

LOS ANGELES

Delia Brown at Margo Leavin

The idea of investing in certain social relations in hopes of economic gain is hardly new, and Delia Brown has aptly reminded us that such stratagems work especially well for corporations interacting with the glamorous likes of museums and celebrities. Brown's latest show, "Steps and Repeats," takes its title from the logo-ridden background banners ubiquitous at red-carpet events. It includes a 30-foot-long oil-on-linen triptych recreating Monet's *Water Lilies*. Titled *MoMA Corporate Logo Wall*, the piece makes unrepentant kitsch out of a well-known masterpiece, meanwhile highlighting the financial reality of the institution that houses the original painting by embedding the logos of MOMA's top patrons—Toyota, Verizon, Merrill Lynch et al.—step-and-repeat style among the painting's flowers. These days it's hard to forget who's Daddy in the Macchiavellian, corporate museum world we have on our hands.

Also on view here, in front of more step-and-repeat patterns, were five large-scale paintings of pairs of conventionally attractive young women in evening attire, standing on red carpet in front of imaginary logo-patterned backgrounds. The nearly identical gamines strike poses in which we're accustomed to seeing the Olsen twins, Paris, J. Lo and Nicole. Like a number of artists before her, Brown calls to mind what the Situationist Guy Debord referred to as the "spectacle-commodity system," which suggests that the personalities of all individuals, and by extension their consumer habits, unconsciously evolve through images in pop culture. Must we acquire luxury items and physical beauty in order to avoid alienation? Countless corporate providers have continued to grow rich by betting that the answer to this question is yes.

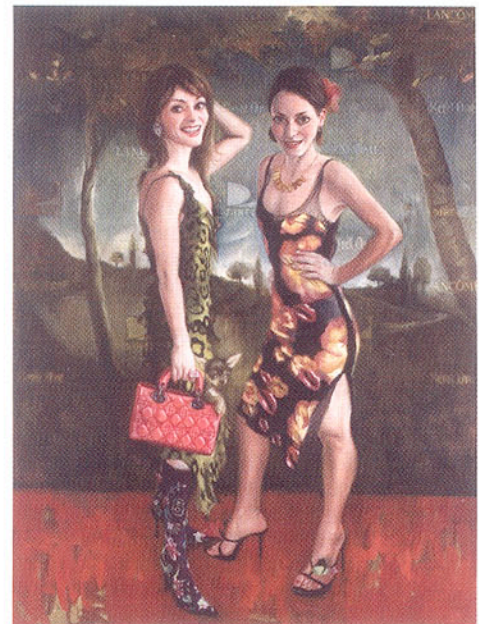
Titled "Double Self-Portraits," Brown's new red-carpet paintings raise a question about where to locate the "product," since successful female artists in their 20s and 30s increasingly reveal themselves to be exceptionally photogenic women (think Rachel Feinstein, Tracey Emin, Cecily Brown, Inka Essenhigh and even Delia Brown herself), who not only make art, but also do double duty appearing in fashion magazines or even modeling for ad campaigns. Brown, who has appeared in her own work in the past, for this show hired an actress, Hollis Witherspoon, who looks rather like her, to pose for the portraits (wearing various wigs). Witherspoon also acts in a video in which she plays a fictitious artist named Chelsey Green, who holds forth on her feelings about and motivations for painting. Here, Brown casts herself more as a voyeur than the narcissistic subject of her work; she positions herself as a part of the society that affects her, and not just as "that bitch . . . getting all dressed up for her own opening," as Green says at one point in the video.

No fool about product placement and the workings of the marketplace, Brown also made her own step-and-repeat canvas with nothing but Taittinger champagne logos, and placed a red rug below it. Attendees at her exhibition's opening were invited to have their photographs taken in front of the work, and, indeed, Taittinger supplied copious champagne for the occasion. If Brown profits from her institutional critique, and even has a nice time doing it, then good for her. Her work has a compelling honesty, requires nerve to make and deals with influential aspects of the culture very few in the art world want to recognize.

—Sarah Valdez

Art in America

December 2006



Delia Brown: *Chelsey Green, Double Self-Portrait (Landscape)*, 2006, oil on linen, 84 by 64 inches; at Margo Leavin.