

Katrina del Mar: Girls Girls Girls

Participant, Inc., New York



Katrina del Mar, *Camille Blowing Bubbles at Riis*. Courtesy the artist and Participant

Mediated, commodified and commercialized into a language beyond recognition, sexuality has become an increasingly problematic field of representation. When the subject in question is girls, well, it's even more fraught. Katrina Del Mar has been active in underground film, photography and erotic fiction for two decades, and her vision is as transcendent as it is transgressive. In her first major solo gallery exhibition in New York at the

always adventurous alternative space [Participant Inc.](#) through February 17, Del Mar weaves her aesthetic obsessions into an expansive visual tableau.

Beyond the obvious appeal of her vision- women who are devastatingly fierce and utterly feminine- the most captivating aspect of Del Mar's art resides in its uncanny capacity to collapse fact and fiction. She will shoot and art direct the poster for a movie before she makes it, and may not in fact make the movie, allowing the ad to be the art. In two shelves of her own books at Participant, some contain prose, others are just pictures, one is poetry, another a dream journal, a few are unfinished, and most are, in fact, blank. Perhaps she will get around to filling these pages, but until then the covers- the lowbrow mix of sensational title and lurid image - more than amply suffice.

Del Mar's work is less about documentary intentions than fantasy, and therein lies its disruptive force. Erotic fantasy art has always been primarily about the desires of the viewer, while Del Mar's are unmistakably shaped by those of her subjects. A edgy tone of verite is enhanced by the fact that none of her subjects are professional models or actresses, and the artist's lowbrow sources of inspiration provide the humor. Their believability does not rely on the viewer's suspension of disbelief so much as that of her participants. Some of these girls may be tough, some might be natural exhibitionists, but it's the story that acts as the transformative force here. The photographic groupings that make up a large part of the installation show series of girls in acts of love, as members of some cartoon violent biker gang, and as bold adventurers on a surfing safari unfold like implied quasi-narratives. Such is the self-subsuming power of fantasy that it hardly matters if these girls are in fact lovers or members of a subculture gang, for the real subject is ultimately the empowering warrant and dominion of that theatrical other.

— *By Carlo McCormick* 02/05/2013