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# Style

## Tea and Strumpets

Performance art meets realism at a mansion in Malibu.

By Amy M. Spindler

Paintings by Delia Brown

Styled by Elizabeth Stewart

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hat's the modern-day equivalent of Mary Cassatt's Impressionist tea parties of cakes and chiffon? A Realist Champagne bacchanalia of Lee press-on nails and Doritos, perhaps? Inspired in part by the exclusionary gleam and faux intimacy of fashion shoots, as well as by Cassatt's scenes of social life, Delia Brown has been staging parties, inventing invitees and photographing them, then exquisitely painting the hedonistic results. Of course, *she* is always invited and *In the Scene*, one step beyond the 80's artists who used their celebrity to get *On the List*. In the group show for her graduate degree, she even created her own V.I.P. room with a Champagne party of hired actors cavorting behind velvet ropes while the cheap white-wine masses were kept at bay.

One of the people invited to the group show, but not to Brown's party inside, was Chris D'Amelio, a co-owner of D'Amelio Terras, a gallery on West 22nd Street. "We left troubled," D'Amelio says. "Is it the greatest thing we saw or just an attempt to get attention?"

The show managed to be both: Brown's first one-woman show, "What! Are You Jealous?" opens at D'Amelio Terras on Oct. 7.

Brown admits that by showing the process of her work she is making it more accessible. "But I couldn't

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**Champagne Wishes** From left: Shorts, \$40. From D&G Dolce & Gabbana, 434 West Broadway. Silk blouse, \$448, and skirt, \$804, by Alberta Ferretti. At Lulu Brandt, Pasadena, Calif. Silk dress, \$5,780. At Christian Dior, 21 East 57th Street. Chiffon dress, \$472. At Betsey Johnson stores. Jewelry, R.J. Graziano. Tea set and glasses from Gump's. Champagne: Moët & Chandon.











**Delia in the Middle** From left: Silk pants, \$1,610. At Valentino, 747 Madison Avenue. Shoes: DKNY. Fur shawl (around Brown), \$641. At Moschino, 803 Madison Avenue. Lace gown, \$4,360, by Christina Perrin. At Avalon, Woodbury, N.Y. Opposite page, from left: Faux fur top, \$900, by Anand Jon. At Bergdorf Goodman. Pants, \$388, by Romeo Gigli. Shoes: Manolo Blahnik. Leather jacket, \$3,800, and pants, \$2,290, by Tom Ford for Gucci. At Gucci, 685 Fifth Avenue. Sunglasses: Paul Smith. Silk coat, \$9,000, by Anand Jon. At Henri Bendel. Leather pants, \$560, by Vivienne Tam. At Saks Fifth Avenue. Mules: Sergio Rossi. Sunglasses: Oliver Peoples. Champagne flutes from Gump's.









**Rest Stop** From left: Beaded pants, \$2,360, by Jean-Paul Gaultier. At Maxfield, Los Angeles. Chiffon dress with attached pants, \$4,980, from Chanel. At Bergdorf Goodman. Shoes: Stuart Weitzman. Polo shirt, \$240, by D&G Dolce & Gabbana. At Bloomingdale's. Leather pants, \$624, from Costume National. At Barneys New York. Shoes: Helmut Lang. Shoes (foreground): Dolce & Gabbana. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Bra, \$36, and tap pants, \$46, by DK Donna Karan Intimates. At Neiman Marcus. Mules: Sergio Rossi. Chiffon dress, \$1,503. At Dolce & Gabbana, 825 Madison Avenue. Necklace: DKNY. Silk dress, price upon request. At Gianni Versace Boutiques worldwide.











# Footnotes Resources, references and the back story behind the story.

Continued from Page 50 make the party accessible," she says with a giggle. "It's exclusive!"

The resulting images, she says, are utterly fake, "luxurious and exclusive but constructed for the moment. I'm not interested in 'what's the truth of this moment.' I'm interested in why some people have access to this experience and others not."

The title of her new show is from a Gauguin painting ("Aha oe feii?") in which two Tahitian women loll naked by a pool of water. She has done a series of women lolling naked in the pools of Los Angeles, where she lives. The show will also include the paintings seen here, staged with models in a Malibu mansion.

Brown's first party series was imagined, inspired by a fashion spread of bathing suits called "Pool Sharks." "I thought, This is the sexiest thing I've ever seen — I want to be at this party." So she invited herself with paints, dressed up in a bra, panties, stilettos, sunglasses and a Betsey Johnson leopard coat. On the wall above the orgy about to take place hung an "18th-century" portrait of herself in the style of her earlier, more academic work.

For that early work, she rented costumes and painted herself with a cat to symbolize self-possession and independence, a twist on the old practice of including a dog, the symbol of fidelity and possession by a husband, in a portrait.

When she puts herself in the picture, Brown says, she is not what's important — what's important is her relationship to the cultural signifiers. Those have included a Versace rug, Pringles, Startec phones, dead Moët & Chandon bottles, Manolo Blahniks, Fogal fishnets and Tab, all pointing to who she was: a former rapper from Venice Beach, Calif. Like rap, Brown's paintings are obsessed with the splashy trappings of wealth: a mansion, designer clothes, jewels. The idea of serving Champagne with Cheetos came from a DJ Quik song.

Like the portraits that first inspired her, Brown's work, D'Amelio says, celebrates the success achieved by its subjects, conveyed through the interiors and the fashion. "It's this thing you can't describe," he adds. "The fabulousness that is our culture at this time." ■

**Pillow Talk** From left: Silk top, \$88, and jeans, \$118, by Kenneth Cole. (800) 536-2653. Jersey top and skirt, \$1,000, by Sully Bonnelly. At the Farmer's Daughter, 1001 First Avenue. T-shirt, \$160, and shorts, \$40, by D&G Dolce & Gabbana. Silk blouse, \$205, and pants, \$305. At Cynthia Rowley stores. Hair: Alex Dizon for Artists by Timothy Priano. Makeup: Lori Jean Swanson for Cloutier. Manicures: Lisa Jachno for Cloutier/L'Oréal. Assistant: George Kotsiopoulos. Models: Staci Harrison, Timothy John, Ramona Gaddis, Scott MacDonough and Lyn Diaz.



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1b.



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**1.** More than just paintings, Delia Brown's artwork is a modern happening. After setting up a scene, she has it photographed paparazzi-style and then renders the glamorous sequence of events in watercolors. Neither brush nor camera shy, Brown always includes herself in the picture — a task made infinitely easier with Nikon's new Coolpix 990 digital camera with remote self-timer. (\$999.95 at Alkit Pro Camera). Satisfying the same itch is Givenchy's new Miroir lipstick, with a mirror embedded in the tube. (\$21 at Sephora.)  
**2.** Never one to be prim, Brown staged her decadent tea party in a setting fit for a king — or a movie mogul. Chateau du Coeur in

Paradise Cove, Malibu, can be rented for \$2,500 a day, complete with a waterfall in the pool. The "model-guests" lounged poolside sipping Champagne donated by Moët & Chandon and nibbling on Cheetos and Doritos. (DKNY's Ultra Violet boots, \$375, are seen here worn by our hostess.) Although excess was one of Brown's themes, no chariots awaited her guests at party's end, just a regulation van.

**3.** Since antiquity, art has been a mirror for the ebb and flow of fashion trends. Just as Brown's party scenes seem to draw on Dionysius and Narcissus for inspiration, the ancients drew on the gods of fashion. On this pyxis, for example, the drape and details of an ancient "tea" gown are as carefully drawn as a Christian Dior ruffle in one of Brown's paintings.

**4.** An alternative to Brown's worldly tea is the traditional Japanese tea ceremony taught at the Urasenke Chanoyu Center in Manhattan. Rooted in Zen Buddhism, Chado, or the Way of Tea, reflects a minimalist aesthetic. The school teaches its students not only how to prepare the special powdered green tea that is the basis of Chado but also how to bow, walk and, most important, create a spiritual connection between guest and host. "It is impolite to bring the outside into the tea room," explains Hisashi Yamada, the school's executive director. "Usually there is freedom to talk. But the greater freedom is not to talk." The next open house is Oct. 18 at 5:30 p.m.

**5.** Brown's revelers could not possibly have achieved a Zen frame of mind knowing that they were dangling gold-rimmed cups and saucers worth \$1,520. Commissioned by a Prussian duke in 1790, the tea set (available at Gump's) is the work of Königliche Porzellan Manufaktur, a company founded by Frederick the Great.

**6.** Talonlike nails applied by Lisa Jachno didn't help the precarious handling of the pricey dishes. Although Jachno is manicurist to the likes of Madonna and Jennifer Lopez, this look can be achieved with Lee press-on nails and a coat of L'Oréal Wear Extraordinaire in Key Lime.

**7.** What did our revelers talk about? Alas, it wasn't Dorothea Tanning, whose book of paintings was artfully strewn on the floor between the Champagne empties and the Dolce heels. Tanning, who was married to Max Ernst, just happens to be one of Brown's favorite painters. "I like the way she uses her dog," Brown says. "It is a very sensual use of pets." But unlike those other fashion pets — Tamara de Lempicka comes to mind — Tanning is not terribly chic. Which is probably why Brown likes her. "I don't hear anyone talk about her," she says. "I snuck her in hoping someone would notice and say, 'Who is she again?'"  
 — Text by Joyce Chang