

Tuesday, April 24th, 2012

## Bunnies in the Lily Pond: E.V. Day and Kembra Pfahler at Giverny

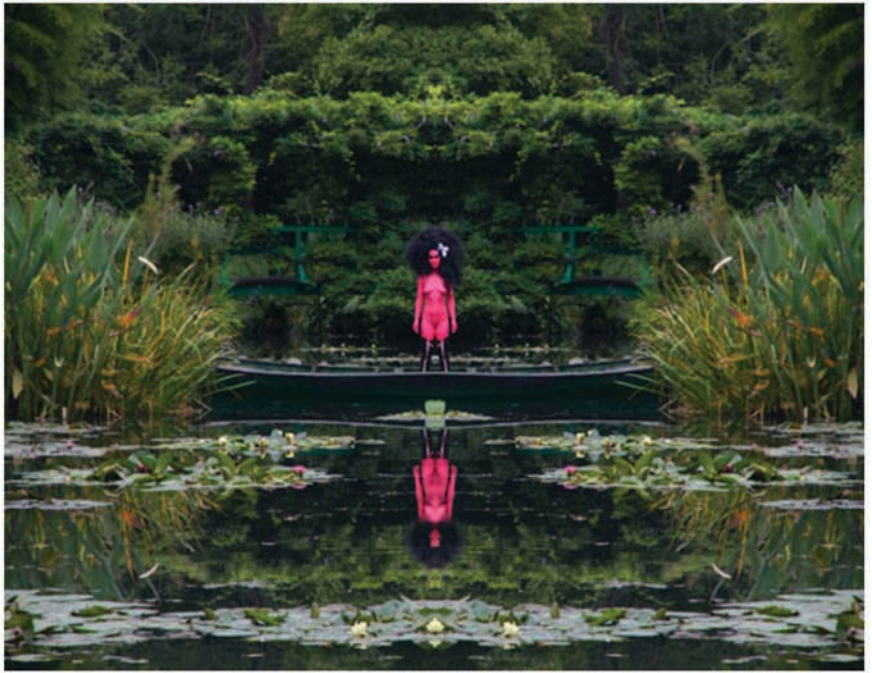
by Ellie Bronson

GIVERNY: by E.V. Day and Kembra Pfahler, at The Hole

March 30 – April 24

312 Bowery, between Bleecker and Houston streets

New York City, 212-466-1100



E.V. Day and Kembra Pfahler, Untitled 21, 2012. Archival photographic print mounted on sintra, edition of 3. 45 x 60 inches. Courtesy of The Hole

Walking into E.V. Day and Kembra Pfahler's delightfully campy exhibition at The Hole is like teleporting into an alternate reality. Lines between real and fake are not merely blurred but altogether irrelevant. The artists, assisted by a grant from Playboy, have transformed the gallery space into a delirious recreation of Monet's gardens at Giverny. Day had spent the summer of 2010 at Giverny after receiving the Munn Artist's Residency from the Versailles Foundation: her only instruction was to be inspired by the gardens. The Giverny that the artists have constructed on the Bowery is a utopian intersection of art and artifice, where sensory overload is *de rigueur* and childish delight the only appropriate reaction.

A gravel path winds through the gallery, cutting a noisily crunching swath through AstroTurf knolls and living flowers. Mulched flowerbeds feature tulips and roses. Goldfish swim in a lily pond spanned by a comically short arched bridge. The illusion is completed by a Sunday painter working away at an easel, churning out landscapes suitable for a Starving Artists sale at a Marriott. Day's photographs are hung on vinyl wallpaper emblazoned with lush weeping willows. Some of the large-scale works are brightly lit and prominently displayed, while other small-scale works are tucked away in unlit corners, making for delightful discoveries.

Day invited performance artist Kembra Pfahler to join her at Giverny, where she photographed her in character, as the Playboy Femlin-inspired frontwoman of glam-punk band The Voluptuous Horror of Karen Black. Pfahler is naked save for hot-pink body paint, thigh high pleather bondage boots, and a towering wig. Her painted skin perfectly matches the pink lilies, while her shiny boots reflect in the glimmering pond. It takes a minute to notice the eerie symmetry of some of the photographs, where Day has digitally manipulated the images into perfect mirrors of themselves like hallucinatory Rorschach tests. The unsettling effect boldly emphasizes the artifice of their *mise-en-scène*.

The exhibition's melding of nature and artifice, human and botanical, history and present, is thoroughly refreshing. Gallery visitors can sit on the fake grass and smell the flowers. Curious tourists pop their heads in the door, exclaiming to one another "there's a garden in there!" and, farther inside, "she's naked!" The artists relate an amusing anecdote in the press book at the front desk. As Pfahler and Day worked alone at Giverny, posing and shooting after the thousands of visitors had left for the day, Pfahler, unaccustomed to the lack of an audience, complained of the solitude. A solution presented itself when they discovered a group of gardeners spying on them from the bushes. Invited to participate, the delighted gardeners posed for pictures with the painted performance artist, no doubt appreciating her vibrant colors and exuberant demeanor as much as any of the blooms they tended daily.

Pfahler appears to own her environs like a futuristic wood sprite or a new species of plant-fembot hybrid. The audacity of Day's inspiration to transport this doyenne of East Village punk to Monet's storied garden seems oddly like the most logical choice in the world. Of course, Monet's Impressionism once shocked people too.



E.V. Day and Kembra Pfahler, Untitled 22, 2012. Archival photographic print mounted on sintra, edition of 3. 50 x 50 inches. Courtesy of The Hole