



DELIA BROWN

DELIA BROWN PAINTS FANTASIES. HER WORK FEATURES THE YOUNG, THE RICH AND THE BEAUTIFUL IN LA-LA LAND, BUT SHE KNOWS THERE'S MORE TO LIFE THAN THIS



Perhaps the only thing worse than a psyche-scarring, cringe-inducing, repression-deserving moment is inadvertently causing one for someone else. For example, staggering from the bedroom to the bathroom in the early morning and accidentally catching your housemate enjoying a little pre-temp-job *Hunky Dory* from Bowie with his eyes shut, arms stretched wide, lip-synching to the invisible masses like he's the Thin White Duke himself and all of England is feeling him so much that he can make the straightest 18 year-old lad want to take it up the rear. And as you get over the shock and think you are about to make it to the toilet undetected, his eyes pop open and he knows that you know and there is a moment so awkward that even the phrase "How's it going?" seems loaded. Then you feel like shit because you've uncovered someone else's fantasy, and the idea of someone else doing that to you would be just horrible.

And by fantasy that doesn't mean hippity-hopping through the enchanted forest amongst the ogres and wild boars or getting lick-lick-licked from your head to your toe. It means the life you could have lived if God had blessed you with different (and oh let's just say it... better) talents, parents and physical traits.

It is these fantasy lives, specifically her own, that 32 year-old artist Delia Brown examines in her art with a sense of both awe and embarrassment. Brown sets up scenes with elaborate use of casting (often including herself in a featured role), props, wardrobe and art direction to make them a reality. The staged situations are photographed and then reproduced by Brown in watercolor paintings or drawings.

Of course without the backstory or theory, many people incorrectly assume that Brown's work simply chronicles the opulent lifestyle she leads. She reveals that even her mom was none too happy when she saw Brown's show *What, Are You Jealous?*, which is all about luxurious lethargy. "[She] flipped out when she saw my last work of people sitting around partying. She was like, 'Oh these are the people you are hanging out with?' My own mother didn't recognize if it was fictional or not." Brown clarifies that although many characterize her art as typifying Los Angeles, it is not her Los Angeles: "I moved to LA when I was nine and I don't think when growing

up any friend of mine had a swimming pool in their backyard. So even when people think I was depicting an LA lifestyle it wasn't the lifestyle I experienced firsthand."

While her past two major projects *Suite Life* and *What, Are Your Jealous?* explored what it is like to be young, rich and beautiful, her new series *No Place Like Home* focuses on a relationship between an older mother and her grown daughter depicted around the house, in the garden, and (of course) by the pool. This being Delia Brown, there is more going on than the obvious. Brown plays the role of the daughter and the role of the mother is played by Margo Leavin, the co-owner of the gallery in LA that represents her.

Brown explains that it is another fantasy reality of hers, not a lack of a positive family life, that motivated her to explore this subject. "I actually got kicked out of my junior high and ended up going to a school in a more upper-class neighborhood for awhile. This friend of mine, her mother seemed so ultra-cool to me. And she was a single mom and she had blonde hair and she always had lipstick on and she smoked cigarettes. When I first saw Margo, she kind of reminded me of that woman, so I made up this fantasy that she could be like that mother to me that I never had when I was 14 that I wanted. In a sense, though it looks like it's all about domesticity, it's actually about glamour and desire for something that has to do with lifestyle and cultural and social environment," she says.

The shift of subject matter from the life of leisure to familial relationship seems appropriate considering the recent economic downturn and the renewed importance many are placing on interpersonal connections. Brown, however, says that this is not what prompted her to do the series. "My work is not about 'What is the public ready to see right now?' That's not as relevant to me as the question of 'What kind of desires am I interested in working through?'"

Then what issues is Brown trying to work through with her explorations of fantasy? "[It] always involves something that is contradictory, like a compulsion and repulsion of the object of desire. So with the decadence thing, I was making myself sick in a sense. It wasn't like, 'Give the people what they want' it was like 'Give me what I want until I'm so sick I don't want it anymore.'"

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