

April 2009

**Holly Andres
Sparrow Lane**

DNJ Gallery
154½ N. La Brea Avenue, Los Angeles
(323) 931-1311 www.dnjpgallery.net



Sparrow Lane

In Holly Andres' solo exhibition at DNJ Gallery, puberty anxiety never looked so good. This display of fifteen large-format color photographs and a wall installation (mirrors, candles, and smaller-framed photos) by the Portland-based artist dresses up pretty girls in storybook narratives to articulate awkward sexual development. Graced with a Pre-Raphaelite flare for dramatic gesture, rich color, scintillating detail and literary reference, Andres revels in female pubescence with an Alice in Wonderland brand of pathological voyeurism that would have delighted Lewis Carroll. But where Carroll was content to keep the "present" wrapped in both his literary fantasies and his obsessive photographs of young girls, Andres directs her starlets to pry loose the lid of the metaphorical box safeguarding illicit sexual consciousness.

Staged in and around "Grandma's house," these technically dazzling photographs function as melodramatic signposts guiding feminine somatics and psycho-social identity. Both these goals are bound here to maternal haunting (second-hand vintage clothes are worn in many of the scenes, suggesting mommy's wardrobe) and Eve's forbidden fruit transgression. In images like *The Golden Pillow*, *The Glowing Drawer* and *The Red Purse*, everyday objects become estrogenic metaphors that engender an awkward, conspiratorial sexual awareness. The empty birdcage in *The Missing Bird* testifies to the cost of this awakening: innocence lost. In *The Secret Portal*, these juvenescent prisoners start looking -- as we all must eventually -- for an escape route away from the nest and into the wider world, where carnal pleasures and fertility banking await.



Sparrow Lane is a Freudian-infested adventure overloaded with Victorian baggage. Underneath the sentimental aesthetics in all of the photographs (old locations, props, costumes) lurk prudish, mid-nineteenth century English notions of female purity and conduct. Andres turns immense contemporary psychosexual female identity challenges--the kinds faced head-on by fellow photographers like Lauren Greenfield (*Girl Culture*) -- into charming, easy-to-swallow yesterdays.

by Darrin Little

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