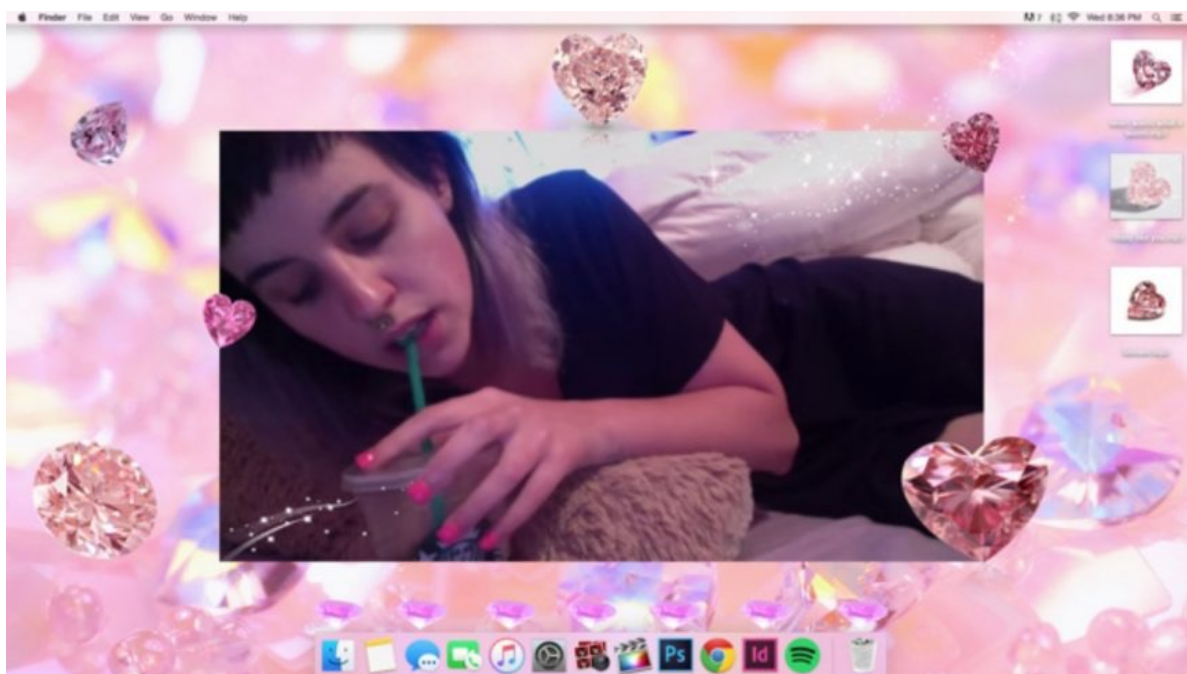


Priganica, Amar and Gagnon, Marie-Claire, 'Going Back Online – A Chat with Molly Soda', Widewalls, (April, 2017)

<http://www.widewalls.ch/molly-soda-interview/>

GOING BACK ONLINE - A CHAT WITH MOLLY SODA

Digital Art, New Media • Amar Priganica & Marie-Claire Gagnon



Active since the days of AOL, **Molly Soda** was a part of the first generation of adolescents to transition their poignant, private scrawlings to **the growing realm of online diaries** – still confessional, but exposed to the eyes of others.

These days, Soda has generated a significant online following, sharing her web-based performances across social media platforms including Facebook, Tumblr and Twitter. Through opening up and expressing her vulnerability online, via **the private space of her bedroom**, Soda explores the

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technological mediation of self-identity, contemporary feminism, culture and perversion.

After exhibiting her work at **Annka Kultys Gallery** in London and **Breezeway Gallery** in Bloomington, she is currently showing the artifacts of her earliest online experiences at **leiminspace** in Los Angeles. Most recently, Molly Soda and Arvida Byström pushed the boundaries of social media guidelines by publishing *Pics or It Didn't Happen* – a book of images banned from Instagram, which features a wide range of subject matter and our society's complex views on the image of the human body and censorship.

Amar Priganica and **Marie-Claire Gagnon** talked to Molly Soda about going back in time for her latest exhibition, how capitalism and feminism go together and why it's important to not take everything online at face value.



Molly Soda; Courtesy: The Artist & Annka Kultys Gallery

Thanks For the Add

Amar Priganica & Marie-Claire Gagnon: This week, your solo show “thanks for the add!” is opening at leiminspace in Los Angeles. Viewers are invited to explore your early interactions with the Internet. Can you tell us about the motivation behind revisiting your teenage self?

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Molly Soda: Yes, it's a show about my early life online and it deals with this era of sharing things before the social media we know today came up. I've been thinking about how the whole Internet has changed over the years and how I evolved with it. I mean, I've pretty much been documenting my life online since I was 14 years old. It's a very personal show because I'm using all these things I put out there on MySpace, LifeJournal and Zynga when I was younger. So *"thanks for the add!"* deals with questions about archiving and with how we put so much faith in the Internet. And it's really hard to even go back five years because so many things get lost over time – they're sort of decaying online. "Bit rot" is a term that somehow stuck with me. We don't really think about preserving all these little pieces of information, which are actually very fascinating and important. People find it really hard to access this content from the past. But luckily I've been using the same password since I was 12.

Amar Priganica & Marie-Claire Gagnon: Was self-representation online more honest back then?

MS: I don't necessarily think so. People have always been trying to cultivate a personal brand or persona on the Internet. It's actually quite an old concept that has only recently been gaining more attention from the public. The way we exhibited our taste online was through customization. You'd customize a layout on these websites to represent your personality. You were able to give people an idea of who you are by picking a song, choosing [pictures](#) and truly expressing yourself without being bound to standardized design. We're still trying to do these things today but it's within these confined social media spaces. Everything is really streamlined and controlled, but we still feel like we have this massive amount of control. But looking at the old content, you can see how free we actually were. So it wasn't necessarily more honest but we had more freedom to express ourselves.

Inspiration and Influences

Amar Priganica & Marie-Claire Gagnon: How did you decide which pieces of your online history to share in "thanks for the add!"?

MS: It's very interesting to take old content that wasn't intended to be art and to interpret it in an artistic way, instead of being like: "Hey, here's my blog entry from 2007, look at it" because that's not interesting. I mean it's interesting to me because I have a lot of memories attached to those things – but that doesn't necessarily imply that it means anything to anyone.

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Therefore, it was a big challenge to pick out the things that actually have a meaning. For example, I'm showing a post about my first break-up. And what's relevant about that isn't the actual physical break-up itself but rather the comments this post received. Communication was super different back then and it's really interesting to reflect on it in another context.

Amar Priganica & Marie-Claire Gagnon: Do you also get inspiration from the art world outside the Internet, for example, from traditional media like painting?

MS: Absolutely! The Internet isn't my only source of inspiration. But most of the paintings I end up seeing, I see online. You know, sometimes we can't access these physical places. But I do like going to shows. That is for sure. I think it's beneficial to see art outside of the Internet. You get a sense of materiality and scale, which are things you just can't grasp online.

Amar Priganica & Marie-Claire Gagnon: You probably get asked about your favorite digital artists a lot but who are your favorite painters?

MS: My favorite painters? I don't know who my favorite painters are. I just have a giant folder on my computer with paintings of women. So I just look at the paintings I think are nice. I'm a bad artist, I don't know anything about art history. Is that bad?

Amar Priganica & Marie-Claire Gagnon: No, absolutely not! Looking through a folder of collected paintings is like scrolling through your Instagram Explore page and liking visual content by people who you don't actually know.

MS: Yeah, you don't have to be emotionally invested in someone in order to enjoy the things they make. Although I think that a lot of people would disagree with that. On the other hand, for me as an artist, I feel like I'm selling myself as well as my art. But that's the nature of my work, so it's okay.

Female Artists and Feminism

Amar Priganica & Marie-Claire Gagnon: You also recently published a book with Arvida Byström called “[Pics](#) or It Didn’t Happen”, in which the two of you are showing pictures that have been deleted by Instagram.

MS: Yes, this was the first book either of us has published and it was very satisfying to make something so relevant to our society. People usually don’t think about social media on that outside level because they tend to see everything online at face value.

Arvida had complained about some [photos](#) of her being taken down by Instagram and I suggested we make a book about it. Our publisher Prestel was really into the idea so we put up a call for submissions and received thousands of photos. In the process of sorting the photos, it became clear that censoring is a really broad issue. We learned a lot about how censorship works and what taking an image off a platform does to our collective memory. This act of cleaning up the Internet is very interesting. Like what needs to be cleaned up and how does that make us feel about ourselves and other people? And why are certain bodies being treated like violent imagery? We think it’s really important for our generation to reflect on how Instagram classifies non-safe content.

Amar Priganica & Marie-Claire Gagnon: The other day you posted a picture of a storefront that was showcasing pillows with the word “feminist” written on them. How do you feel about feminism getting exploited by capitalism in the last few years? Especially in regard to taglines like “The Future Is Female,” which are erasing queer, trans or other non-binary people entirely.

SM: I agree that this can be harmful. But I think that everything is going to be co-opted by capitalism because that’s just the society we live in. Nothing good can stay, right? And I also think that feminism is so broad and so open to anyone’s interpretation, and therefore can be completely misused. I don’t necessarily feel upset that feminism is being exploited because I know that’s just how these things work. Like think about when it was really trendy to be organic and green and care about the environment – suddenly we were all mad at fast food. So somehow people branded that and made it a thing. And what’s happening to feminism is just an iteration of that. That’s why I don’t

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necessarily feel hurt – if anything, I’m a bit amused by it. And if capitalism is a way to get people to think about important issues, maybe it’s okay. I’m never going to be mad at something for being a mainstream idea. But at the same time, I don’t know what your interpretation of feminism is going to be if you’re someone who’s wearing a “The Future Is Female” shirt. It’s a complicated issue.

Amar Priganica & Marie-Claire Gagnon: You once stated that female artists make the best work. Do you still stand by that?

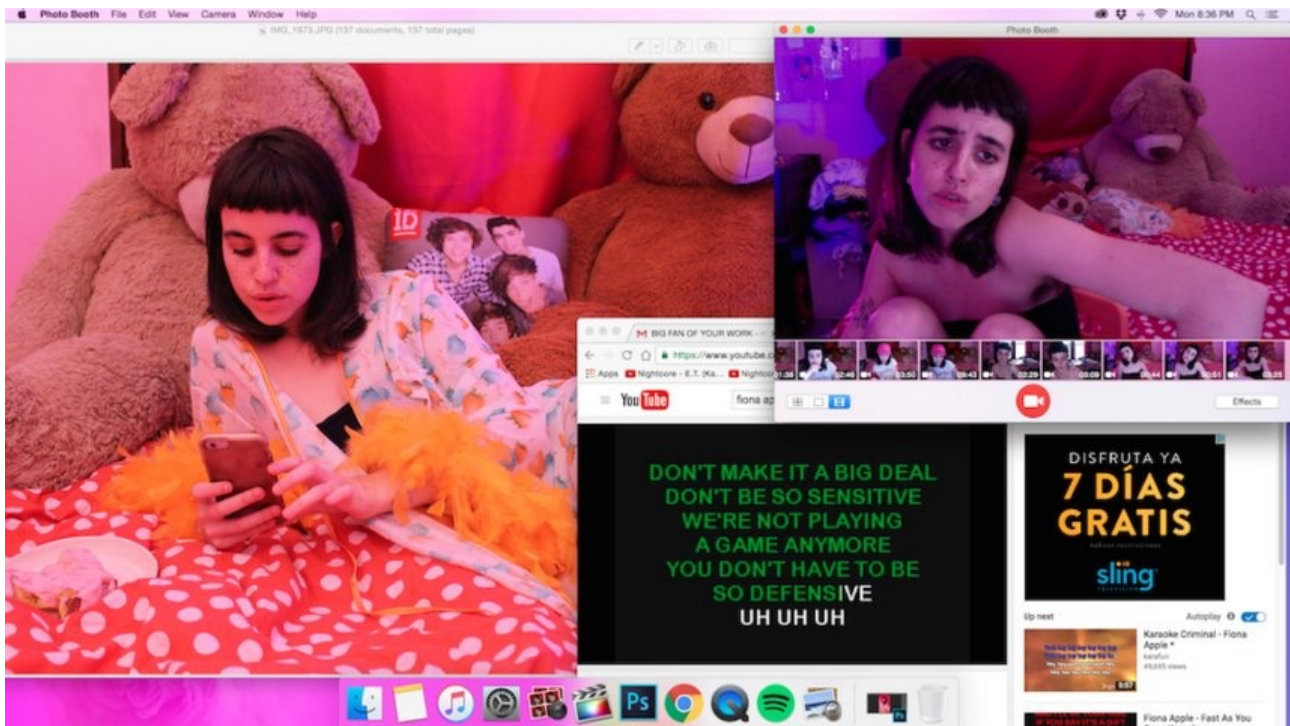
MS: I feel a little bit different now. Obviously, I’m very attracted to a more feminine approach to art – not necessarily female but feminine. I feel like when I look at a piece of art, I can tell who made it. Like what type of person made it. And I definitely think that there’s a common theme in my taste. I do like to say things to be a little bit provocative sometimes, you know. And I’m not going to lie – I genuinely believe that I’m always going to be more interested in a feminine aesthetic. It simply speaks to me more than anything else.

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Arvida Byström, Molly Soda, Chris Kraus: *Pics or It Didn't Happen*, Images Banned from Instagram, 2017. Prestel Verlag. Courtesy: Pressten Verlag

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Molly Soda – Don't Be So Sensitive, 2016. C-Type print on aluminium 55.2 x 31 cm (21 3/4 x 12 1/4 in); Unique Courtesy: The Artist & Annka Kultys Gallery

Featured image: MOLLY SODA – Our Song, 2015; NewHive Page and YouTube video, 15 min 11 sec; Dimensions variable; Edition of 3 +1AP; Courtesy: The Artist & Annka Kultys Gallery.