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Molly Soda Releases 'I don't want you to miss me' Zine, Talks Recent Internet Controversy

After the release of her last NSFW zine "Should I send this?" digital artist Molly Soda became the target of vicious criticism, having her work heavily scrutinized by hordes of keyboard warriors. As a follow-up to the controversial project, Soda has released, "I don't want you to miss me:" another collection of selfies and nudes, except this time her own body isn't featured at all.

By choosing not to photograph herself for this project, the omnipresent feeling that something's missing threads throughout the zine. The result is a dynamic meditation on dealing with loss, whether it's missing specific people, pets or even objects. Using sound and audio clips in the digital version, (yes, there is a physical version too), Soda creates a strong level of intimacy between herself and the viewer, forming her presence even though she can't actually be seen.

We recently chatted with Soda about the project and received her thoughts on Internet criticism, personal aesthetic and ex-boyfriends.

Describe, "I don't want you to miss me," in your own words.

"Basically it's a collection of texts and images based on loss or missing someone or something—kind of feeling someone's presence without them necessarily being there. It could even be an object or a person or a pet, it doesn't necessarily have to be a specific thing. It was a collection of texts that I had written about that. The images in the zine are basically set up like I would be taking a selfie, but I move out of the frame when I go to take the photo. If you went to look up photos of me, like tagged photos of me on Tumblr, you would recognize all the backgrounds from previous photos so they're not unfamiliar spaces. I wanted to use that to highlight something missing or something being gone, and also as a response to the use of my body in my last zine 'Should I send this.' People got really swept up in this idea that I was using my body or leaking my own nudes and the zine became a lot more of something that I didn't necessarily expect it to become. I wanted to sort of react to that, as well."



Would you say this zine is a direct response to the criticism you received for “Should I send this”?

“I would say it is a follow-up. I think that it is laid out the same way that my previous zine was laid out where there’s equal parts text and equal parts images. They’re both about different things, but I think they have similar feelings. I wanted to take the chance to follow up and respond to my last zine with a new zine, so it’s not completely out of the blue.”

Designed as mediation on loss, was there one particular person or a experience that inspired you to make “I don’t want you to miss me?”

“Yes, I think I touch on a few, but the major person or instance is about an ex-boyfriend, which is weird because I haven’t dated anyone for two years now. I moved to Detroit after I broke up with this person, but when I made the zine, I was thinking about how you can still be affected by someone that you haven’t really seen in a long time, like physically seen. I talk a lot about this person and the conversations we’ve had or about them still having my things that I’ve lost. I think the main focus of the zine is about this person that I used to date and how it’s been two years and I still haven’t really felt their presence lifted out of my life yet. I also talk about pets dying and people in my life leaving and the general feeling of loss as well, but I feel that the ex-boyfriend thing sort of anchors it all together.”



Does he follow your work?

“I’m not sure how closely he follows my work and I don’t think he would ever tell me. I still haven’t figured out if I want to directly send him a link or send him a physical copy of it or if I just want to have it exist and maybe he’ll find it. In general, it doesn’t make me nervous. I feel like anyone who dates me has signed up to be a part of my Internet life. Not that I would ever say anyone’s name or post photos of them, but that’s my experience and that’s what my work’s about, so most people are aware of that. This isn’t the first time I’ve talked about him online or in a piece before.”

What are the main differences between the physical and digital versions of this zine?

“The digital and the physical zine will have the same images, but they’ll feel a little bit different. For the digital zine, I made it a little more involved than the last zine I did. All the images in the digital version are gifs. Except for the front page, not much is happening in the gifs because I’m taking videos of those empty spaces and gif-ing them, but nothing is really moving. I also recorded the audio from those spaces, so I use that on those pages, too. You hear the noise of an empty room and then I’m speaking over it reading the text. For the digital portion there’s a little bit more going on just because I like to take advantage of my tools.”

Do you feel like you have more creative freedom when making a digital zine versus a physical copy?

“Yeah, I just think there’s a lot more access in terms of digital zines. A lot more people can see it; it allows me to use my tools; I can use my voice; and I can use moving image. It’s easier to get it out

to people, but I think there's still something so intimate and special about holding a zine and reading it alone or spending time with a physical object. I wanted to make both. Since my work is mostly digitally based, zines are kind of the only way I can actually give people my work in the physical sense."



The controversy surrounding your previous zine "Should I send this?" seemed to mainly revolve around everyone's obsession of categorizing you. Personally, how do you define yourself?

"I view myself as an artist and as a feminist. I think all of the work that I make is inherently feminist. Art and feminism are words that people are constantly trying to define and I think that if it doesn't fit into their definition, then people get frustrated and that's when there's backlash. I think that photographing yourself and putting your work out there as a woman, being vulnerable and talking about intimacy, and being open and sharing is inherently feminist.

I think people also had a lot of problems with the way that my zine was put together because people tend to think of art as having to be a technically skilled thing. The thing I like about making digital work is that it's a little bit lowbrow because everyone can do it in a way, and everyone does it differently. I think the questions of "What is art? Is this art?" will be going on forever. If people think that something's easy or if it's something they could do themselves, they dismiss it as not art. I don't think that's fair because I think that art is anything you've created that you want to call art. I think the discussion it sparked was interesting because it's better to have people talking about your work, instead of putting something out and not having anyone say anything or react to it."

Are you worried about this zine's message being misconstrued as well?

"I think any time you put something online or put yourself online, you're always going to get misconstrued. I think people are going to read into whatever you do with their own background and their own biases. We're all different people and we all digest content differently and that's okay. I've always been aware that whatever you do when you're putting yourself online, people are going to have a comment on it, whether or not it's negative or positive. I'm not worried about it. I also think that because I'm not using my body [in this zine] that there will be substantially less backlash. It was interesting because on my 'Should I send this?' piece, no one was making comments about the actual text. I'm wondering if because I'm taking my body out of the equation, people will find something else they want to comment on or if the text will shine more."

How do you think your aesthetic have evolved over the years as an artist?

"It's evolved a lot. I think that when I first started making work or when I first was in art school, I was always online. I was always blogging or posting photos of myself, and then I was also in a photography program. I felt this need to separate my art process and my online life. Then I realized as time went on that I was unhappy and that I wasn't interested in taking photos the way I thought I should be taking photos in the way that someone traditionally thinks about a photographer. Then

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I started thinking about websites as art and videos as art and using the Internet as a tool to get my work out there and using it as a medium to make work on instead of having to make a print, painting or a physical piece. I think I've evolved in that way that I'm not separating my real life practice from my online art practice anymore. It's all melded into one thing."