

thought twice before installing female-nude portraits—one painted by a male artist, one anonymous—in her Philadelphia living room. Was she supporting the exploitation of women, promoting “the male

playing some not particularly provocative male-nude photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe in the bedroom. “If you’re squeamish and not proud to expose a piece, don’t buy it,” he advised. The photos hang in

Designer Todd Nicky, who sells art in his Los Angeles (and, soon, New York) shop, Nickey Kehoe, said of the relative absence of the human figure in décor: “An antidote will follow.” The return of exuberant

Mr. Wolf, too, champion nudes, male or female, is of setting. “I think it’s a beautiful form,” he said. born designer suggests

## FLOWER SCHOOL



THE ARRANGEMENT

## LOUNGE ACT

Floral designer **Lindsey Taylor** captures the tranquility—and simmering unease—in a painting by ‘Austria’s van Gogh’

ON A RECENT STICKY summer day, I treated myself to a trip to New York’s Neue Galerie, an elegant—and vigorously air-conditioned—jewel of a museum. I stumbled on an exhibit devoted to an artist unfamiliar to me, Richard Gerstl (1883-1908), considered by some to be Austria’s Vincent van Gogh. Until he took his life at 25, after a scandalous affair with the wife of composer Arnold Schoenberg, Gerstl painted prolifically in an expressionist style. While some of his self-portraits verge on disturbingly intense, his brush strokes loosened in his later work and he began painting en plein air. The resulting pieces seem to suggest that he saw beauty in the

world despite his anguish.

The inspiration for this month’s arrangement, Gerstl’s “Portrait of a Man” (1908), depicts a well-dressed figure in repose, his clenched face revealing a tension at odds with his languor and the cool, verdant setting. To translate this dynamic, I gathered heirloom flowers that felt loose and summery: pink and lavender sweet pea, purple baptisia, white scabiosa, periwinkle hydrangea and fresh green lady’s mantle. I let the flowers cascade over the vintage ceramic’s rim, taking on a horizontal shape, so the arrangement aped the man’s pose while the deep brown vase and black background convey some of the darkness seen in his anxious expression.



THE INSPIRATION

An array of cascading sweet pea, baptisia and scabiosa mimic the reclining figure in Richard Gerstl’s 1908 ‘Portrait of a Man.’

Ceramic Vessel, *artist’s own*

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