

## In the galleries: Exploring how body language is a visual form of communication

By Mark Jenkins

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They're faceless black silhouettes, but the figures in Linda Behar's prints are clearly women. Their gender is underscored by their backdrops: single-colored doilies whose crochet-like patterns invoke traditionally feminine crafts. Yet there's something unusual about some of the body language in "I Am Woman," and that's central to Behar's Washington Printmakers Gallery show. The Venezuela-bred artist is interested in the different ways women and men are expected to sit, stand and move.

One of Behar's inspirations is a 1940 U.S. study of women's bodies, but she also draws on more recent data. She uses video game software to pose the bodies in her pictures, and sometimes selects male stances for female figures. That explains the assertive bearing of the women in the "Sitting" series, in which the doilies become chairs, perhaps in an executive suite. Other series turn the settings into various props: In a playful "Waiting," a woman leans on the backdrop, deforming the pattern with the weight of her body; in "Flying," the most recent series, the lacy circles become wings to soar after spending the pandemic year in the coop. Another series, "Amigas," places groups of women in front of Celtic-style infinite-knot designs, intricate if less stereotypically womanly.

Behar's prints, each of which juxtaposes the black silhouettes with one other color, are printed traditionally. Yet the images are computer-generated, which allows high-tech options. Three portrayals of women who dance with and around rounded red shapes are equipped with QR codes that summon video of the figures in motion. The artist likes working with a computer because it gives her full command of the process, she told a recent visitor to her show. But the animated dancers' movements suggest that Behar wants her silhouetted archetypes to pirouette away from her, and society's, control.

***Linda Behar: I Am Woman Through June 27 at Washington Printmakers Gallery, 1641 Wisconsin Ave. NW.***