



## THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL

### Fear and loathing in Los Angeles

ARTIST ALEX PRAGER lives and works in sunny L.A., where she photographs gorgeous but expressionless girls hidden beneath thick layers of make-up, bright blonde wigs, fake eyelashes and thrift-store outfits. Her subjects look like living dolls in a world of make-believe, and they often appear scared. Her photographs reveal an underlying atmosphere of unease and worry beneath the surface of constructed beauty and the false promise of happiness. "I'm creating this imaginary world, and it comes from me," she explains. "I can daydream all the time. I can basically say whatever I want, and no matter how disgusting or repulsive or dark or sad, it is easier to look at through cheerfulness or beauty." Her new series, *Week-End*, is an exploration of artificiality and paranoia in Hollywood. Like Cindy Sherman's early photography, Prager's glossy, colour-saturated images appropriate the aesthetic of film stills, and are visually evocative of the cinematography of David Lynch or a Technicolor Alfred Hitchcock. She is particularly inspired by the high drama of classic 1950s movies, with their powerful emotions of fear, longing and lust concealed underneath a camp theatricality. "Beneath this shell," says Prager, "there's a real person who's probably really scared." DEAN KISSICK

*Week-End* is at M+B, Los Angeles, until March 6. [www.alexprager.com](http://www.alexprager.com)  
Alex Prager, *Barbara* (2009). Courtesy the artist