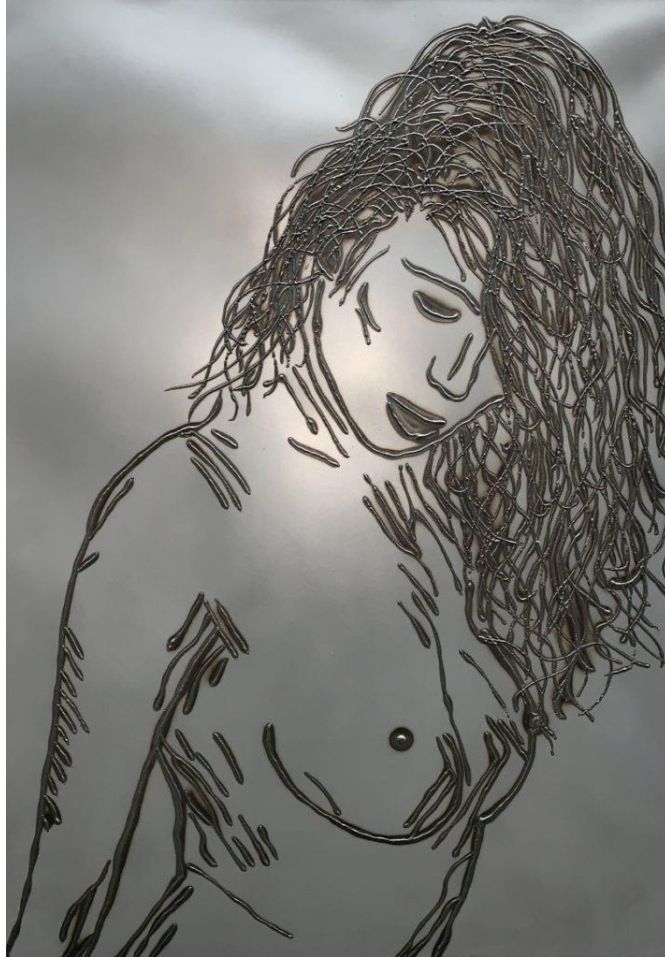


# **office**

**November 20, 2018**

## **Steel Nudes**

By: John Martin Tilley



*Nick Moss, Poised (2018). Courtesy of Leila Heller Gallery.*

I met Nick Moss on a flawless fall day: the leaves seemed to change before our very eyes, the impossibly abundant trees that surrounded his ridiculously chic house atop a hill in upstate New York rolled out into the distance in shades of yellow, red and orange like a Bob Ross landscape—a classic panorama that felt exactly like the delicious slice of Americana that it was.

The setting seems apt for the welder-cum-entrepreneur-cum-artist: he is a handsome, unassuming man from Michigan enamored with steel as a material and its unexplored artistic possibilities. It's a material that is difficult to master and control and whose associations are mechanical and somewhat ferocious—it recalls precision, man's dominance over nature and the dawn of modern weaponry, but also of post-Industrial America, the Midwest and high school shop class. Vast sheets of shimmering gray steel serve as Moss's

canvases, where he has chosen to tackle both the oldest and newest of artistic tropes: the emoji and the female nude.

At his new solo show, *Rigorous Perception* at the Leila Heller Gallery in Chelsea, other pieces are entirely abstract, where swirling vortexes of marbled color are formed through different patinas applied to the steel's surface. The show is like the bookends of art history: on one end, the classically figurative; on the other, the abstract, unified by their rendering in this most permanent of mediums.

The nudes are drawn with a welding tool, normally used to fuse metals together and which leaves a melted scar in the process. Here the scars form female figures, the fusion that of image to surface, these simple drawings rendered in a level of permanence reminiscent of ancient monuments built to last the ages. These nudes are like goddesses of yore caught in a myth for the future—one can't help but picture them in a very distant time, a leftover of our species as evidence that we existed, once.

In order to accomplish these pictures, the artist explained with boyish enthusiasm to the small gaggle of New York art press gathered in his studio—an outbuilding that was part welder's garage, part man cave-turned-artist's lounge (with a sparkling new motorcycle displayed with sculptural flair as centerpiece)—he has to weld the steel canvas to the table itself. After offering to separate the picture from the table several times, it became clear that he was itching to do so. We all stood at a safe distance as he popped on his welding helmet and ignited the welder, making short order of his work: the picture lifted off the table because it had become warped—getting it flat again is a whole other process.

After he led us to the house, a breathtaking lodge decorated to magazine perfection in mid-century modern pieces in homey shades of ecru and brown, where his beguiling girlfriend (who served as a model for some of Moss's figures, and it wasn't hard to see why) served shrimp and grits as discussions proliferated about the artist's earlier work—those larger-than-life iPhone emojis rendered in, of course, steel—and what the aliens that discover them will think of our era. The answer? Who knows.

