

PETER PAUL RUBENS was a great Flemish painter of the 17th Century. He liked plump women. He liked to paint them and he liked to hang out with them, for they were the standard of beauty in his day. What you might call the Peter Paul Mounds—his models' soft, round curves—were in those days thought by all to be indescribably delicious.

Rubens' models were heftier than most of the women you find in our pages, but just as lovely if you widen your perspective a little. In these days of supermodels on whose hipbones you could shave (some of our acquaintances have tried), we thought it would be an invigorating change of pace to present seven modern Rubensian ladies we found both refreshing and, yes, sexy.

We wondered if locating beautiful middleweights might be as difficult as signing a worthy opponent for Marvelous Marvin Hagler, but the matchmaking was simpler than that. Unbeknownst to us, a breadth-taking new industry was springing up even as we considered shooting this pictorial, one devoted to putting full-figured girls in the spotlight. These young women are some of the best that new industry has to offer. We found them through agencies that place "larger models" in commercials, catalogs, newspapers and billboards, but they're not exactly used to nude modeling. That doesn't seem a very weighty matter to them, though. Kelle Kerr, who holds a degree in speech and drama from North Texas State University, echoes the rest in her pride in the work she did with us. "I wanted to work with Palma [photographer Palma Kolansky]," she says, "and I think the idea behind the pictorial is very good. The pictorial itself is tasteful. It's beautiful." And if ever there were a PLAYBOY pictorial that drew its inspiration directly from the work of great artists in great art museums, this is it.

Glancing over the newsstands and into the tube, one could think that modeling is a narrow space women can enter only sideways, that only the skinniest of the skinny ever get in. But the past few years have brought a boomlet in business for models of a larger scale. It has a great deal to do with identification—many women consumers have trouble connecting with the ultralean models they see so often in *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*. They're more comfortable patterning their buying on women closer to their own size, as long as those women are pretty enough.

"Bigger models work a lot," says Mary Duffy of New York's Big Beauties agency, which represents Maureen Roberts and Debbie Laster. "You'll see them in the large sizes of clothing in catalogs, in print ads and in live fashion shows for department stores. This is only a seven-year-old industry, and for a while, people said it might not last, but it's here to stay."

If so, we had better get used to seeing a more Rubensian look in our media. Duffy thinks that's a good thing, especially for the photographers. She believes most of today's high-fashion models pay too high a price to be thin.

"Twelve hundred calories a day just aren't enough," she explains, making excellent sense. "If you go through life and never have an ice-cream cone, your disposition is not going to be very good." Many of New York's top fashion photographers have told her how difficult it can be to work with thin and edgy models. "They tell me they *love* working with the bigger girls. Well, of course! They're not starving themselves all the time. A lot of people will look at them and say,



In our opening spread, you saw Valerie Rehling, Rubensian pride and joy of Santa Barbara City College. Just 19, Valerie is partial to "shiny cars, the beaches at sunset" and—get this, starving models—"mint-chip ice cream." On the facing page is Santa Monica's Conni Peach, who asked what kind of men she likes, says she likes them male. Above: Inger Lønmo, who recently subtracted from her perfect 39-27-39 by losing 30

'My God, those girls must be eating all kinds of junk food. The difference is that we'll have salads *with* the dressing. But my girls do not eat junk food. They have to have good nutrition," Duffy says.

Things were not always thus. From the prehistoric art made the Venus of Willendorf nearly round to a contemporary skiing acquaintance of ours who measures his vacation quests in tonnage, there have always been men who like women to have a little heft from right to left. But the supply and demand makes rare things valuable; in earlier times there were few plump women and many thin ones. Nutrition, good or bad—was the business of only the feds, and there were many more unfeds. Today, so many people can afford to be thin that it's "in" to be thin; but in the days before Twinkies, when Rubens was working, the fashionable shoe was on the other foot. All the best models were plump. Thinness signified hunger in fashion, and the best measure of beauty was probably the weight. But there's no compelling reason all models have to come from the same mold, as though the idea were to save wax. It's easier to see full figures squeezing into the picture again.

Now that the youth and feminist movements, the Black Panthers and the Silent and/or Moral Majorities have had their day in the spotlight, even popular politics is turning toward weightier things. A relatively new group called the National Association to Aid Fat Americans has taken on what it considers our cultural bias toward thin and has received heavy media coverage for its efforts. Founded in 1969 and burgeoning ever since, the N.A.A.F.A. dedicates itself to fighting "fat oppression."

"Fat can be beautiful" and "Fat can be fit" are two of the N.A.A.F.A.'s slogans. "Plump can be pleasing" would be a fitting motto for this PLAYBOY feature, but the N.A.A.F.A. is not interested in drawing arbitrary lines when it comes to beauty, what it sees as an arbitrary standard of beauty. It's interested in blowing that standard to smithereens, in making us believe that extreme fat can be not only beautiful but *sexy*. A 300-pound female spokesperson, being stared at by a roomful of "fat admirers"—was quoted as saying, "I kinda like being a fat symbol!" Her organization has yet to put out a line of products, but don't worry about our nation's forests, but many heavy people do believe we're entering an age in which beauty will come in many shapes and sizes. There's already an excellent independent and-lifestyle magazine for "the abundant woman" called *Big Beautiful Woman*. Can extra-wide centerfolds be far behind?

As the people who gave the world its first close look at lithe sex symbols as Marilyn Monroe, Victoria Principessa, Bo Derek, we're not sure we're ready to join the N.A.A.F.A. in the realm of superheavyweight sex symbolism. We are, however, to open the door to some of the loveliest, most beautiful models.

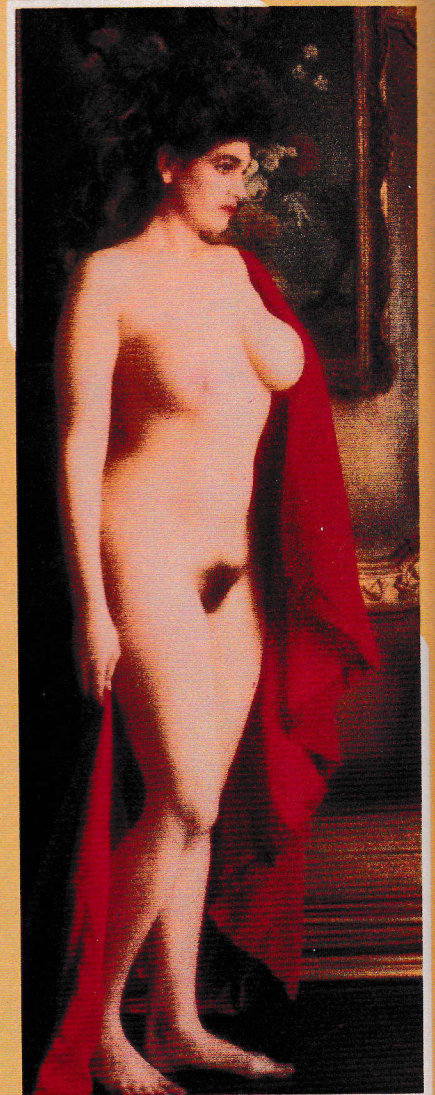
Duffy doesn't hesitate to speak up for her current models, charging no extra charges: "They're really the same as any other models. They go through the same trials. They have to do without their grooming, their make-up, their skin care. The women are all gorgeous, and our readers are going to see them."

So feast your eyes, and remember that even Venus, the goddess of love, was portrayed at Milo, at least—as a fat girl on the chunky side. But she was no less disarming for that.





Maureen Roberts (left and below left) and Debbie Laster (below) come from BB—the Big Beauties agency—and they definitely qualify on both fronts. Maureen has a full-scale 40-inch bust and a waist of only 29. She's been described as a Rubens painting come to life, only prettier. Debbie, at 5'8", is among the shortest of our well-rounded ladies, but she's got perfect 40-30-40 measurements. Yesterday's painters and today's photographers would probably call her pretty as a picture.



Jody Myles (right) of Plus Models Management, Ltd., makes a fine addition to any modeling session. She attended Manhattan's Fashion Institute of Technology, which may explain how she managed to engineer the perfect pose in what even we will admit is the least likely outfit of the month. There's plenty of advertising work for larger models these days, particularly in catalogs; this one might be from the "Shawls R Us" catalog. At 26, Jody's ready to move on now to even bigger and better things.





This page belongs to Plus Models' Kelle Kerr, whose now-wholesome, now-sultry face has personified the Macy Woman for that most celebrated of department stores. A member of the Screen Actors Guild, Kelle's both a model and an up-and-coming actress. You may have noticed that we haven't said how much a single one of these ladies *weighs*, but we'll offer a barometer now—to set the betting line. Kelle makes no bones about it—she weighs 150 pounds, and every one makes a good impression.