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Connor Marie Stankard: Ava, Chloe, Blair, Nicole

June 4 - July 24, 2022

When I walk into a store, or look at a collection—of images, or avatars, or beauty products—I'd most like to see individual *types* with variable *qualities*. When I watch a K-Pop girl group like BLACKPINK dancing and singing in perfect yet differentiated synchronicity, I feel the existence of peace and reason, harmony and symmetry, because they are all equally different, thus equally the same, like four petals on a daisy. When I see five different flavors of the perfect-girl perfume line *Daisy Marc Jacobs* at Sephora, I feel the same. There's *Daisy Black Edition* (2008), *Daisy Pop Art* (2010), *Daisy Sorbet* (2015), *Daisy Twinkle* (2017), and *Daisy Skies* (2022). And I want to collect them all. This is more or less what Kant says about beauty (that it's the relaxing sensation of the mind playing upon the symmetrically-spinning-out petals of a pretty white flower).

But Connor's collection of girls gives me an ugly feeling... because *Charlotte* (2022) and *Vita* (2022) have the same mouth. And *Marla* (2022) doesn't have a mouth at all! Connor's girls don't give the taxonomic pleasure of complementary choices (blonde with blue eyes, redhead green eyes, brunette black eyes), but the nausea of ONE (option, girl, individual) that's been smeared across a spectrum. These eight girls do not contain multitudes, nor are they diverse. Should you see an opalescent rainbow, it's only because a pure, sick whiteness has hallucinated colors into itself: Pepto Bismol-pink, violet, #7FFFD4 aquamarine (tell-tale symptoms of girlhood!). Should they appear multiple, it's only because a single, perfect girl has been repeated to the point of mutation. ONE girl, infected with herself and pipetted into eight differently sized, -treated and -heated Petri dishes—much more cruel than a rainbow: an ombré of unequal individuation. And maybe that's good; equality is such an illusion! We know: in real life, there IS a perfect girl, and there isn't really more than one of her. Looking around the gallery, we get the sense that this real, true model (the perfect one) doesn't appear in the paintings. She's gone, just an impression on a surface (*Cavity*, 2022), and she's probably already been sold. But that's okay; we already know what she looks like. All we need are her basic ingredients—those eight fluids of difference (*Choose Me, Hear Me, Stuff Me, Stitch Me, Fluff Me, Dress Me, Name Me, Take Me Home*, 2022)—and her limit or edge cases, her deviant images, up on the walls.

These eight paintings were first bred by Connor from digital photos, starting with a perfect girl (*Bella, Lily-Rose, Kate*) and then (abusively!) toggling different parameters—"gender," "earrings," "mouth open," etc.—to find their breaking points. I'm glad Connor's pushing this model to her limits; she should have to suffer at least a little. I picture Connor in a white lab, pumping this perfect girl full of qualities until she's full, until she can't take it any more. And she bursts, and the traits start leaking out of her every hole. Like a punctured Tide Pod, her features swirl around in a facial whirlpool; her puffy and botoxed skin puckers into a paisley. Always-already unfinished, made to be dissolved, stuffed with potentials, her uses are many—it's all up to your personal preference. The room suggests the classic combinatorial game in which you pick a face, pick a potion, and suture them, with a little love, on the table. But I'm not sure what we'd do with the results, or what they'd do back—also like Tide Pods: notoriously tasty, notoriously deadly. Multi-purpose. "Too much like candy" (as noted by Procter and Gamble), for everyone's good. And so, though we avoid eye contact with the death-driven girls, it's easy to see how this could end: a thin film of plastic fatally leaking, her insides exceeding their parameters; our little teeth dripping with what looks, deceptively, like *Daisy*: fresh and clean.

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And this is what Kant says about the sublime—that it's the vertiginous feeling of our minds pushed past their limits, encountering entities in excess of form. At *Ava Chloe Blair Nicole*, we're at the spa for images, where skin comes to grow, under the microscope or under the mouse. Here, Juvéderm mouths are stuttering—way past the point of articulation. Here, our desires meet their detergents. Here, we're at the primordial mud-bubble bath (*Habitat I*, 2022) where forms are mid-makeover: dissolved and dismembered, then re-produced.

— Olivia Kan-Sperling, May 2022

Connor Marie Stankard (b. 1992) lives and works in New York, NY. She received her BFA from Pace University in 2015 and her MFA from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2021. Recent solo exhibitions include *Cloaca Palace*, The Anderson, Virginia (2021); *A Mosquito's View*, FAB Gallery, Virginia (2020); *Stirring in the Mantle*, Motel (2016). Her work has been included in group exhibitions at King's Leap, Kimberly Klark, Tuesday, Allen & Eldridge, and Page NYC.

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