

# REGEN PROJECTS

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## Los Angeles Times

# The reality behind dreams of glamour

By HOLLY MYERS  
Special to *The Times*

Tenderness isn't a quality one generally associates with the so-called Young British Artists, a generation far better known for irreverence, audacity and headline-grabbing showmanship. It's a palpable undercurrent, however, in the work of Gillian Wearing, whose third solo show at Regen Projects spans both the gallery's locations.

Most of Wearing's work over the last decade has revolved around the experience of the individual, whether alone or in the context of family. She approaches this theme with clear-headed sensitivity and compassion, often using the work to create neutral if tightly controlled spaces in which to allow her subjects to speak for themselves.

Such is the case in the two series on view here. "Pin Ups" consists of seven roughly poster-sized paintings, each depicting a single scantily clad (or in one case nude) model in an alluring posture. Wearing found these models — two men and five women, all nonprofessionals — through an ad she placed on the Internet.

In each case, she arranged for a makeover and a photo shoot, then commissioned science fiction illustrator Jim Burns to make a painting from one of the photos in line with the model's own preferences. At a glance, the paintings suggest a suite of straightforward, soft-core glamour shots or some vaguely ironic meditation thereon.

Look closely, however, and you will notice that the frames holding the canvases are actually hinged at one side, suggesting — as most glamour shots implicitly do — another reality



JOSHUA WHITE *Regen Projects*  
GILLIAN WEARING: "Rowena" is among the glamour portraits painted by Jim Burns for Wearing's "Pin Ups" series. The hinged canvases, when opened, reveal documentary material.

beneath the surface. Each opens (with the help of a gloved gallery associate) to reveal, tacked to a board behind, snapshots originally submitted by the model as well as a handwritten statement explaining his or her reasons for wanting to be represented in this way.

The young people in the snapshots, needless to say, bear an imprecise resemblance to the doll-like figures in the paintings. Like most expressions of glamour, fashion or

erotica, these are fantasy images in which the distinctive qualities of the individual are streamlined into a stock ideal. The contrast is poignant.

Whatever judgments one might make about why a person would seek such a transformation are quickly challenged, however, by the self-possessed voices in the statements. Their reasons are myriad and touchingly candid: Several speak of having been bullied as children, others describe recently over-

coming weight problems, having too little money to buy nice clothes or feeling shy, out of place or otherwise uncomfortable in their own skin. The projection of a sexier, more confident image is not, as one might initially expect, a form of delusion — of trying to be what they're not — but rather a confirmation, in visual form, of some confidence they feel they possess on the inside.

"Family History," the second body of work, is more

elaborate in its construction and less moving in its effect. But it touches on a number of similar issues — namely, the methods by which we endeavor to represent ourselves and how these attempts may be thwarted or tinted by various climates of public perception.

Conceived in response to the 1974 BBC proto-reality television series “The Family,” the installation includes a video that posits a childhood version of the artist commenting on her reaction to the figures on the show. Another video involves a present-day, talk-show-style interview with one of those figures (the teenage daughter with whom Wearing intensely identified).

Like the pinup project, “Family History” is a patient exploration of states of mind we all share at one time or another, distinguished by a generosity of spirit that steers well clear of sentimentality.

**Regen Projects**, 633 N Almont Drive and 9016 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, (310) 276-5424, through Aug. 23. Closed Sunday and Monday. *www.regenprojects.com*