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EDITOR'S NOTE: In this space each month, Sarah Elise Abramson will scour the country for the best and brightest emerging artists on the scene and then interview them about their work. Sarah has a wonderful eye, and I'm sure you will enjoy what she is able to discover each month.

Molly Hewitt's film work is terrifyingly candid and falls somewhere between Hollywood and the American Dream. Hewitt holds a mirror up to the disturbing reflection that is our modern dysfunctional world. She films most everything on VHS, giving her work this sort of public access television quality. Mike Kelley textiles can often be spotted in her videos; these quite intentionally B movie-style films are composed of nonlinear edits and shot composition. Yet, there is something very subversive about her work, a social commentary about what is considered appropriate behavior that is quite hilarious and absurd. She sews all her own costumes and makes crude ceramic sculptures as props. Sexual identity, feminism and



Interview with

Molly Hewitt

By Sarah Elise Abramson

what it is to be a feminist are all very dominant themes throughout much of her work. Sweeping pastiches pulling together the cheekiest elements of pop culture from the '50s right up to present day drift breathlessly, and sometimes dramatically, as she explores conformity of her own generation. These vignettes of re-contextualized imagery show Hewitt's dark and witty sense of humor. Mixing the tonal darkness, ambiguity and ennui of David Lynch with the dyspeptic editing and digital effects of Tim and Eric, Hewitt creates psychedelic nightmares that result in an odd sort of familiar elegance.

Hewitt is a UK-born video artist living in Chicago. After graduating from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago a year ago, Hewitt finished and screened her first short film titled *Maggie's Problem*. It's about a young, married woman who falls in love with a sea monster. Recently her work was in two shows: *Material World*, with video works by Hewitt and Kaycee Conaway at Chicago Filmmakers on May 2 and at Hokin Hall in Chicago on May 6, as well as a performance at the Chicago Underground Film Festival Queer After Party on May 16.

What is your biggest fear?

Adam Levine's voice

Professionally, what is your goal? Any future plans?

A psychic once told me that in the future I am going to be in charge and that no one is going to tell me what to do. I want to write and direct a feature film and a television series and music videos. And I want to continue making props and costumes. I also would like to put on some type of live performance or play with a cast and tour the world.

You exclusively shoot on VHS. What inspires this?

I originally come from a ceramics and fibers background. I think what attracts me to VHS is the textural quality of the image. I am not necessarily interested in producing clear, crisp images as much as I want to create a new world by literally looking at things through a different lens.

How do you usually go about conceptualizing your films?

It usually starts with something I want to see, or a costume or prop I want to make, combined with whatever pop music I am listening to at the time. Then I find that themes and ideas from whatever I am watching/reading/thinking about make their way into the video. A lot of the time I am reenacting imagery or videos I like, or figures in pop culture that interest me. My work is about desire, and trying to copy and imitate things as a way of connecting to the world and simultaneously creating a new world.

What themes do you pursue?

I think a lot about performing femininity—how I do that every day and in my work? Drag is an important aspect of my work. I consider myself a drag queen and a drag king, but I also practice drag of historical time periods and trends. I think a lot about the signifiers of femininity—also pop and mythical icons that embody that. I think about witches and plastic surgery addicts. Gold diggers, strippers and porn stars and the implications of choosing those careers. I watch a lot of TV, and I think about the things I see, as well as the act and experience of watching something on a screen. I also have been making work about my identity as a



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Molly Hewitt

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A scene from *Molly and Me*, 2013

2
Dream scene from
Maggie's Problem, 2014

4
A scene from *Diamonds*,
2013



British citizen and feeling displaced living in the U.S.

What have you been listening to in the studio?

Disco.

What are some of your favorite movies?

True Stories by David Byrne, *The Forbidden Zone* by Richard Elfman, *Hold Me While I'm Naked* by George Kuchar, and a Barbie cartoon I have on VHS called *Barbie and The Sensations: Rockin' Back to Earth*, where Barbie and her band have a concert in outer space to promote world peace, and on their way back to earth, they accidentally create a time warp by rocking out too hard, and they go back in time to the '50s.

Thoughts on being a woman in the art world?

I think the best art is made by women.

Thoughts on being a woman in society?

I think that Barbie is an excellent example of the struggles women face in our society. Barbie has had 130 careers, and she has never been married. I think she is a positive example of a progressive modern person, yet all everyone seems to talk about is her body. Yet she looks exactly like how society and the media have told us we are supposed to look. The value and powers women have been given in our society are all about image and sex appeal, but if a woman ever uses those powers to her advantage, she is immediately shamed.

Can you give an example of a real-life situation that inspired you?

In the reality show *My Big Fat American Gypsy Wedding*, a man named Pat Baby threw a huge Halloween party and dressed up as Captain Jack Sparrow and got a tattoo for his costume. I was really inspired by that level of dedication to a Halloween costume.

What type of research do you do to prepare for your films?

I watch a lot of music videos, reality television shows, dramas, English comedy and old films. I also try to watch a lot of live performance art and go to screenings—I watch a lot of video artist works. I look at a lot of vintage cookbooks, and probably the most influential books to my practice are *Hard Core* by Linda Williams; *Men, Women, and Chain Saws* by Carol J. Clover; *Playing in the Dark* by Toni Morrison; and *Guilty Pleasures: Feminist Camp from Mae West to Madonna* by Pamela Robertson.

What can't you live without?

I am an avid collector of dolls, fake plants and ugly/cute tchotchkes. I don't think I could live without them.

What memorable responses have you had to your work?

"Ew, why did you make that?"

Contact info:

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Sarah Elise Abramson is a contemporary fine art photographer based in San Pedro, California—a mysterious post-industrial enclave whose offbeat countercultural history and proliferation of unusual sights, sounds and citizens is tailor-made for Abramson's obsession with everyday surrealism. In both her own photography and in her curatorial and editorial approach to exhibition projects and independent publications, her emphasis is on discovering the eccentric beauty in the things most people overlook. Found objects, hidden messages, secrets of the universe that hide in plain sight—throughout her studies at Parsons The New School for Design and Brooks Institute of Photography, and later at LaChapelle Studios, her work has evolved from finding to intuitively creating original daydreams and shared cosmologies.

