

Jansen, Char 'Bedrooms, Karaoke, and Glitter. Molly Soda Makes Her Solo Show Debut', Flaunt, (November 2015)

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From My Bedroom to Yours

Molly Soda

Annka Kultys Gallery

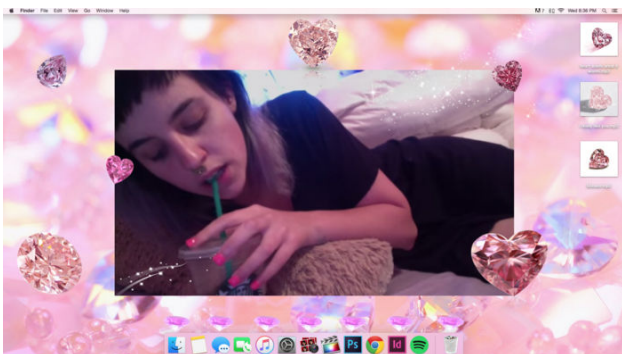
472 Hackney Road, Unit 3, 1st Floor, London E2 9EQ, United Kingdom

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Bedrooms, Karaoke, and Glitter: Molly Soda Makes Her Solo Show Debut

by Char Jansen

It's not hard to understand why so many people write off art of the kind 26-year-old Molly Soda makes: to date, she's best known for works such as dating a giant teddy bear, and "leaking" her own nude selfies (*Should I Send This?*). In the artist's new London solo, the tropes of hypergirly net art are all here, unabashedly IRL: glitter, miniature unicorns, stickers, glitches, and iPhones with cracked screens. The walls are painted, of course, pink. But there's much more to Molly Soda's work than I had thought having viewed it only online. This show is a confident leap in a new direction, both for the artist, and for the art of this genre.



Molly Soda, *Our Song*, 2015, [NewHive Page](#) and YouTube video, 15:11min, Dimensions variable, 2AP + Edition of 3

This is Soda's first proper solo show. She is, of course, a known quantity thanks to her online presence—but until now, she had no gallery representative, something that [Annka Kultys](#)—an established art collector recently turned gallerist—expressed surprise at. Kultys came across Soda online in June, and connected with her work instantly: she flew to Detroit to visit the artist soon after and offered her a show at her new space in Hackney on the spot. It's exciting to see the results of the union: Kultys is a high-caliber collector with sterling knowledge of the industry—not the typical person to represent art that is so otherwise removed from the conventional art world. Alongside the show's polished production (including a beautiful catalogue including three essays on Soda's work) Kultys' expertise is also pushing to give pragmatic ways to collect digital art. Following the example set by artists like Petra Cortright, Kultys has priced the digital video works on show according to the number of views they have on YouTube. The pieces are then being sold as files on USBs that Soda has customized by hand (yes, they're pink, too). For this kind of art to go on, more galleries need to take initiative in this way.



Molly Soda, Installation view of *From my Bedroom to Yours*, Annka Kultys Gallery, London, 2015

The presentation itself is pretty and pristine: 20 video works selected by Soda (her favorites, she tells me, but also taking into account those YouTube ratings), all from 2015, are presented on iPads and a laptop on low tables, iPhones, and mounted on walls—each is decorated with pastel colors and glitter, or potted plants. This presentation makes sense for framing the personal, intimate feeling of the homemade videos. Seen as a whole, with the sounds of pop music and Soda's singing in gentle cacophony, it's as if you're standing in the artist's bedroom with laptop that has been left open with multiple tabs playing.

This is exactly the effect Soda is seeking. And she is very good at identifying the things that we all do and say in private—things we are ashamed of—and communicating them. The theme of shame, or undoing shame, is the constant theme in these works: the artist isn't afraid of making her private space public (almost all of the videos are shot in her bedroom, or bathroom). There might not be depth to all the works—but why do we demand there be? This again points more to the demands of the viewer from the art, and our inability to accept things (art, people) as they are. It is better instead to consider the artist's output in terms of breadth rather than depth: her volume of production is prolific, but she also illustrates the gamut of emotions a young person feels in her films—and it feels genuine, a symbiotic or collaborative documentary rather than performed.

It's fundamental too to realize that these works aren't made for the art world: Soda's online audience is much wider than that. As I stood with her (she is pretty, petite, and seems grounded) she told me that the audience she was expecting was mostly her fans and following from her community online, rather than a high-brow art crowd. This is the most conventional art setting she has put her work in so far though, and for me, it's an invitation for the art world to take this work more seriously: like it or not, there is something to be learned from Soda's study of the etiquette and interactions of the next generation.



Molly Soda, *From my Bedroom to Yours*, Installation view at Annka Kultys Gallery, with *He*, 2015, [NewHive page](#) and [YouTube Video](#)

In one video work, *He*, the centerpiece of the show, Soda plucks roses from a pile in front of her. Her face is cropped out showing only bra-less boobs and hands. She recites statements we've all heard, and read, a thousand times: "He Likes It When I Talk Really Slow," "He Thinks I Have No Direction," "He Checks My Facebook 6 Times A Day." From loving to painful, cheesy to cruel, the statements are read with tenderness—they don't come off as singular personal experiences but form an empathetic, collective voice that Soda channels and shares. Her whole visual language is built around this voice: in the various videos on display, she performs songs (she later told me how karaoke is a huge influence on her, and a way of coping with anxiety), she cries, she dances—sometimes sexily, and others dorkily—she lolls on her bed, smokes a cigarette, sometimes clothed, sometimes nude. As individual works they are a little repetitive, but as a collection, they've got momentum and force.



Molly Soda, Installation view of *From my Bedroom to Yours*, Annka Kultys Gallery, London, 2015

Soda has clearly found many aspects of her web use uplifting. The fact she has spent so much time there interacting with so many peers also gives her work the feeling of a more genuine insight and synchronicity with the common concerns, fears, fun, and forms of self-expression of her generation. This is what makes Soda stand out. It might come off as pretentious, and I'm sure many will question it as such, but there's no affectation here. Soda is a young woman who knows who she is and what she is doing. If you view her work with an open mind you can get something from the experience: glitter and unicorns are just things she thinks look nice.

This is a solid solo debut that proves Soda is more than an "internet persona." There's certainly room for the fledgling artist to grow her ideas and she'll be back in London next year during Frieze. But it's refreshing to see that this often marginalized art form truly has something to offer, and to gain, from the gallery context—and even to learn that it might best be viewed in that way.

—Char Jansen