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Flash Art

LOS ANGELES

DELIA BROWN

MARGO LEAVIN



DELIA BROWN, Portrait with Pablo and Chiquita, 2001. Oil on canvas, 147 x 112 cm.

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Delia Brown could be the spawn of Eric Fischl. Her middle-class psychodramas are alternately glibly entertaining and shallow, masking a real craft and discipline. “No Place Like Home” is another of her fictionalized narratives, in which she stages characters, photographs them, and then produces a collection of drawings, watercolors, and oils.

In her newest collection, the artist has asked her dealer to stand in as “mother,” and in two photo sessions produced a series of images of domestic drama that she references throughout. The drawings are delicate and economical of line — quite wonderful. The oil washes are superb, the watercolors a bit more stiff, and the oils look like photo-realism; the more realized, the more mannered and limited the technique. But the concept is ingenious and carries the day. In *The Good Mother*, a caring matriarch hovers over the ill daughter, comforting and nurturing. All this coziness disappears in *Upstairs*, where some sort of difficulty is being experienced. The emotional journey of mother and daughter in middle-class America, dramatized in the ordinary, is the leit motif of each piece, illustrating the emotions of a young, entitled woman.

The central piece of the exhibit is the art smart *Portrait with Pablo and Chiquita*. Brown and Leavin pose regally as mother and daughter; behind them on the wall is a well known John Baldessari word painting. In one of life’s delicious ironies, by coincidence Baldessari happened to be in the gallery standing next to me when I looked at this painted. When asked his opinion, he murmured an inaudible judgment. Life imitates art imitates life and so on, I would guess he may have said. But we’ll never know, will we?

Clayton Campbell