



'Viva Lolita'

Curated by James Putnam

**14th March – 25th April,
Private View 13th March**

'Viva Lolita' presents a range of contemporary artists depictions of young teenage girls that capture the mingling of fading innocence with emerging sexuality. Inspired by the title of Vladimir Nabokov's notorious book, 'Lolita' has since been coined as a word, with seemingly widening connotations, for a sexy young teenage girl. Images of sensual and seductively dressed female adolescents have been an increasing phenomenon not only in the world of advertising and media but also in visual art, particularly in the genre of photographic portraiture. Acknowledging the complex nature of the transition from girl to womanhood, some contemporary artists have an inclination towards examining and deconstructing the sense of young teenage innocence and purity with a combination of irony and ambiguity. The current proliferation of erotized adolescent images coincides with the proposal that young girls are becoming sexually more active at an earlier age. The 'Lolita look' is also a range of provocative clothing aimed at the adolescent market while many parents are increasingly permitting or even encouraging their daughters to wear clothes and make up to appear older than they really are.

In Japan the term 'Lolita Complex', called *lolicon* refers to a genre of comic book illustration *manga* or animated cartoons *anime*, wherein childlike female characters are depicted in an erotic manner. This has spread to visual art and is linked to the quintessentially Japanese predilection for the small and cute, referred to as *kwaii*. This combination of the cute and erotic is typified by paintings of almost doll-like teenage girls whose sense of innocence and purity seem to be an incitement to defilement. Central to the controversy aroused by Nabokov's book published in 1955 and its subsequent film version by Stanley Kubrick's (1962) was the taboo theme of the sexual obsession of a middle-aged man for the under-age Lolita. But in the novel as the story unfolds we learn that Lolita is already quite sexually savvy and not merely an innocent virgin corrupted by a predatory older man. Using the mediums of painting and photography 'Viva Lolita', aims to explore the multi-faceted character of the adolescent girl embodied in persona of Nabokov's Lolita - a volatile synthesis of sweet, innocent, awkward, precocious, seductive and manipulative. This rich and varied collection of images is intended to stimulate the viewer to question sentimental associations with the idealized state of childhood and acknowledge the impure and often darker face of adolescence.

'Viva Lolita' brings together a selection of existing and specially commissioned works by 18 international artists some of whom are exhibiting in London for the first time.

Charlotte Beaudry (Belgium), Heli Rekula (Finland), Koichi Enomoto (Japan), Fafi (France), Feng Qianyu (China), Nick Ruston (UK), Nazif Topcuoglu (Turkey), Li Bo (China), Mark Karasick (Canada), Trevor Brown (UK), Nobuyoshi Araki (Japan), Hellen Van Meene (Netherlands), Lei Benben (China), Edvarda Braanas (Norway), Stu Mead (USA), Jens Lucking (Germany) Andrea Massaioli (Italy), Mat Collishaw (UK)

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