

Kallinikou, Vivi 'Molly Soda's Comfort Zone', Artrabbit, (29 November 2015)

https://www.artrabbit.com/network/features/2016-november/molly-sodas-comfort-zone

# Molly Soda's Comfort Zone

29.11.2016

by Vivi Kallinikou

We really like Molly Soda. Her Twitter feed is a piece of performance art. Her YouTube beauty tutorials have an inimitable style and her take on the digital is what everyone should be talking about.

We talked to her about her work, her nudes and what it means to be online.

Vivi Kallinikou: Thank you for taking the time to meet me. Let's ease in, for the people who don't know your work: You create gifs, YouTube tutorials, selfies, chat videos, zines, and even your Twitter feed is a piece of performance art. How would you best describe what you do?

Molly Soda: I say I'm a digital artist primarily. All of the work I make is online. That's a big thing for me: I like my content to be accessible, and the way that I distribute everything is through social media platforms. So it's not just on my website but it's actually living amongst everyone's feeds. I also think that my work is best viewed on a computer, in your bedroom, when you have a private moment with it.



## Molly Soda on tumblr.

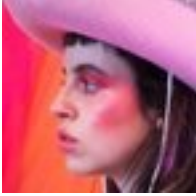
A lot of the work I make is about the way in which we interact with each other online, what it means to be online and what it means to curate a persona online, what it means to make a private life public. I'm constantly asking questions about the internet because it's something I grew up with, something that affected me so deeply and still does. When I started blogging or writing online diaries - it was like my secret separate life and now everyone is on there. It's the norm for everyone to use social media but before it was sort of like

a niche thing, or it was for a specific thing, like a forum, like a fan page, your private diary that you don't want anyone from your high school to read.

vk: Do you find it difficult to sell pieces like this?

ms: Yes, it's harder to sell work that is digital in nature. It's not impossible, I've done it, but people are kind of like: "Whoa, why is this valuable, if I can see it online, or I can just right-click and save it or screenshot it?" I actually think that there is a lot of value in work that is online. It doesn't make sense for me to make a piece and have it sit in a collector's storage unit. I want people - a lot of people - to engage with it.

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**amalia** @mollysoda

my role models are the type of people who eat pieces of bread in their beds late at night

6:27 AM - 27 Nov 2016

604 604 Retweets

2,165 2,165 likes

[View image on Twitter](#)



Ryan, 27



University of Maryland, College Park  
6 miles away

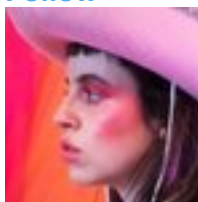
If I don't look better than my pictures, I'll get drinks until I do 😊



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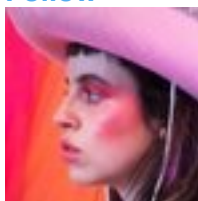
Rape culture alive and well on tinder...

6:19 AM - 28 Nov 2016

25 25 Retweets

287 287 likes

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After careful consideration I've concluded that all astrological signs are fundamentally bad and I shouldn't date any of them

7:22 PM - 6 Sep 2016

140 140 Retweets

470 470 likes

### *Molly on Twitter*

A lot of people don't view digital work as valuable because it's not physical or tangible which is silly to me because our digital life and everything we're processing online is way more impactful than a lot of physical shit that we see. But that's just how it is - at least for now.

vk: Do you think that has to do with some sort of ownership issue?

ms: Yeah, it's a very childish thing, this idea of "I want to own it, I want to touch it, I want to hold it in my hand and I want to be the only one to do so." And I'm like: "Isn't it cool that a million people saw this video and you own it?" That's my take on this, my selling point. But we're not there yet. A lot of digital artist have to sort of compromise their work in order to make money off of it.

vk: Do you find yourself having to compromise sometimes?

ms: No. Well, I want to say "no" but I don't know. I know that I want to make sure that I make work that is relevant to me and my time. If I do make physical work, I want to make sure that it's aiding my digital work and it's not just physical work for the sake of it.

vk: My personal favourites are your YouTube tutorials. In particular the "How to look natural" makeup tutorials which is such a strange and fascinating concept considering how much work and money some of the YouTubers put into something that should come "natural". Can you talk a little bit about the motivation behind your use of this material? How sincere are your replies to these?

ms: I've been obsessed with beauty videos for a long time. I first discovered them about 3 or 4 years ago. I was fascinated with what was happening in this whole world of YouTube personalities that focus on beauty contests. I knew I wanted to make work about it. I knew that these things exist and there were all these ideas I was having but I didn't know how to approach the whole thing. At first, I was making these fake beauty videos where I was very obviously a character, where I would put on a wig and pretend to be this type of girl that did this type of thing until I started hating that because I didn't want to make fun of anyone. I respect the amount of work and the passion that goes into creating these videos, and I thought there was so much value in it. When I started the "no makeup videos" I was really interested in what goes in them: A lot of people watch these videos but they don't necessarily follow the tutorials, they just watch them. And I thought:

“What if I watched the tutorial for its intended purpose? What if I followed every step, did everything they told me to do, like buy all the products that they told me to buy etc.” So I did a series of the no-makeup makeup tutorials, 9 to be exact, in 2015, where I recreated YouTube beauty tutorials, followed all the steps, and kept track of what everything costed too.

**My "NO MAKEUP" Makeup Look - How to look natural with makeup on!**

**Full screen is unavailable. [Learn More](#)**

vk: How much goes into a production like this? How much does a natural no-makeup-makeup-look go for?

ms: (laughs) Somewhere around 150 to 300 dollars.

vk: That's pricey.

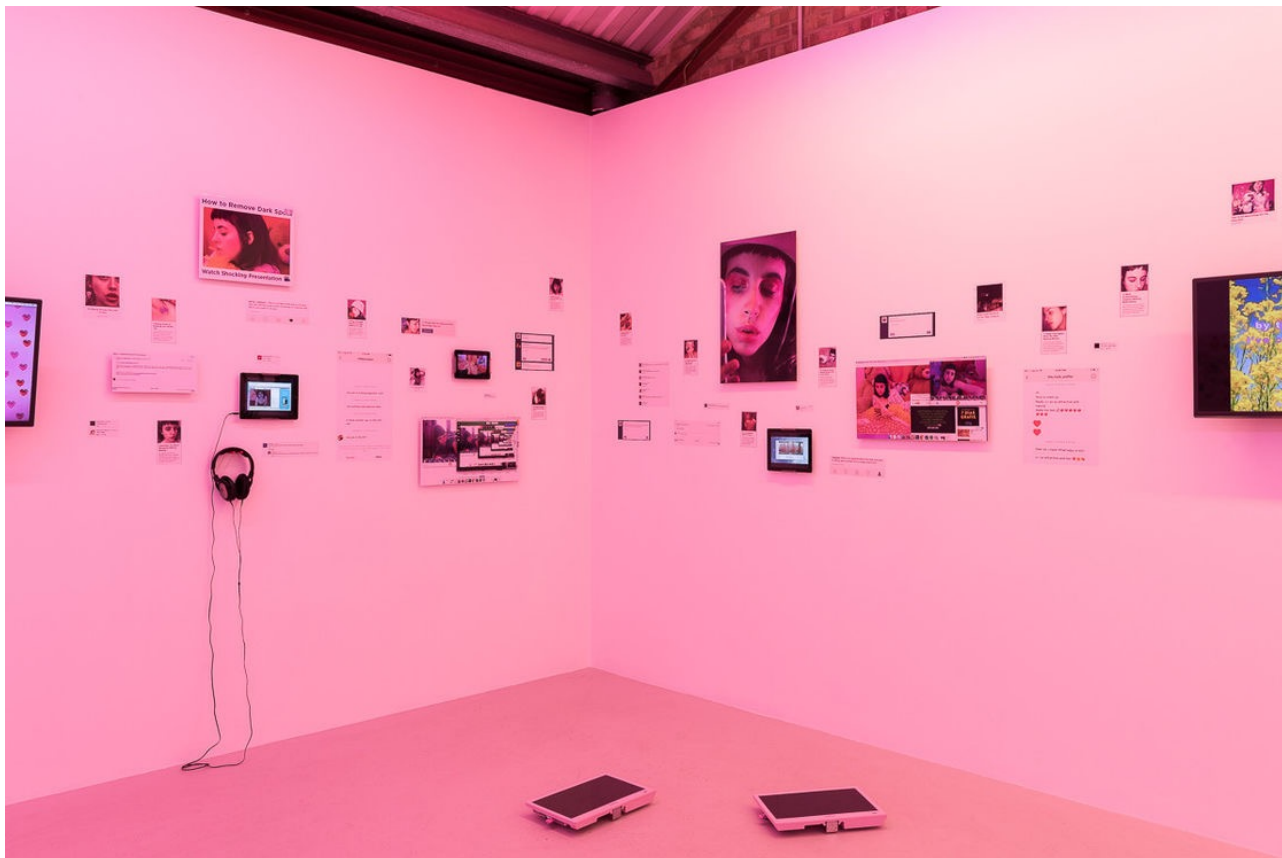
ms: That's assuming that you don't have any makeup and you're buying it all from the beginning. I cheated a little, I didn't always buy the original product. I sometimes bought the equivalent. But yeah, I ended up spending hundreds of dollars on makeup.

vk: They use some fancy products.

ms: Oh yeah, they use really expensive stuff. Makeup is not cheap. Even drugstore makeup isn't cheap. Anyway, that was sort of my way of trying to tackle the idea but also trying to be more impartial, but you can't ever be 100% impartial. This is how I started making my own beauty tutorials.

vk: Those are the ones you exhibited at your most recent show at Annka Kultys Gallery?

ms: Yes, there were three of my beauty tutorials in the show, and I have a bunch of them on YouTube. I mostly focus on the language in these videos and the way they're all sort of streamlined and edited in similar ways. You'd be surprised how much work goes into creating these videos. All the labour that goes into them - that is essentially unpaid labour. I do think that people eventually get some ad revenue, you know, when they're popular enough, but I don't know how much that is, and how feasible of a living thing you're making off of it but you're making three videos a week, you're editing, you're shooting, you've got a lighting system, a room dedicated to it. The people that are doing these are really going for it.



EXHIBITION

Molly Soda: Comfort Zone  
14 Oct 2016 12 Nov 2016  
Annka Kultys Gallery  
London, United Kingdom

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The other thing I'm fascinated by is this ambiguity in the way we relate to them. We like these YouTube girls so much because we think they're relatable but actually they're not. Yes, they're more relatable than celebrities but they're not your regular person. They're going to those lengths, editing out all these undesirable things from their videos, putting so much thought, effort, money into their work, and constantly create all this content. It's pretty extraordinary.

vk: What do you think is the motivation behind this work ethic and effort? Is this to reach out to people and engage, make friends, become popular?

ms: I think it depends. A lot of the YouTubers I'm obsessed with are very often people that struggle with anxiety, don't like to travel. I think sharing their passions through a video platform, reaching out to so many people while being in the privacy and comfort of their own home is their preferred way of engaging with the world. In the process they become celebrities sometimes but I don't think that's the initial motivation.

**Full Face Drugstore Makeup Tutorial & Affordable Brushes!**

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vk: Let's move on to another one of your series. Last year, you leaked your nude selfies and sexts. What were you thinking?

ms: (laughs) It's such a silly project.

vk: It's really not, though. There are so many different levels of meaning there. I thought it was a very bold move which took this entire conversation about body confidence and ownership onto the next level.

ms: I'm glad you think that. It's cool that people responded this way. But for me it was something that I made very quickly and I didn't think that it would become such a topic of conversation. I don't think it's my best work. For me, it was just a zine that I made. I had all these silly emails, girly texts and notes on my phone that I would never send to anyone. I wanted to use the material for a project and was trying to figure out what visuals would work best. I instantly thought of the nudes that I have on my phone that I would never send to people. I don't really send nudes to anyone. I just take them and then go on with my day. At the same time, I was terrified someone could get their hands on them. A lot of my work stems from my deep-rooted control issues. I would never send sexts or nudes to anyone because I don't want them to have this power over me. "Leaking" them, releasing them myself gave me a sense of control and power over my own image. This is how "Should I send this" started - but it turned into this weird thing, where people made me a poster child for body positivity.

vk: Did it surprise you? The timing of your release might have had an impact on the perception for this work. It was around the time all these celebrity nudes were leaked which was clearly an attack on someone's personal space. Where people felt entitled to women's bodies, and they felt they had a right to look at these images. But you turned it around by giving them permission to look at your body.

ms: Yeah, I guess it turned into a commentary on how you can be in control of your image.

vk: Do you identify with the person you are in the work you put out there? How much of what we see online is you and how much is a persona you created, whose image you carefully curate and control?

ms: At first, I thought Molly Soda was a created persona but then I thought Molly Soda is me because I'm not lying, I'm not dressing up and play make-believe. It's all real. It's me, it's part of me. But I think it's really both because I'm curating and I'm controlling the image. I'm giving you access to what I want you to see, even when you think it's embarrassing or funny or weird, I'm still the one evoking this emotion. Just because I post "ugly" pictures doesn't mean I'm any more real than someone who posts "hot" pictures. It's still a constructed reality. I'm highlighting parts of myself that I want to highlight. I'm feeding you the content. So I think it's both, me and a persona.

vk: You get some really, really weird comments on the stuff you share. What was your initial reaction to something like: "hello sweet baby, I want you to suck my dick." Is this something you anticipated? Or was it something that surprised you at first but then you thought "cool, I can work with this"?

ms: Yes, that's exactly it. I remember the first "gross" message I got was from someone at high school on an online journal. This teenage boy commented on a series of pictures of me "You have DSL." I didn't know what "DSL" meant and had to look it up... just for the record, it means dick sucking lips (laughs). That was in 2006. The more work I put out the more comments I get - good and disturbing ones. I like to work with what people give me because it's what social and digital media is all about. Communication. Direct feedback and engagement.

vk: Do you think that people - bc they know now that you use this kind of stuff and that you have this massive platform - do you think that they want to be part of your space and feel more inclined to write something offensive so they can be part of the game?

ms: Sure, some people do. But I genuinely think that the dudes that say shit like that don't really know who I am. They don't know that I'm an artist. A lot of the YouTube comments I get are from people who don't follow me. They find my content based on YouTube's algorithm and search results which I think is quite fascinating. Because it means their reaction is a good representation of how they feel and act online. This is what they would say to some other girl's feed. So I definitely get the weirdest comments on YouTube and Instagram.

## INBOX FULL

Full screen is unavailable. [Learn More](#)

I dedicated an entire work to comments and people's reactions in "Inbox Full" (2012) which is a ten-hour video of me reading my comments. I'm reading every message that was sent to me on tumblr. But these comments on tumblr were more poignant because people who follow me on tumblr know who I am and what my work is about.

vk: Out of the Net-centric, web-based group of artist from our generation, is there anyone in particular whose work you admire or who you look up to? Have you come across work where you thought "that's genius, why didn't come up with that?"

ms: Oh sure! So many people. I would have to look through my phone and see what sort of stuff I've screenshotted or saved in recent times. But yeah there are so many...

vk: We love artist studios and have dedicated a social series to artist studios. How can we imagine your work space? The nature of your work doesn't need much space so where do you work from and how?

mk: From my bedroom, on my bed mostly (laughs).

vk: Can we get a photo of you on your bed?

ms: Totally.

vk: Awesome. Thanks so much for your time!

\*\*\* Molly sent me two shots - an informal and a formal portrait of herself on her bed and I'll be sharing it on our Instagram on Sunday. Follow @ArtRabbit and #StudioEnvySunday to see it.

Vivi is ArtRabbit's managing editor. Follow her on Twitter or Instagram. For more updates on contemporary art events follow ArtRabbit on Twitter, Facebook or Instagram.