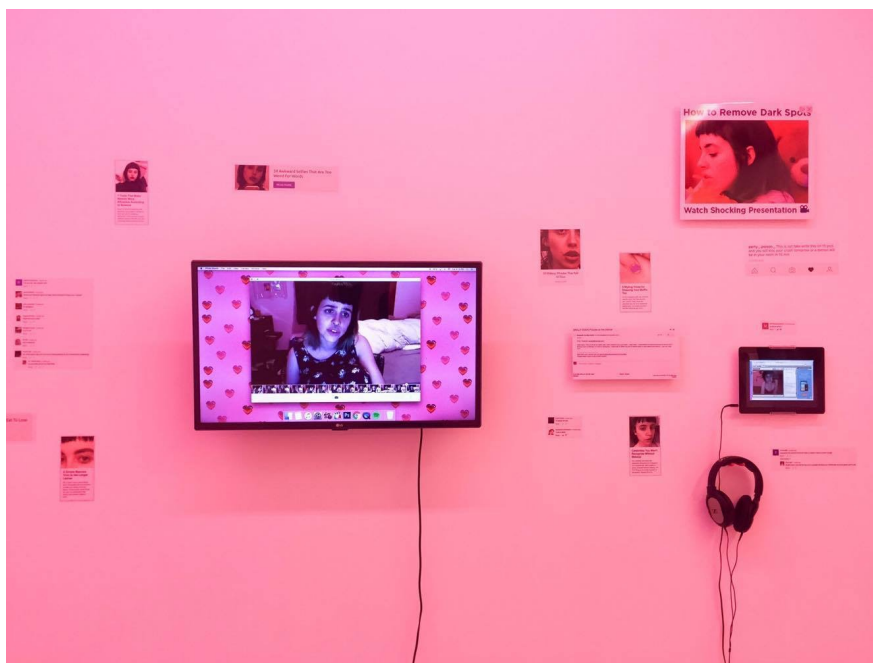


Eloise, Marianne 'Molly Soda : Comfort Zone', February Stationary, (14 October 2016)

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Molly Soda: Comfort Zone



If you have somehow never come across Detroit-based artist Molly Soda's work on the Internet, there's perhaps little use trying to explain it. Her candid work spans mediums and includes Youtube-based performance art, digital pieces, selfies, and more; but primarily her pieces are a colourful and unfiltered look at her life. Her work is at once modern and nostalgic, utilising technology and looking back on the early days of the internet while considering the complicated relationship between IRL and URL.

Last year I wrote this piece on Soda's first solo show, *From My Bedroom to Yours* at Annka Kultys gallery in London. *From My Bedroom to Yours* was a pink, kitschy exploration of the bedroom that incorporated screens, selfies, and videos of Molly doing things that would usually be entirely private; dancing, singing, crying. Molly has been busy in the year since we last met, working on a number of projects and getting together Comfort Zone – her current show and her second with the gallery. I was lucky enough to go to the press preview and have a chat with Molly (real name Amalia Soto) today.

Comfort Zone is a follow-up to *From My Bedroom to Yours*, but wherein the first show explored making the private experience of the bedroom public, *Comfort Zone* considers that the idea of a safe space at all is an illusion. It retains some of the kitschy, feminine aesthetic of *From My Bedroom to Yours* but feels a little darker or even more mature due to the nature of the subject matter. I asked Molly what it was all about, and she said: "It's basically sort of a discussion or a continuation of the last show but it's more about the bedroom being a place where we don't feel very good or safe. This idea of safe spaces and basically like, safety is a farce or safety is fake."



Despite the show being about the lack of safety, walking into it felt a little like walking into heaven. The white stairs were draped in pink light thanks to some neon lights attached to the ceiling, but unlike *From My Bedroom to Yours* there were no beanbags – I didn’t get a chance to ask whether or not this was intentional, but it definitely took away any feeling of comfort. Some of Molly’s works were on display on TV and Macbook screens as in the previous show, including an 18-hour long photobooth video of unreleased footage that was never intended to be shown to the public at all.

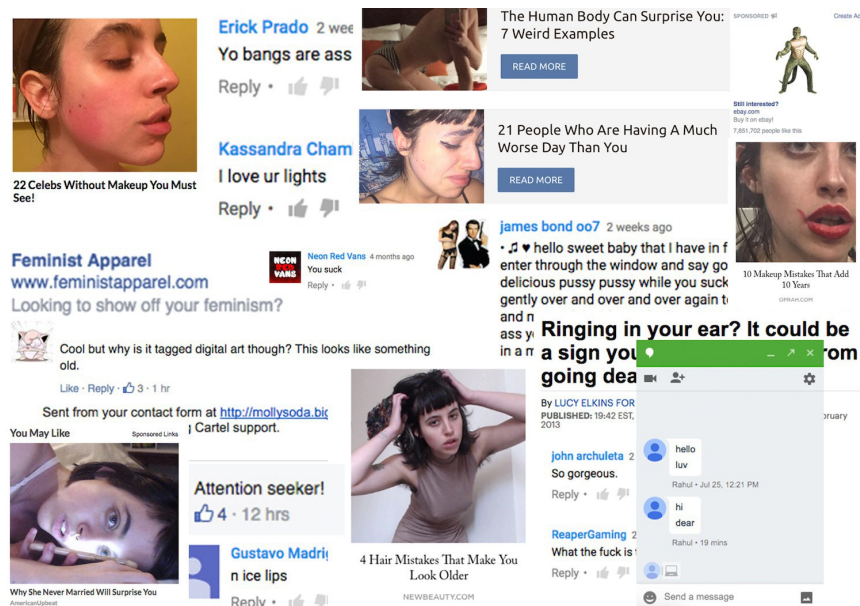
The gallery’s walls were also covered in non-digital pieces, including clickbait style adverts with Molly’s face pasted over that of the advert’s model. Resin sculptures were attached to the walls, and they appeared to be made from the baby pink tabletops of *From My Bedroom to Yours* (but again, I was too dumb to ask). The sculptures were covered in mirrors, candy, make-up, CDs – tokens and things that we all own and keep in our private spaces, stuck directly on the wall for all to see.

“We have to tell ourselves that things are safe in order to live life, but it’s not real.”

Molly Soda

Something that affected me were the cutouts of negative Instagram and Facebook comments littering the walls; they served to give just a small insight into the daily onslaught of shit that Molly gets as a woman living publicly online. *Comfort Zone* is in part intended to explore how we engage with the devices which inform our everyday existence; dissecting our relationship with them and the fact that we are never truly alone or safe.

“We have to tell ourselves that things are safe in order to live life, but it’s not real. The show is about this idea that our private rooms or private spaces are safe spaces but we have our phones and we are plugged into everything. We are never alone and anyone can contact us if they want to, anyone can get our information if they really want to and we’re not like unemotional people who can’t be penetrated by our devices. So it’s sort of about taking what is on our devices and putting it out there instead of what I’m doing in my room and putting it out there it’s more the contents of what I’m doing when I’m surfing the web or things that are really agitating to me.”



Recently Molly has been refreshingly honest about her financial troubles and the exploitation that she suffers at the hands of magazines and websites that offer her exposure but a) for free and b) sometimes at the cost of cheapening her work or twisting her words. The fact is that many people hear of Molly Soda because of her body: be it her own selfies, conversations surrounding her body hair and body positivity, or *Should I Send This?* her zine of self-released nudes. While she has been happy to discuss these topics, articles intended to focus on other aspects of her work often come back to or lead with her physicality as an anchor or as a way to get clicks from people that are intrigued.

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Molly Soda

“As an artist, as a young artist you don’t want to bite the hand that feeds you. Especially when I first started I was so excited if anyone wanted to write about me but as I’ve gotten older and dealt with it more I’ve noticed certain work gets highlighted and certain things about me get highlighted a lot of the time. My work is talked about in conversation with my body and I think that happens with a lot of women artists, especially young women artists in relation to our bodies. Everything becomes about that or about things that people will think make you more interested or relevant.”

I ask Molly whether the cost of exploitation is worth the exposure that she gets in return: “It cheapens your work and it cheapens you in the long run which is why I have tried to pull away from that sort of thing. A lot of artists I know have tried to pull away, but I just feel like artists think that they need the press or publicity but the magazines need them. It’s just insane how people aren’t taught to demand things because they’re afraid that if they demand too much people will say “fuck you, we’ll use someone else.” especially women. Especially women of colour. It sucks, it’s really shitty.”

The conversation surrounding digital/online artists and personalities getting paid and not being exploited by magazines who make \$ from discussing their work is an important one, and one that is finally starting to be talked about; in part because it’s something that we haven’t dealt with before. Molly said: “it’s a new problem because we are the first twenty-somethings really trying to make a living off the Internet as well as doing whatever it is they’re passionate about. It’s definitely hard.”

The fact is that consumers get the content Internet artists are putting out for free initially, and then feel entitled to keep receiving it – without bearing in mind that even the Internet famous need to eat. There’s an assumption that if they appear to be popular and doing well, they must be rich; but as long as artists as prominent and visible as Molly keep speaking up, there has to be a tipping point.



Comfort Zone is a solid follow-up to *From My Bedroom to Yours*, and they work together hand-in-hand. The show serves to reinforce the fact that Molly's work is important; her honesty about the reality of life as a woman and an artist may be at times uncomfortable or difficult to hear, but it has to be heard. Even those of us who aren't artists live our lives intensely publicly, with even our most private moments potentially being in the hands of hundreds of people at once. We are perpetually plugged in and accessible which can abate loneliness for a time, or it can reinforce the fact that everyone in the world is having fun but us. *Comfort Zone* explores this eloquently and out loud, while giving us a slither of insight into what it's like to live as someone "Internet famous" for just one day. The fact is that not all of us could handle the shit that is thrown Molly's way, but she not only handles it – she makes fucking great art out of it.

Comfort Zone is showing at Annka Kultys Gallery through the 12th of November 2016