



Art

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Delia Brown, “Precious”

D'Amelio Terras, through Sat, Jun 21., through June 27



Homework

Photograph: Courtesy D'Amelio Terras

Delia Brown paints subjects we love to hate. In the past, she's depicted herself and her friends in a manner blatantly intended to arouse jealousy—flaunting their youth, sexiness and supposed wealth. Her latest series still unfolds amid the trappings of (borrowed) luxury, but adds cute kids as props in saccharine portraits of the artist and other women (none of whom have children, according to the gallery statement) playing happy mom. As tidy and controlled as her earlier scenes were *louche*, Brown's vision of motherhood is as irritatingly unrealistic as it is incisive in exposing unattainable ideals.

Brown has claimed Mary Cassatt as an influence, but even Cassatt occasionally pictured a feeding or diaper change, labors that Brown ignores. Instead, cooperative children are seen lounging with carefully preened moms on cozy beds or couches in immaculate homes; it's unclear whether the little darlings are “precious” for being themselves or for serving as must-have possessions.

Brown may have intended some sort of meditation on class and parenting, but the absence of affection between mothers and kids, and the sterility of their settings, are more evocative in revealing how hard it is to step into someone else's reality. What starts out as another provocation turns into a confession of self-doubt, a 180-degree turnaround from the cockiness of her earlier work. Poignant and decidedly less frivolous, these latest panels signal that Brown is perhaps moving in a more personally risky—but meaningful—direction.

— Merrily Kerr