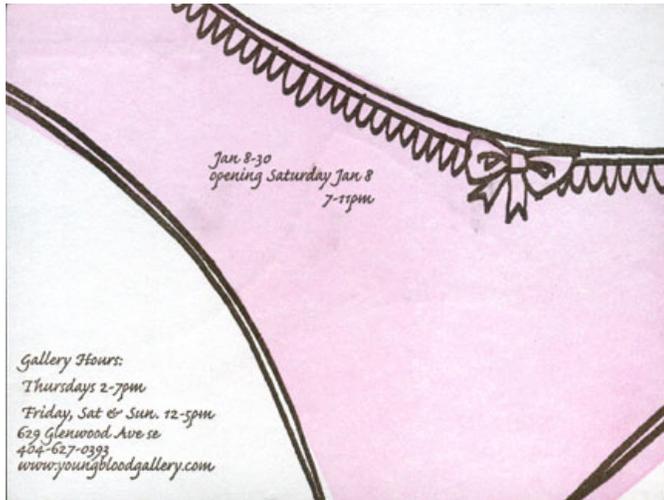


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our night in the panty hideaway unit

Editors



Dear readers, your adventurous comrades in arts have been at it again. Ahoy ye ahoy ye, for we are about to proclaim our truths, pirate style, or is that commando style? All that we know is that it's not doggie style. So let the virgins be protected and the granny trou be run up the flagpole as we begin. Kristin says we've gotta include the phrase "free-lippin" so there it is, in case we forget later. Yeah! Free-lippin. And while we're at it, might be time to go ahead and lay our cards on the table. First off, we both feel that sex is a really great thing. Remember? The show that the Beaster rated among the best of 2004, we rated as a visit to the dickless realm. Not that there's anything wrong with dickless sex. Second, a comprehensive survey of our editorial staff reveals that underwear use- we refuse to use the word "panties" (ech! Julie is distressed to have just typed the word "panties")- ranges between 10 and 70% of the time. Thus: many days are not greeted with cries of rapture over any laundry item, especially underwear. Although Kristin does have a favorite bra. And Julie really wants to tell you something about what little underwear she has, but can't think what. Ratsalad!

Now down to some serious art talk. Seriously, all silliness ends now. Only that makes Julie feel like she can't type anymore. But Kristin was only joking. Phew! Bet you were worried. We're not going all *October* on you so soon, but we might promise to use the word *object* at least once. And maybe *ontology*, if you're good.

First we'd like to tell you about Lauren Clay's small gallery installation at Eyedrum. We'd both seen her work before, as part of the *This is the Future* show at Saltworks this summer. Kristin remembers being really affected by the work at that time; for Julie, the context of the small gallery made this work about contained space more powerful.

Lauren's work is subtle and eloquent, simultaneously elegant and pathetic. Her style draws formally from predecessors such as Robert Morris' drooping felt sculptures and Eva Hesse's organic string works; but Clay's works are less earthy and biological, and more evocative of Superman's immaterial Fortress of Solitude.

We were lucky enough to interview Lauren at the opening of her show, and were impressed with the level of imagination and articulate awareness she brings to her work. It's rare to encounter someone so engaged in the expression of her work, both visually and verbally.

The *Hideaway Units* and *Rescue Units* are overtly pristine and pretty, but there are disturbing elements, too. The work is clearly about surviving, on the level of surviving the banal, as Lauren described it in our interview, but also on the level of trauma from physical, emotional, and sexual violence. Titles like *Proposed Communal Hideaway Unit for Virgins* and *Proposed Rescue Unit for Virgin Hideaways* evoke the systematic violence of a predatory world. Lauren says she uses the word *virgin* loosely, in the sense of anyone who is untouched by the world, and she uses the word *rescue* loosely, in the sense of being comforted in an austere and empty place. But the physical slicing of her paper supports and the endemic sadness of the works' emotional tone imply multiple, darker readings.



Whether intentional or not, mixing of the banal and the traumatic is perhaps one of the most eloquent qualities of Lauren's work, as traumatic experiences blend seamlessly into all of our lives once they have occurred, making them both horrific and banal in continued experience.

Lauren's work rises above simple references to victimization and escapism through her latent faith in the ultimate, unconditioned existence of the refuges she describes. These are spaces she has found through an archeology of intentions, rather than created

through fantasy or deliberate rational thought. Much in the same way that the Secret Garden is simply there to be found in Frances Hodgson Burnett's classic children's novel, and in the way that internal spaces of respite are available to be found in meditation practice, Lauren's enclosures await those needing shelter in times of trouble. We all need our fortresses of solitude sometimes to keep doing right in the world.

Movin on down. Take off your pants, we're going to the panty show. Question: why do women wear *panties* and men wear *underwear*, or *briefs*, or even manly *boxers*? On the sidewalk outside Youngblood Gallery, Julie made the bold and possibly cola-induced statement that "*panty* IMPLIES molestation." This may be going too far, but the word does include pant, and it IS sickly diminutive. And pant is also what you do into the telephone, if you are a masher.

Back to art again. Art sure is a stern mistress & a big trouble with this fact is that it's possible to make art without having a complete understanding of its pesky implications. First of all, Ratsalad has nothing but love for Youngblood. This is the first time we've reviewed a show at the East Atlanta gallery, but we're sure we'll be back to see more emerging artists. In this city, it's really important that Youngblood exists as a community center and a venue for art that might not otherwise be seen.

That said, we were unfortunately not very impressed with Erin Bennett's *Panty Project*. Too many points were left untouched to leave us warm and rosy, conceptually speaking of course. Overall, the photographs were visually appealing, with pretty colors, blurry pastoral settings, trim midriffs, and snazzy gold frames. No problem here, and a big step up from what you'd find in the dressing room at Victoria's Secret.

Our conversation with Erin, who was generous enough to spend quite a while talking with us at the opening about her work, opened more questions than it answered. If, as Erin says, the photographs aren't about sex, then why is it the Panty Project, and not the Sock Project? Surely everyone has a favorite pair of socks, too, by the same thinking that presumes a favorite pair of underwear, and they DO live in the same drawer. Several of the photographs clearly involved the photographer straddling the half-clothed bodies of her models. How is this not involving sex, when the act of creating the work creates a sexual experience?

The images' titles (pseudonyms along the lines of *Ms. Racy* or *Gigi*) imply a peepshow sensibility, and the show's pricelist reads like a Cheshire Bridge "spa" menu. You can choose exotic India for \$130, go even higher with naughty Ms. Beal at \$140, or settle for Caroline next door, at only \$65.



In this body of work, restrictive filters of innocence and anonymity around the unavoidably sexual push into fetishization of the innocent. It's as if Erin is trying to make the work without acknowledging important cultural contexts. We all know about *Lolita*, we've heard we can sell our dirty underwear online, we are aware of the various ways society likes to put a girl in a pretty box, for show. To state the obvious, our culture is rife with images of women as objects, rather than individuals. It is impossible to make portraits solely of women's pelvic regions without opening this door, so some compelling reason must underlie such work for it to rise above the tide of pussy galore we all swim in already. If no account is made of the women whose bodies fill the panties, why not photograph the underwear alone?

Anonymity does not further the work. Nakedness is not safe, ever. It is vulnerable, sometimes exhilarating, sometimes terrifying, but attempts to render it safe render it paradoxically creepy. The natural lighting in Erin's photographs is indeed lovely, supersaturating the images' colors, but her models' presence in anonymous woodscapes is problematic. The equation of women's bodies with nature is a tired horse to be riding on, and leaves us wishing for a good stallion.

And that puts us back onto the subject of real sex. We wonder why real, openly erotic art is so rare to find these days. Not self-consciously clever-sexy work, or comments on gender roles, or other political or apolitical gymnastics, just good fucking and its role in our lives. Without fake tits, with pubic hair, and good times for all. This is still meaningful. Why have we turned our backs on the erotic as the subject of compelling art? Is it the advent of AIDS? Have we really come very far from the repressions of the Kinsey era in our ability to look at our sexuality with a steady eye? In the past few years, we have seen shows in Atlanta about penises, vaginas, playtoys, primping, and other sidesteppings, but mostly none of these are directly erotic, or intimate.

So, a challenge to ourselves and all of you. Can we all make work, whether erotic or not (though erotic would be nice) which is truly intimate in its exploration of human experience? Can we write the intimate, draw it, act it out as part of our lives? In response to the goat-fest of this Republican inauguration period, we imagine a counter culture which thrives on passion: in food, in sex, and in love.