

DOUBLE D

by Sabrina Tarasoff

Some paintings: in one, long locks, neatly cropped, fall over the shoulder of a Northwestern University sweatshirt. It's worn by a petite blonde, her college-sweats accessorised with pink nails, a purse and a small dog; the handbag—let's guess Gucci, or Prada,—held more tenderly than her sad companion. Elsewhere, another: the girl's double D's shoved into a pink pull-over, gazing at her own white boots as she's out and about in that perpetual millennial rush. A pink planner and dark jacket (leather? for an edge) are strewn insouciantly over a slim arm as insignia for the modern woman, always en route to a Starbucks, always in between meetings. Strawberry blonde tresses replace any facial features, granting anonymity courtesy of a great colourist. Someone is surely dying to know what salon she goes to. Atop of the image, a jagged edge of glass, like a sharp pang of envy, cutting through her face. The composition is Carrie-chic, and I don't mean Bradshaw. One last: a brunette clad in a tarty, summer dress the tone of ripe cherries. She's headed towards a dark car in white boots that look oddly familiar. Facing away, an apple-bottom ass shapes the skirt; its curvy extravagance a kind of camp that asks to be glanced at.

The supposedly spied-on subjects in question stem from Louise Sartor's 'Out and About,' a series of paintings depicting lone girls clad to the nines, sauntering through metropolitan landscapes. Faces always obscured behind veils of well-coiffed hair, they abide by what Sam Fussell puts forth in his text *Bodybuilder Americanus*: "fascism is sexy, because it renders the individual faceless." Fussell focuses on muscles, like uniforms, leather and Levi's, to get at an anonymity found in a figure reduced to its 'double D's': discipline and determination. For him, flesh is a form of dressing like any other; it's exaggeration a performance of power that cruises its audience for anonymous affect. Sartor, embracing the tropes of girliness, simply reclaims such gym-speak by placing any 'double D's' back in their apposite bras. It isn't hard to imagine 'discipline' and 'determination' scribbled across the chest of a sporty blonde, breasts as bon mot promoting the noble cause of cutting the body to fit this year's fashions.

Through such slogans, the girly-girl, as much as any other trope of womanhood, shapes herself according to an ideal of artifice; she accessorises as much with the cynical and pastel-toned palaver of gossip columns, as with fake lashes, stilettos and grande lattes. But whereas Fussell calls this assimilation a fashion that wilfully ends free will, a "lip-synching," Sartor's somewhat perverse approach suggests it may be fruitful to think otherwise. The girls are cast as serendipitous demagogues, whom by granting the guilty pleasure of gaze have come to guide society's wandering eye. Blurring all distinctions between sartorialist and stalker, Sartor follows them intently with a warily compassionate hand. Seams, like curves, become sites of pleasure, in which desire is nonetheless underwritten by its uglier associates such as envy, anxiety and disgust, no moralism implied. In fact, Sartor seems to find figures—whether it be in images online or IRL—en route to that "special place in hell for women who don't help women," which is to say, instead of demonising female competition, she indulges it. She makes this 'special place in hell' a holiday home, in which summers can be spent in teeny bikini's cutting the heads off pretty girls found in ones high school yearbook. That is, envy, a stereotypically girly affect, is granted a new significance as it creates a slippage between ones own flurried experience and the world-at-large. As Sianne Ngai points out in *Ugly Feelings*, envy has a diagnostic capacity, which engages "the objective world into ... a subjective characteristic." To Ngai, this is a recognition of social inequality, or reification in reverse, in which concrete differences between individuals are abstracted into emotion—and made all the more triggering for it. Though following girls around town may seem a simple perversion to some, Sartor basks in its potential to shape a subject through desire. Whether it is a labour of love, the cynicism is still strong. In other paintings, like fragments of girls clad in baggy t-shirts, some plastered with inane slogans that incapacitate even those infamous double D's, others simply caught with their mouth's wide open eating in vulgar display, Sartor settles herself

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the limits of spectatorship. In one, painted on piece of paper like salvaged trash, a glimpse of a grey sweatshirt bearing the words "GOOD MOOD." Elsewhere: "GYPSIES AND THIEVES," "LET THIS DEVIL DRESS IN BLACK," and "I FEEL LIKE PABLO"—an entire arsenal of obscure slogans for the cynicism of contemporary living. Enter envy's evil, maybe somewhat smug twin: finding pleasure in another's misfortune—or stupidity. It's not just staring, but pointing and staring. The t-shirts, for example, make a mockery of politics, as the joy of cleavage is brought to an abrupt and ironic end in slogans so asinine that even their supposed self-reflexivity fails to satisfy. In one such image, another faceless blonde, lips pouting, is seen stepping out of a car in a pink camisole bearing the intentionally misspelled label: "RADARTE." The top is from a line of sweatshirts and tee's designed by Rodarte—'so cute, right?' reads one review—in which the brand's name has been twisted and contorted into variations of itself. They allude to cheap knock-off's, yet with prices starting at \$113, are less critical reflection, and more an emphasis of already-apparent status. Paired with a painting on an egg box, in which chopsticks approach the wide-open mouth of another blonde, such vulgar excesses are made the droll rites of girlhood, and, our disgust at their public display, the unambivalent threshold to what should be permissible. So, maybe there's some moralism after all. I digress.

Some final paintings: four glasses of chilled Chardonnay, raised to good health against a lush, green landscape. A postcard for the labours of leisure well done, hanging suspended above an envelop, pleasantly paranormal. Beside it, in another image, a single glass of wine stands in repose. It foregrounds hands tapping against the lilliputian keyboard of a tablet, cobblestones peeking through its negative space. Paris. In one, a pregnant bubble-belly stretched into mauve tricot; in another, a lady sits in waiting in a monochromatic plaid dress. In considering what cohesions may exist between promenading young girls, t-shirts that scream sweet nothings, and glasses of Chardonnay, the mind tends to automatically wander into well-discussed realms of consumerism, capital, inequality or other social qualms. We've been taught to consider significations rather than surface. But like the sweet narcissism of young girls, wine swished around a sharp palate, or any other lingering pleasure in life, Sartor's paintings are the product of pure satisfaction found in a world stilled to a pose. In the end, dressing-up, just as doing your nails, or painting an image is an exercise in building a body, in which discipline and determination are the driving forces. Suspended in daily rite, these still lives—a term that encompasses the portraits, as much as the objects—recall something said by Arnold Schwarzenegger: "Posing is pure theatre. I understand that and I love it. My body has always been dramatic." Sartor treats her subjects with an equivocal compassion, dwelling in their image not necessarily to analyse, but to understand surface and its affects.