh and the hopeful imaginings of male artists who always made their female sitters look like more than just friends.

Bad Girls are struggling with each other in their underwear, the distant cousins of the shocking Betty Page, their fantasy lipstick lesbianism as false as their staged battle, now such bland common currency it features in adverts for hair products. Marshall further comments on the sexualisation of the feminine with her Alice In Wonderland series. Alice can no longer be thought of without the dark inference of Lewis Carol's unwholesome attachment to her. Here her face is doll-like, her white rabbit a double entendre, a character from the story and a spectre of the Playboy bunny branded on the clothes of even prepubescent girls.

For her latest series Marshall takes figurines that only a grandma or a six-year-old girl would admire, transforming them in portrait form from something that would normally never be given house room into a desirable entity.

*Kate Marshall is one of five artists exhibiting a selection of original work at the Prime-Arts exhibition, December 3-4 at the Green Park Brasserie, Green Park Station, Bath. For further information and tickets for the private viewing, call 01225 707 500 or view online at [www.prime-arts.co.uk](http://www.prime-arts.co.uk). Kate Marshall is also exhibiting at the Eyestorm Gallery, Exeter Quay, 27 Commercial Road, Exeter until December 23, for further information see [www.katemarshall.co.uk](http://www.katemarshall.co.uk)*

**SARAH JANE DOWNING**

