

MARTA EDMISTEN

March 23 - April 27, 2007 at [another year in LA](#), Northeast Los Angeles

by Mario Cutajar

Selected images from
"pinkpussypanties" project:



"Signed" photograph
of dressed mannekin.



Correspondence from a buyer.



Duplicate of bagged
panties sent to a customer.

In her show titled "lol" (as in "laughed out loud"), Marta Edmisten plays head games on multiple levels, not least the phallic. A sexual agent provocateur, she uses the Web to haul in samples of the fantasy life that flourishes in its depths, like some scientist studying the fauna around deep sea thermal vents--not a forced analogy given the lava-hot blurtings her clever come-ons tend to elicit. For anyone unacquainted with internet porn, some of the material may cause queasiness, but its real challenge is in what it says about the implicit parallels between the marketing of sex and the commodification of art. In both cases, the allure of the object depends on its ability to convey to prospective buyers the illusion that it is an object deeply craved by others. That's what being hot means. The object itself can be a nothing. In fact, as the vacuity of Warhol's production so adroitly demonstrated, the closer to nothing the object is, the more capable it is of serving as fantasy object, its desirability indexed exclusively to its desirability for others.

The truth of this is most evident in Edmisten's project entitled "pinkpussypanties." "I made a website," Edmisten reports on her website, [martaedmisten.com](#), "where I pretended to be three 18-year-old girls selling used panties. I modeled their personas on popular pornographic tropes: the Catholic virgin, the slut, the lesbian, the girl next door, and the Asian girl. I made the site pink, girlish and simple so it would look as if teenagers had actually produced it. The site contained photos, diary entries, and bios from each girl. For \$25, each customer received a pair of used panties (worn by the girl of their choice), a photo of the girl wearing the panties (shot using a hosiery mannequin), and a personal response letter. I saved all of the orders I received along with duplicates of everything I sent out." Visitors to the gallery can view these items, neatly collected in transparent baggies, arranged on the walls.

The fevered responses accompanying the orders for panties Edmisten received in response to her solicitation are remarkable for the specificity they display ("1 pair of High Cut Briefs or Full Briefs in a floral print in nylon or satin. . .No thongs!"), but even more so for their credulity. Keep in mind that Edmisten used a hosiery mannequin to model the panties.



Posted images of dressed mannekin.

What is it that lies behind such suspension of disbelief? Perhaps, something that lies behind all forms of faith, including the most sublime, the idea that out there *must* exist the thing that will satisfy, be it God or a pair of soiled panties cast off by a make-believe nubile virgin. The space of fantasy is populated by lurid figures that occlude the terrifying emptiness that supports them. And lest one judge too harshly the sad sack who wants to get off with the aid of a pair of panties bought online from a con artist, keep in mind that in the run up to the Iraq war, there were countless sad sacks who in their quest for multiple wargasms (Afghanistan was just foreplay) were willing to swallow whatever pretexts for invasion the Bush administration dished out.

"Blind Date," Edmisten's other work in the show, is a series of photographs of men who got suckered into showing up for a hot tryst after responding to an online ad by the artist in the guise of a horny ingenue looking for one-night stands. Unbeknownst to those men who showed up, their date was across the street snapping pictures of them as they waited for a thrill that never came.

In this, as in her other work, Edmisten retains the upper hand. It's like a meaner version of Candid Camera, except that the marks don't get to find out there is a camera.

It's easy to laugh at these libidinally ruled men and their willingness to make fools of themselves for the sake of a bit of friction. But perhaps the deeper significance of this work is in what it reveals about a culture oppressed, as Slavoj Žižek has noted, by the media-driven imperative to enjoy.

As modern, open-minded folks, we like to think we've come a long way since the dark days of our God-fearing, straight-laced parents (or grandparents) and their funny prejudices about sex and self-indulgence. But this freedom from inhibition and our belief that we are all entitled to do our thing come at a price, namely, the peculiar form of oppression that consists of the nagging sense that we are never enjoying ourselves enough even as others undoubtedly are. Pornstar Jenna Jameson recently authored a bestseller giving advice on "how to make love like a pornstar." Presumably, we need to know. Or else we're making love like ... who?

Like the people who watch pornstars make love and go out on blind dates with prospects who never show up.