



THE NEXTBIGTHING

talent pool

Painter Delia Brown's deceptively superficial photorealist work could have been produced by Darren Star. But the Porsche-driving, logoizing, tits-and-grass, Heather Locklear So-Cal lifestyle she depicts has a way of making some viewers want to move to Amish country.

Photograph by Taryn Simon







LAST SPRING, PAINTER DELIA Brown invited a half-dozen high-style friends to UCLA's New Wight gallery for her senior show. Guests lounged on rococo furniture, swigging bubbly and cutting lines of cocaine in front of her paintings as the Chardonnay crowd gawked from behind a velvet rope.

Though the friends were hired extras and the coke was confectionary sugar, the word-of-mouth was authentic: "Suite Life" earned the 30-year-old provocateuse gallery shows on both coasts. "Delia was pushing buttons, acting like the bad girl of the academy," says Chris D'Amelio of the New York gallery D'Amelio Terras. This fall, Brown will open at Margot Leavin in Los Angeles.

Looking at Brown's delicious dioramas, it's hard to tell whether she's enchanted or repelled by the lives she depicts. "I don't think she intends to be judgmental," says D'Amelio. "She definitely appreciates people having fun, but she also captures the emptiness and the boredom of it all."

Brown once painted cats—as part of an effort to explore "cuteness" in art. There are cats in every corner of her apartment. A stuffed Hello Kitty is perched on the bathroom shelf, and a series of small oil painting of kittens frolic on the living-room wall. But her three years in UCLA's grad-



scrubs for long. Brown borrowed the title from an 1892 Gauguin painting, *Aha oe feii?* (Tahitian for "What, have you got a grudge against me?") Her twenty watercolors—best described as ghetto-fabulous high-fives Hugh Hefner—sold out, although reviews were mixed. While some critics called it expert and well crafted, others winced at the sheer vulgarity. Michael

BROWN'S POOLSCAPES ARE CHLORINATED WITH PRIVILEGE: VERSACE CLOTHES AND NOKIA PHONES LIE ABOUT LIKE THE AFTERMATH OF A HILTON-SISTERS SLEEPOVER.

uate art program was all it took for those cuddly kittens to blossom into bosomy glamourpusses. "I was flipping through some magazine and I saw this Mario Testino spread, *Pool Sharks*," Brown says. "All these gorgeous people were lounging around in bathing suits and chunky gold jewelry. I was like, *Wow!*"

Brown tore up the fashion glossies as she created poolscapes chlorinated with privilege. She scouted locations, chose the clothes, and cast models (including herself) to portray the beautifully bronzed as they partied with the So-Cal sun shimmering in the sky. Versace gowns, Nokia phones, and bags of Doritos were strewn about like the aftermath of a Hilton-sisters sleepover. Brown painted from photographs taken of the set.

Today in L.A., wearing a baby T with MONTREAUX printed on it, Brown's showing off her photo-surrealistic paintings. Auburn hair is pulled back to reveal a high-gloss complexion and Bambi-brown eyes. At the University of Santa Cruz, she says, she switched from anthropology to art because she could draw

better than most of the art majors.

A Venice Beach kid with parents who worked in public health, Brown was kept far from the madding label-worshippers. "In elementary school, when everyone was wearing Jordache jeans, I was wearing Jordair because my parents shopped at Sears and Penney's," she says with an embarrassed giggle. Instead of loitering at malls, she attended workers'-rights demonstrations.

Before she committed herself to a life of stretching canvases in "grubby old paint clothes," Brown dreamed of a glamorous life in hip-hop. Her partner in rhyme was a fellow sales assistant at a Betsey Johnson boutique. They were the Fuzz, but "people used to call us Salt-N-Pepa" she says, rolling her eyes. Though they did open for Wu-Tang Clan once, they never recorded more than a demo. Brown was off to UCLA's prestigious graduate program, which counts the logotristic Barbara Kruger among its faculty.

Her debut show in New York last fall, "What, Are You Jealous?" guaranteed she would not be stuck in studio

Kimmelman of the *New York Times* has referred to her shows as "instantly forgettable pseudo-events," her subject matter, strictly "fad."

But the same week as her opening, she scored a coup with her own illustrated fashion feature in the *New York Times Magazine*, set in a Malibu mansion. Brown was a model: "I wore an aquamarine Versace dress that Elizabeth Hurley had worn. Somehow my chest didn't look the same in it."

"Her work is seductive," says David Frankel, an *Artforum* contributor and the head of the Museum of Modern Art's publications department. "Delia is part of a school of artists who make the viewer feel guilty about being attracted to their work. In the eighties, David Salle did it with extremely decorative pop-culture pieces."

Actually, painters have been depicting the luxe life—and all its flash trappings—since the Medicis. One of Brown's biggest influences is John Singer Sargent, the portraitist who immortalized the late-nineteenth-century's own *crema di eleganza*. Says Brown: "I can get down with Sargent." —Maura Egan

Déjeuner Sur L'Herbe looks even more raunchy with a Beverly Hills backdrop (previous page). *What, Are You Jealous?* (above center) captures the diamond girls who love their Dom Pérignon. *Untitled Genre Scene* (above right) is Hogarth via the Pacific Coast Highway.