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2015

LAST-LOOK: *LOVELY DARK*

Within the crisp sun-drenched irregular walls of the former Regen Projects HQ hang recent works by Yale's 2015 MFA Photography Graduates. Curated by interdisciplinary artist and Regen staple, Jack Pierson, the show features ten artists whose works vary in form and content but share a journalistic sense of 'shaping metaphors out of the real.'

Highlights are photographs and books from Polish-born Ilona Szwarc's series in which she explores the sequential transformation of the other. Augmenting her doppelgänger through theatrical make-up and cinematic archetypes, Szwarc manipulates the photographic frame to uncover the fluidity and imperceptibly of identity. In her series of books on display, Szwarc's lens adopts narratives of 'herself' through each character's metamorphosis— manipulating their flesh and augmenting their humanity through a combination of playful cosmetics, violent tucks, changing backdrops, and historicised connotations. Through her fictitious self-portraits, Szwarc exploits the painterly effects of photography both figuratively and literally: applying strokes of caulky foundation and powder to create a surreal and uncanny portrait of an aging woman— culminating into an androgynous, humorously grotesque, or saintly mask of her former self. But Szwarc asks us to look closer, where the essence of humanity peeks through: in the pearl-hued caverns of their eyelids, nostrils, ears, and in their soft, often manicured, youthful hands.

Given Szwarc's cultural and geographic heritage— growing up in a devoutly Catholic country colored with a communist past and based in New York until re-locating to Los Angeles only 3-weeks ago— her body of work reflects an infatuated research considering the alienation and cross-pollination of identity. 'I am always looking for who I am vs. looking for who I am not,' she says. Viewing 'identity as expressive' and pulled to capture 'how that manifests in the environment a person occupies,' Szwarc's portraits are introspective topographies tracing the mirrored self— the gaze, the twin, the abject other— the essence ultimately permeating and distinguishing us from and with each other.

Closing this Saturday, August 1st at Regen Projects (West Hollywood). Open Tuesday–Saturday 10am–6pm.

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