

Delia Brown

Delia Brown's work is concerned with artifice. Through the agency of her drawings, watercolors, paintings, and her recent video *Pastorale*, 2002, Brown creates what might be thought of as "plausible fictions." Central to these fictive scenarios is the presence of the artist herself: acting the spurned lover or bored Hollywood rich kid, or pretending to be the daughter of her real-life Los Angeles dealer Margo Leavin. Like Cindy Sherman, who reimagined herself as the star of a succession of 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s B movies, or Kerri Scharlin, who had

her daily life documented—and dramatized—by a professional courtroom artist, Brown pitches both herself and her works somewhere between fantasy and reality. Like Sherman and Scharlin, Brown restages herself through her adoption and subversion of mediated stereotypes: gendered abstractions of female identity lifted from the pages of fashion magazines or from the plots of daytime television dramas.

Approximating the form of a music video, *Pastorale* would appear to be ostensibly a promotional clip for its star, the Oakland-based soul diva Goapele, whose lush R 'n' B ballad "Closer" provides both the film's sound track and narrative drive. Shot by a professional crew on location in an idealized example of a California Craftsman house, *Pastorale* is in fact a highly mannered filmic tableau. The uniformly good-looking extras that populate Brown's film appear somewhat uncomfortable with their assigned roles. In their cool indifference—hanging out by the pool, tending the barbecue, or mooching around somewhat aimlessly—her troupe appear as if straight out of central casting. If the literary pastoral imagined the countryside through rose-tinted lenses, *Pastorale* reimagines suburbia as an unlikely rural idyll.

In their portrayal of a slightly vulgar, self-congratulatory, and somewhat decadent milieu, Brown's works are unsettling, their apparent lack of critical distance unnerving. It is appropriate that the artist both lives and works in the shadow of Hollywood, where artifice has long taken on the mantle of the real. Ultimately she seems most interested in creating confusion between the acknowledgment and identification of her own desires, and how those desires are subsequently negotiated and represented. Self-consciously engaged with the superficial, Brown's works might perhaps be best understood as a commentary on the nature of superficiality itself. Walking a thin line between parody and self-parody, the artist would appear to want to have her cake and eat it too. MATTHEW HIGGS

Delia Brown was born in 1969 in Berkeley, California. She received a BA from the University of California, Santa Cruz, in 1992 and an MFA from the University of California, Los Angeles, in 2000. Brown's solo exhibitions include *Forsaken Lover*, Il Capricorno, Venice (2002); *No Place Like Home*, Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles (2001); and *What, Are You Jealous?*, D'Amelio Terras, New York (2000). Her work has also been presented in group shows such as the Prague Biennial (2003); *100 Artists See God*, Independent Curators Inc. (2003–4); and *Seeing*, LACMA Lab, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2001).

Los Angeles



Delia Brown
Pastorale (still), 2002
(featuring Goapele)