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Review

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Tribune Art Critic

Arthur Lerner's show of new drawings at Printworks is called "Velazquez and Friends," which trickily describes what visitors are in for. It first suggests other artists and their colleagues, which is true enough—insofar as Lerner has borrowed people and poses from Caravaggio to Velazquez to Manet. But the "friends" who are cast in parts from earlier paintings are Lerner's own, including his wife, daughter and even one of the partners in the gallery.

The large sanguine drawings are, then, portraits of Lerner's contemporaries, whom he gives the roles of, say, a philosopher/beggar or girl with a pearl earring. He gives himself such roles, as well, and they range from some of the dwarfs in the court of Philip IV of Spain to Holofernes, the Assyrian general in the Old Testament whom the maid Judith decapitates.

This kind of artistic play has a long history. Michelangelo, for example, was thought to paint his own likeness as the beheaded Holofernes in a pendantive in the Sistine Chapel. But in Lerner's case, there is perhaps some joking and affectionate symbolic play as well. In any event, his artistic forebears have suggested a kind of contest, and Lerner has met them—triumphantly—on their own ground. The exhibition also includes a couple of self portraits in which Lerner is simply a contemporary artist. One called "Fableman" most touchingly shows him as a rumpled guardian of legends and myths in the age of the computer.

At 311 W. Superior St., 312-664-9407.