

WEEKEND LIFE

GET ALL GEARED UP FOR WINTER
The right equipment does matter **G19**



BIG SPACE, BIG PLATES
La Viena opens in new spot **G17**



The women in the Drawn to Men art party sketch a portrait of their subject, a model who went by the name Jake. PHOTOS: JODI ROBBINS/CALGARY HERALD

SPICING UP THE STAGETTE

Party-goers drawn to sketching nudes and socializing with gals



Women in the Drawn to Men class get a lesson for an hour-and-a-half, during which they learn six different techniques for figure drawing.



The model poses with the artists and their finished works.

JODY ROBBINS
FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

On a recent Saturday afternoon in Kensington, a dozen women troop into a formal living room. They are greeted with flutes of champagne, an array of pencils, pastels and charcoal, plus drawing boards lined with artist paper. It's all a bit confusing, but surprises are to be expected at any bachelorette party.

The art supplies suggest an enlightening cultural activity is about to take place, but then "Jake" struts in, wearing nothing but tight underpants.

Jake (that's his stage name, by the way) is a model, not a stripper, but that doesn't stop the ladies from erupting with hoots and jeers that would make any Chippendale dancer blush.

"Welcome to Drawn to Men," says owner and host Nicole Kern. "At our parties, we don't draw landscapes or boring bowls of fruit. We draw hot guys!"

Capitalizing on the trend of paint and sip entertainment, Drawn to Men is the latest art activity sweeping across Western Canada. Initiated by Kern, while looking for a unique bachelorette activity, Drawn to Men has morphed into a raunchy, yet refined art party enjoyed by the likes of the Real Housewives of Vancouver.

"It's a fun way to explore your creative side with your friends," says Jamie Nordhagen, who organized the Kensington party for her sister's stagette.

"My sister really likes art and I stumbled across this online. I

thought it was too good to be true."

Each session is led by a professional art instructor, who works from specific lesson plans that encourage guests to explore their creative side.

The lesson lasts for about 90 minutes, during which you'll learn six different techniques for figure drawing.

Nordhagen and her crew went for the Package Delivery option, where the model and art instructor come to you at a private location.

Those who think being surrounded by works of art might spur on the creative process should opt for the Gallery Experience at Art Point in Calgary's Ramsay neighbourhood or The Art Way in Vancouver.

Instructor Maraya Loza-Koxahn gets the class going with a quick charcoal gesture drawing.

"The purpose of this exercise isn't to capture the essence of Jake," she reassures her nervous pupils.

"We just want to capture his bod!" She knows most attendees haven't had formal art training and her role is to set the mood, while providing instruction. Whatever fledgling artists draw up to them.

Liquid courage loosens the ladies up and gets their creative juices flowing as fast as the champagne is poured. Not that these ladies need any encouragement. "Is this your first time Jake?" they tease. "Quit only drawing his penis!" another chides her friend.

At Drawn to Men, there are no rules. Brides-to-be put their muse into his first poses (or contortions as the case may be), which allows for some, how shall we say, inter-

esting renderings? But the class isn't solely focused around the beefcake. Ladies also pair up and draw portraits of one another. Should you have odd numbers, one lucky gal gets paired up with the model and keeps his rendering as a memento. Despite their chiselled features, most models aren't blessed with enhanced artistic ability. Still, the ladies fawn appreciatively over Jake's efforts.

The nouveau art class isn't just for bachelorette parties. Any female occasion from birthdays to book club can be spiced up with the flirtatious, quasi-cultural experience. "It's about experimenting and doing something unique with your girlfriends. There's a lot of focus on play-based learning with kids nowadays, but we don't do that as adults. Yet we learn the most when we're able to experiment," says Kern.

Putting pen to paper can be intimidating for some, but the event is more about creating and having a good time than becoming the next Michelangelo. Besides leaving with your drawings, guest take home a shared bonding experience. "It was kind of awkward at first," admits Nordhagen. "We didn't know what to expect, but everyone thought it was really unique and couldn't stop talking about it afterwards. Plus, we all ended up with some pretty cool art work."

More info on Drawn to Men is available at drawntomen.com. Jody Robbins is a Calgary-based freelance lifestyles writer and blogger. Follow her adventures on TravelswithBaggage.com or on Twitter @Jody_Robbins.