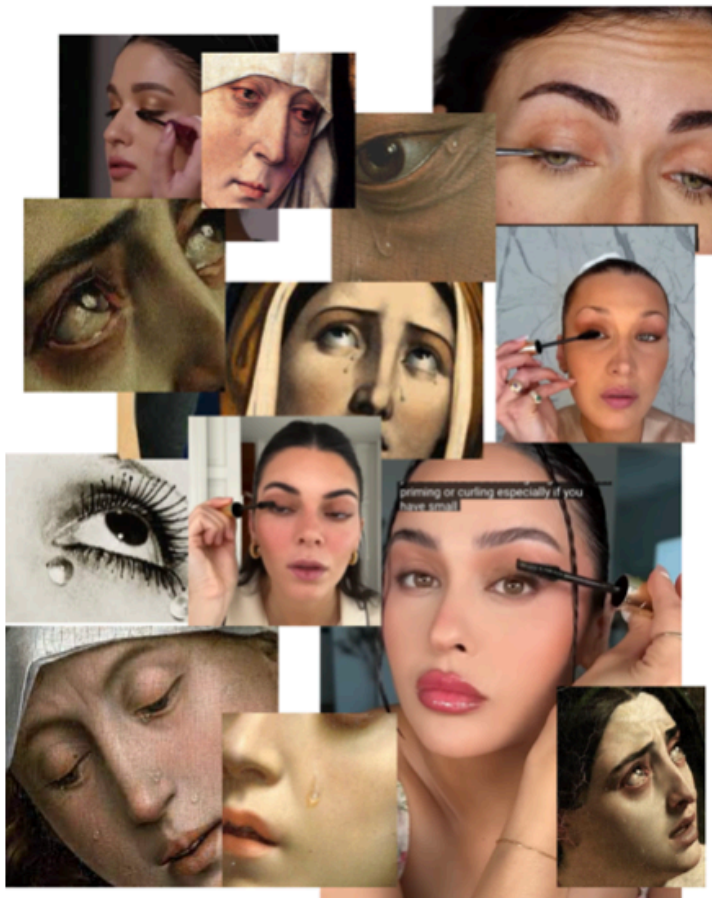
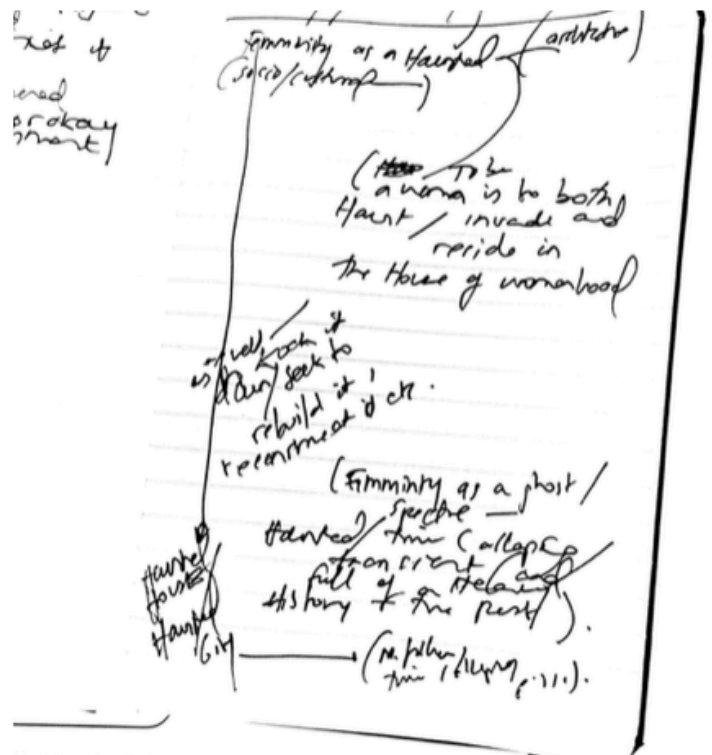
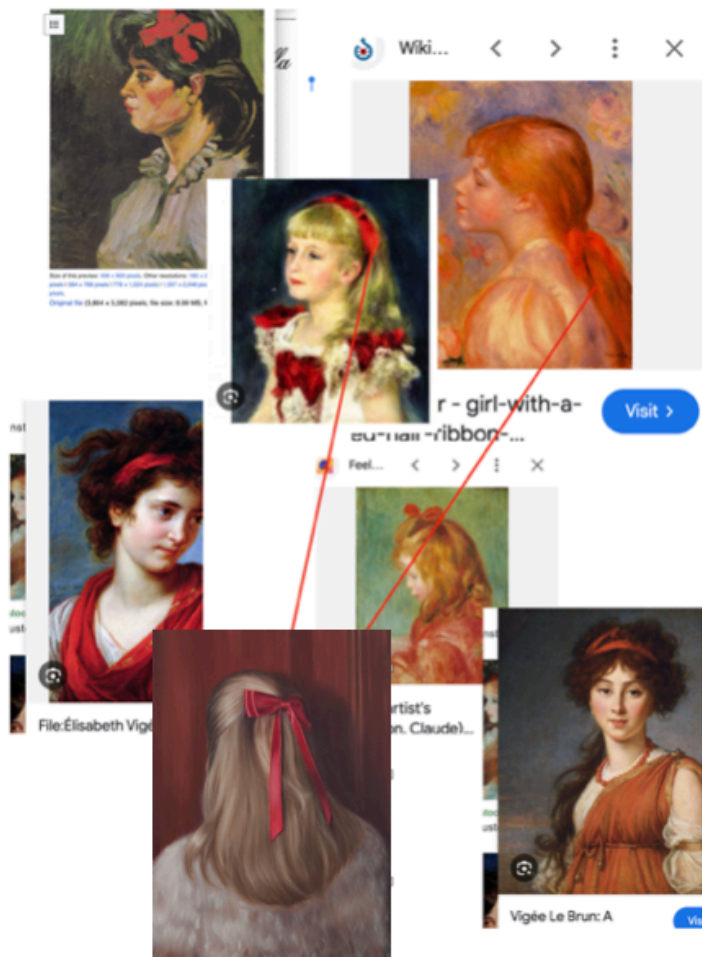




Lucy Robson : The Ghosted Codes of Femininity

Isabella Greenwood



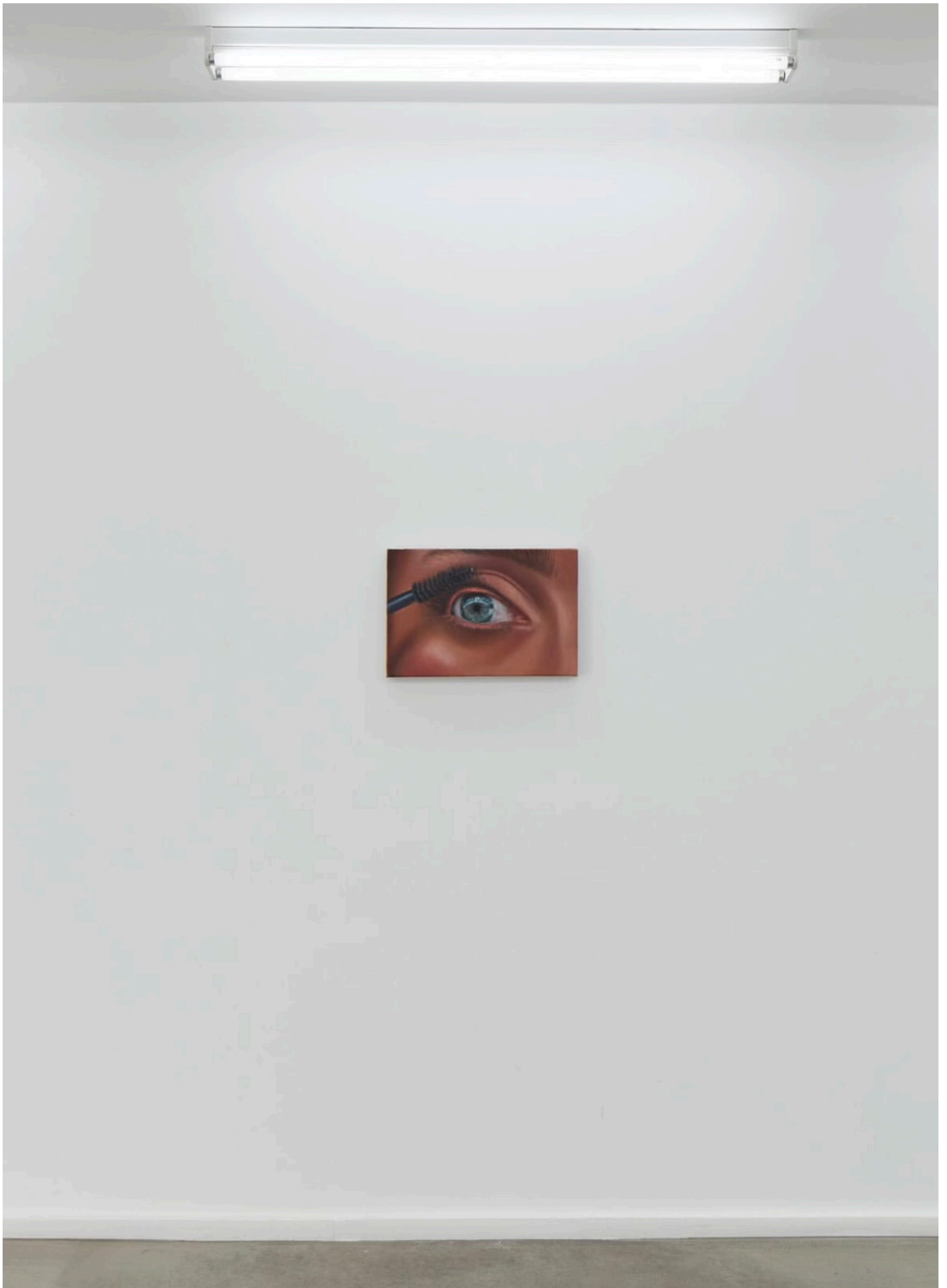
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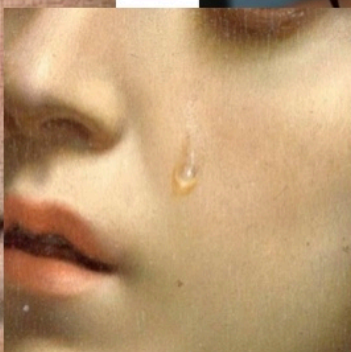
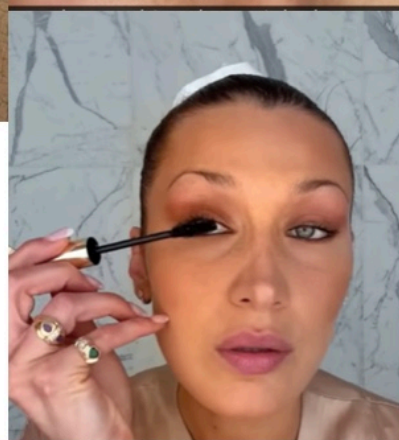
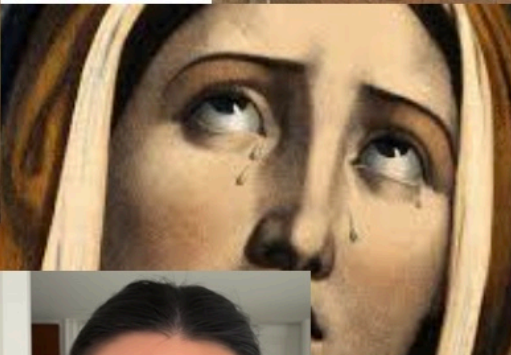
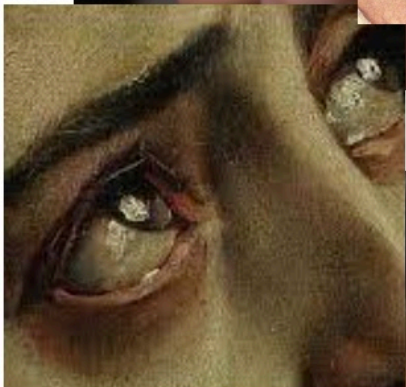
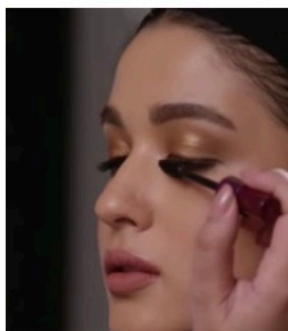
Lucy Robson is a South African visual artist living and working in London. Her practice engages with the visual and material textures of femininity, where hyper-aestheticised relics of girlhood, and their shelf of souvenirs—a pair of porcelain angels in prayer, a heart-shaped locket and harlow-gold hair—are neither fetishised nor dismissed but repurposed as important signifiers of girlhood.

Soft femininity is often mistaken for passivity, but in Lucy's work, it is wielded with sharp intentionality, its connotations rendered uncanny through their very excess. Lucy's signifiers of girlhood do not function as benign nostalgia, instead, they are reanimated as sites of tension, where blushed hues stand in friction with latent threats—an outstretched foot, raised vein, and a tender gasp signal at the deeper tensions behind her works.

The feminine, and by extension the girly-girl archetype, is historically and culturally loaded; both idealised and dismissed within the lexicon of visual culture. Lucy's work does not seek to reclaim or romanticise the aesthetic of girlhood but rather to interrogate its architectures: where does its power reside? Whom does it serve? And what might it obscure? Her aesthetic lineage extends from the delicate erotics of the Rococo—Boucher's pink-lit odalisques and Fragonard's weightless muses—to the darker ambiguities of Surrealism, where femininity was often rendered uncanny, a thing of veils, dolls, and fragmented bodies.

Western traditions have historically positioned women as reflections of masculinity rather than autonomous subjects, reducing femininity to a mirror-like aesthetic that reinforces male selfhood instead of asserting an independent ontological presence. By contrast, Lucy seeks to reposition femininity not as spectacle, but as a contested field of agency and signification. Her practice dismantles





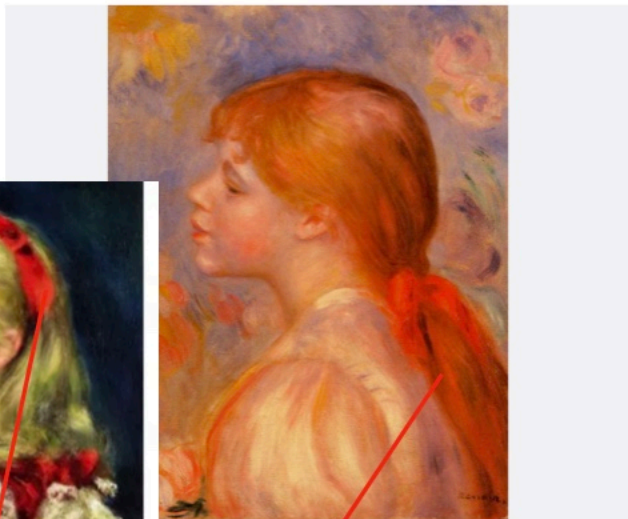




Size of this preview: 456 x 600 pixels. Other resolutions: 182 x 240 pixels | 584 x 768 pixels | 776 x 1,024 pixels | 1,557 x 2,048 pixels. Original file (3,864 x 5,082 pixels, file size: 8.99 MB, 1



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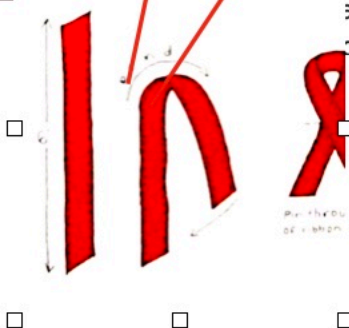
Feel...



File:Élisabeth Vigée-Le

and pins there!

artist's
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Vigée Le Brun: A

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the ornamental frameworks historically imposed upon the feminine, allowing for a rearticulation of girlhood as something unruly, excessive, and resistant to containment. While feminist theory has long sought to rescue femininity from its perceived fragility—recasting it as a site of resistance or empowerment—such binaries (submissive or subversive, weak or strong) often fail to capture the spectral, more ambivalent forces at play within the aestheticisation of girlhood. Lucy's work maps a more intricate terrain, where softness is not the opposite of tension, but rather its accomplice.

Lucy constructs a visual language that is neither derivative nor contingent, refusing the demand that femininity exists as an ornamental supplement to male subjectivity, or a mirror-like aesthetic that reinforces male selfhood rather than asserting an independent ontological presence. Through her work, Lucy resists this historical flattening, asserting a feminine aesthetic that is self-fashioning rather than reflective, self-possessed rather than absent.

A sensual gasp is titled, 'To please gods and deter demons', while an outstretched and perfectly manicured foot is named, 'Instant Crush'. Lucy pairs female sensuality with a somatic playfulness that feels at once girly, as it does religious. Lucy notes, 'Power, femininity and visibility are inextricably linked... even as young girls, we understand that the big and blazing stories happen to beautiful women. Catholicism shaped my basic instincts around image-making; a profound tethering between beauty and holiness, and a penchant for pain, emotional pageantry, and of course, high drama.'

For Lucy, the feminine is inextricably tied to its larger cultural context: while seeking to disassemble it at the same time. In distorting the idealised contours of femininity, Lucy's work embodies a haunted quality, by conjuring a femininity that appears stable and perhaps legible, but becomes eerie upon closer inspection: and is this not femininity's final form?

Lucy notes: 'You don't escape the realities of being a woman in this world. Some of those realities are easier to bear—even satisfying—but more often I find myself thinking that femininity is a life-long game that requires you to be devoted to your own contortion.' Lucy remarks that ultimately, her work is about the undoing of the fantasy, and showing what it might mean to face up to that, but still remain yoked to feminine symbology. Through the material syntax of her paintings, Lucy complicates the simplistic idea that this symbology is merely a construct to be reclaimed or rejected. Instead, she exposes its historical burden, its affective weight, its double-bind of seduction and constraint.

By repurposing relics of the girly archetype, she does not simply celebrate or critique them—she unsettles them, positioning femininity as something both deeply familiar and fundamentally estranging. Hers is an aesthetic language of ambiguity, where innocence is not a sanctuary but a site of tension, where beauty does not promise safety but instead

+ all phone
 friends
 & forgive
 not if
 need
 okay
 want

(Haunt/Community)

Community as a Haunted (architectural)
 (social/cultural)

(~~the~~ To be
 a woman is to both
 Haunt / invade and
 reside in
 the House of womanhood

is well
 as to look it
 down / seek to
 rebuild it
 & cement it etc.

(Community as a ghost /
 haunted space —
 time collapse
 from present
 full of a history
 & the past).

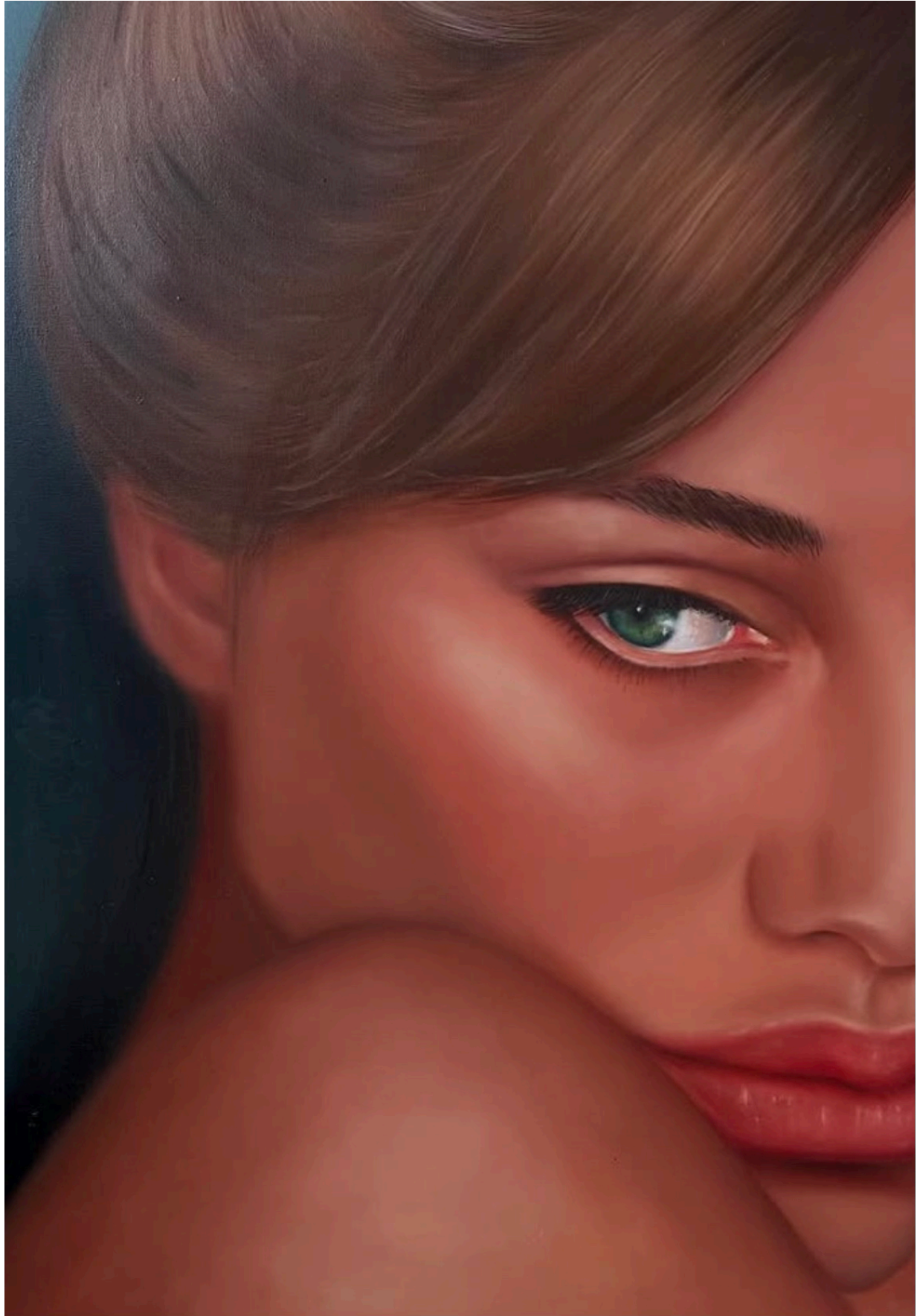
Haunted
 House
 Haunted
 Girl

(M. Fisher
 The History of...)

forges of something more insidious. In this, Lucy's work does not merely depict girlhood—it performs its contradictions, making visible the mechanisms by which femininity is constructed, consumed, and, ultimately, dismantled.

If femininity is a haunted architecture, then Lucy positions herself as both its inhabitant and its trespasser. Her work does not merely depict girlhood; it performs its contradictions, making visible the mechanisms by which femininity is constructed, consumed, and undone. It is within this interplay of ornamentation and alienation, that her paintings demand to be read—not as passive reflections, but as active interrogations of the gaze that seeks to contain them. Robson's work does not seek to resolve the tensions of femininity but rather to insist upon them, revealing a visual language that is spectral and insistently present.

Isabella Greenwood





every thing you
you change,
every thing you
changes you.



How Hunted Girls Become Haunted Women

By the palest beams of adolescent moonlight, I recall Judy's battered bible, with its ragged spine, its yellowed pages blooming wide, undisturbed by the closed eyelids of time, collecting dust on my preteen bedside

I slumbered all through puberty, woke up a child inside of a woman's body Admittedly, it isn't the kind of body most would deem appropriately 'womanlike' Limping awkwardly into a gutless, tragic twenty-five; I became a haunted house wailing too loud to get any proper shut eye All the doors unlocked and thrown wide, a haven for other little ghost girls to creep inside, seeking protection as they peaked timidly through the crooked blinds

Of the few men I've known intimately, they got just the one thing in common They're all such heavy sleepers, such hearty eaters, their shadows looming so wide and opaque in the door frame, I'm amazed how the world opens up and envelopes them in such a sincere embrace, how it scoops massive craters tailored precisely to their dull, lumbering gaits

Me, I don't take up quite so much space I was taught a man lying on top of me would hold my flighty coffin in place, keep it from drifting out the open window into the storied horror of another cliché, echoless night; The one of which our long-disrespected mothers, though crowing and bleating and yapping, Lord, they tried, but failed to instill in us a lasting dose of healthy fright

It belongs to the dreaded zombie, endlessly walking, the mute demon, wordlessly talking, her body flailing and floundering Convulsing at the polluted mouth of the nondescript river where she was unceremoniously dumped, on the naive precipice of her very first crush; Bloating and waterlogged when the hellhounds belatedly sniff what's left of her dignity out

Cut to the mighty policeman on the scene, he shakes his head in mock disbelief, and for all the cameras and microphones, nobody sees as he dips his grimy hands in the tainted water and slips them inside his finely pressed trousers

And he doesn't see me, a cuckoo clock high-noon screaming, unblinking Craning my neck from the spindliest branch on the shortest tree Because I swear, I saw one of her fingers twitching there in the bloody leaves But he starts Ziploc bagging her up in sad little snack-size pieces Tomorrow's lunch labeled neatly to be stowed away in the coroner's freezer

When I come to, my coffin unglued Scrap wood eating me, I am heaving My desperate lungs are the sorry ones doing all the pleading and imploring Caving under the weighted blanket of a so-called safe man, top of the food chain, blissfully snoring

And as I lie in the dark, waiting for the song of the grandmother birds, those earliest of mourners, I can't help but think of all the little ghost girls with crushed windpipes, and how if each one were to manage a solitary cry—their collective vocal chords, mangled but defiant, would it strike even a dent in the ear-splitting silence?

Or would those well-rested men we've been conditioned to defend, feign deaf from their warm beds? Are they all secretly playing pretend when they claim not to hear us?