

AROUND THE  
GALLERIES

# The flip side of leisure

DAVID PAGEL

The world economy is a surreal stew of cooked books, epic bankruptcies and uncertain ambitions. Its out-of-whack atmosphere takes queasy shape in **Delia Brown's** 13 new paintings, most of which depict sexy women lounging around the beachfront pools and tropical gardens of the super-rich.

Sipping Champagne, listening to music and posing like tourists, the attractive thirtysomethings wear bikinis, berets and fatigues, à la Che and rebels everywhere. In hot tubs, on patios and in designer dining rooms, they act like college kids on spring break — not as brazenly, or as drunkenly, as on “Girls Gone Wild,” but purposefully and pointedly.

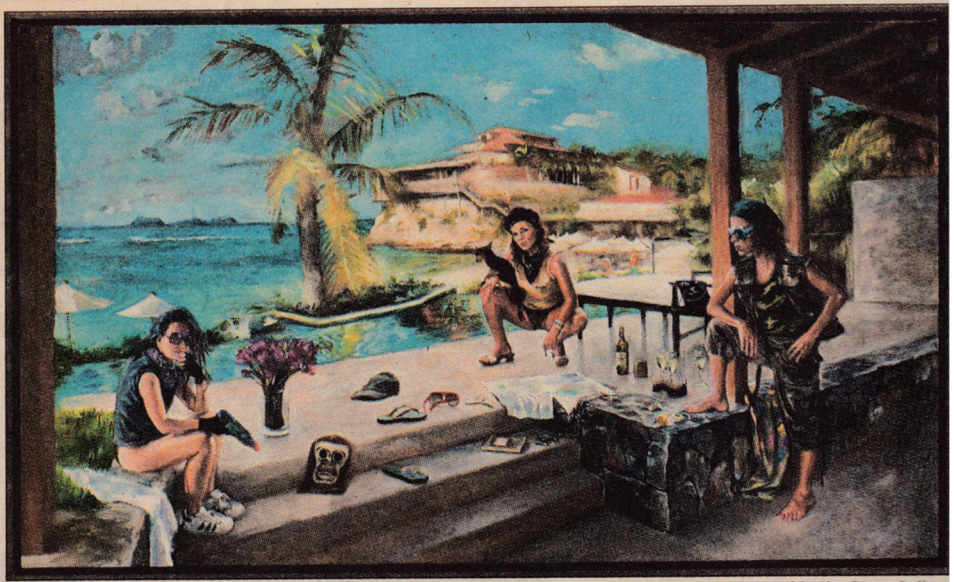
A sense of good-student seriousness runs through Brown's domestically scaled oils on linen. If the members of a graduate seminar in French literary criticism, circa 1985, designed a book cover that was meant to make fun of themselves and their professors, it could be any one of the wickedly contradictory images in her exhibition at Martha Otero Gallery, in collaboration with Country Club Projects.

Titled “Last Exit: Punta Junta,” Brown's suite of paintings refers to Tom Lawson's 1981 essay, “Last Exit: Painting.” To his manifesto that defended painting from its postmodern detractors, Brown adds the singsongy sound of a nursery rhyme gone south. “Punta Junta” evokes both the beauty of Caribbean vistas and the ugliness faced by start-up governments and wannabe leaders, who presumably act on behalf of ordinary folks.

The conflict between leisure and labor, privilege and privation, is Brown's subject.

To make her paintings, she used her savvy as an artist to gain access to the vacation estates of some 1 percenters, who let her use their St. Barts retreats as the backdrops for such rebel fantasies as “Guerrilla Villa,” “In There Like Swimwear” and “Les Demoiselles de Saint Barthelemy.”

Brown's pictures of conspicuous consumption gone wrong are nothing if not divisive. On one level, they are pricey items that cynically capitulate to the powers that be. On another, they present a world that has been turned upside down, its exclusive properties occupied by 99 percenters. In the absurd world captured by Brown's realistic art, it's hard to know where fanta-



Martha Otero Gallery

**DELIA BROWN** takes on the conflict between a life of privilege and one of struggle in works like “Guerrilla Villa” that depict comely rebels at vacation spots.

sies end and nightmares begin.

**Country Club at Martha Otero**, 820 N. Fairfax Ave., (323) 951-1068, through April 14. Closed Sundays and Mondays. [www.marthaotero.com](http://www.marthaotero.com); [www.countryclubprojects.com](http://www.countryclubprojects.com).