

## Popular

Popularity is an obstacle in the labyrinth of adolescence. You enter a world that glamorizes competitive individualism and alienation. "She wears exactly what her friends wear, designer brand names stocked by their favorite stores, as if her body was a doll in someone else's dreams, where she lives her life somewhere else." When there are obstacles along the way, we learn about ourselves. And when there are no obstacles, mundane realities return as monstrous and overwhelming forces. "What clothes my friends and I wear have nothing to do with boys or trying to be popular. It started when we started getting our breasts. Yet, it's not even my clothes, it's just anything. The guy I liked, the way I wore my hair, what I said to this girl, to that girl, the way I moved my mouth." When you have reached the end of the labyrinth something has been revealed, found, discovered.

*Karin Bubas and Kyla Mallett*, lavishly construct and decorate an installation, in the gallery, of a young woman's bedroom. Enter a narrow hallway, a dimly lit room, enclosed images hang on a wall, a bright lamp shines, glowing pink walls, a poster of a kitten the size of a tiger. Old stuffed toys, used plastic dolls, an inflatable pillow pile onto a pink duvet, spread out on a single, white vinyl covered bed frame. Jumbled on the floor and the top of the dresser drawers are more piles; lip gloss, gym socks, t-shirt's, hair clips, plastic jewelry, teen mags, headphones, an entire collection of dance compilations. I look around again at the image, thinking I was across the hall from Jeff Wall's, *Destroyed Room*. But what seems destroyed for a moment, is really an intentional mess. Someone has clearly organized the ensemble and her presence is everywhere.

"It's not what you wear, it's how you wear it: if it's too short or too long, if it goes with the rest of your outfit, whole days of silent treatment befall a girl who slips up and rolls her *Mavi* jeans a quarter inch too high. You can't make them happy. You can wear something they really like, but if you wear it again, they say, 'why are you wearing it again?'" Being popular and having the "look" means wearing the labels; "*Gap*, *Michael Star* at Bloomingdale's, *Buffalo Jeans*, *Juicy Couture* baby-tee's, *Tiffany* necklaces, reefers and *Birkenstocks*. Hootchie, a glossy girl-gang look, requires slicked-back hair, gold hoop earrings, *DKNY*, *Tommy Hilfinger* and *Nautica*." Even when you get the clothes right, there is so much else that can go wrong. And what is going on, is the strangely naive and perplexing point that appearance is power. With this kind power, what one girl could do to another girl's image in one gesture could affect her entire life. "She wore a cowboy hat to a party. She has a reputation from when she was little. She can do that. If I wore a cowboy hat to a party, it wouldn't work." Our ideas of image and ourselves are shaped by the iconography from television, cinema and print. The experience of the installation is an experience of authenticity, of "being there" in the girl's room, being "popular" and it rails against the fear and cynicism that pervades twentieth century culture, and the glossed over reality from television and Hollywood.

The way *Bubas and Mallett* have designed the space, the photographs and the installation engages the viewer's body. From the photographs of what looks like an ordinary day in the lives of two girls idly spending time in a bedroom, to the mysterious absence of a presence in the simulated bedroom installation. Even though, the photographs fill in the blanks, as to whose "been there", there is still a mysterious manner in these young women's faces, gazes and positions. This mystery furthers my disbelief in what is "real". Something else is brewing. Perhaps the girls have been discovered. Perhaps they wait; knowing that mother has read the diary, carefully disclosed at the bottom of the dresser drawers.

The riddled space of labels and image never stops. The journey out of the labyrinth begins as subtly as looking at yourself for the slightest moment longer in the mirror, while applying the latest "look". Realizing I am not any of these things; the makeup, the pieces of clothing, the presentation. Like the first tingling sensations when the numbness of novocaine wears off. Whatever the social context, the image of the labyrinth involves a person either mythical or actual and is always a woman on her way through an initiation. The ordeal of the labyrinth always ends in a triumph. Somewhere in the labyrinth the Minotaur sees red. This time he will lose this young woman, who once was about to be sacrificed for his appeasement.

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