

Photo courtesy of the photographer



Lilly McElroy, "I Throw Myself at Men #3," 2006. Digital print, 30" x 40"

## FLIGHT OF FANCY

In this photo, Lilly McElroy is throwing herself at a man. Literally. She is an arrow shot from a bow, her calf muscles bulging, her lips pursed with the effort, her chest thrust forward between her outstretched arms. This is a kamikaze leap, a here-goes-nothing moment, so utterly serious that it becomes parody. The fellow at whom she is throwing herself appears to understand that he is under attack, that he has no chance of catching her, that everyone is watching, that this woman will possibly break his bones, that it will hurt. He does not look particularly strong. He is not very fashionable. In just a moment she will strike him like a pigeon flying head-long into a window.

From 2006 to 2008, McElroy, an American artist born in 1979, placed ads on craigslist.com seeking men willing to meet her in bars and allow her to throw herself at them.

This photograph is the third in a superb series of 12 images, all called "I Throw Myself at Men" in which she hurls herself at the men who answered the ad. And you can see that despite their preparation, or perhaps because of it, the men are very surprised.

McElroy has a sense of humor. These flights onto people are clownish, slapstick, physical humor (Her last work from 2009 – "I Kicked a Dog" – is a gigantic cartoon-like depiction of herself after making a kicking motion, and a massive dog up in the air – both made of papier-mache and acrylic).

But mere entertainment cannot explain the way this photograph works. Throwing yourself at a man is an act of despair, and no woman can look at this photograph without asking herself if this is what she's doing in her own life. Lilly McElroy is illustrating a hysterical reaction and exposing a total misunderstanding women have in connection to their relationships with men. As

an artist, McElroy is focused on action. But in the real world, is flinging yourself at someone really preferable to submissiveness? And another, substantive, question: Can assertiveness of the kind McElroy suggests really substitute for speech in women? Language speaks louder than throwing.

The entire project was photographed in bars that look like backdrops in a David Lynch movie – the pool tables, dim lighting, the cheap paneling on the walls, the dirty wall-to-wall carpet – all tell an American story. McElroy, who grew up in southern Arizona, studied for a master's degree in art in Tucson and Chicago, and currently has works on display at the Indianapolis Museum of Art (in an exhibition in which Sigalit Landau is also taking part), explains on her website how the aesthetics of these regions influenced her. In another interview, she spoke of her admiration for Cormac McCarthy, David Foster Wallace (whose book "Infinite Jest" she thinks about every day, though she didn't finish reading it) and Tina Fey's "30 Rock" TV show.

Thus, this photograph also illustrates her profound interest in popular culture, her ability to combine a high-brow attitude toward this experience with a lowbrow aesthetic. This is a local, specific photograph, but when you reflect upon it, its nature and quality are also captured in these words that were written across the ocean:

They come  
Different and the same  
With each it is different and the same  
With each the absence of love is different  
With each the absence of love is the same

This is a poem by Samuel Beckett. The moment McElroy stops being funny, her photograph begins to speak of the absurd.

### Omri Herzog

## WHAT UNITES US

Two weeks ago, one of Israel's two IKEA branches burned to the ground. A thorough reading of the catalog illuminates the deep connection between the store and its local fans

The IKEA catalog for 2011 is a hefty volume of almost 400 pages containing photographs of products, listing their prices and adding technical specifications. But it also tells a story. That may explain why the catalog also functions as reading material, constantly leafed through in living room and toilet, even in the absence of a concrete intention to buy anything from it. Catalogs of office equipment and descriptions of items available at perfumeries get thrown out; the IKEA catalog stays at home.

It is a permanent domestic feature in almost every home in Israel, transcending class, religious and ethnic differences; it appeals to men and women, youngsters and adults; it's the most popular text in the Hebrew language. In a society where battles are fought over the terms "home" and "identity," the IKEA catalog is a common denominator, replacing the telephone book as the printed verbal text in which every person can find himself.

The book's genre (henceforth I will call it a book and not a catalog, because it is also a book – indeed, primarily a book) is a skillful integration of a manual for leading a better life and a leisure-time magazine. It is entertaining in the deepest sense of the term; what entertains us – pleases us or consoles us, often both – tells us what we already know. It simply says to the audience it is aiming at: "What you already know, is right."

This same element is innate in gossip columns, the Channel 2 news and American action films: their messages never provoke, even if they generate amazement, sadness or mockery. We need them because they are consistent with a predictable world view, and they allow us to take pride in making the inherent distinction between good and bad, between legitimate and deviant.

### Realize your dreams

The IKEA book is entertaining. We already know what it will contain and the world view it reflects, one toward which it behooves us to aspire, for it has something for everyone and no one can evade it. The title, which appears below the author's name (IKEA) is "For a better everyday life!"

The book enjoins us to undertake the urgent task of development, progress, upgrading in order to realize the good, and tells us how to achieve it: "Bring this style home today!" "Introduce this design into your homes immediately!" It's cheap, it looks great, it's convenient, it's exactly for me, for my life and my dreams, and for the person I am; because "This is where life happens," "This is the place for dreaming," "This is the place where you can be the real you."

What is this wonderful place? Is it the store or the furnished home, or maybe the book itself, the promise it holds out? Through its agency I can be myself, my taste can be my own, my dreams mine and not others' – and I can realize them in all their dizzying surfeit. The book promises us supreme individualism, just what you need, what you always dreamed of. It declares relentlessly: "your place, your way," "the combination that best suits you," "choose for yourselves."

But how to choose? The very thought is tiring, with all the mistakes along the way and the efforts to figure out what there is to choose from, and what for; so "let us help you find the most suitable pots and pans for your kitchen." Everything is special, everything is suited especially to you, will be exactly the right size for you, if you only surrender to the beneficent, liberating and consoling understanding that what suits you alone lacks all distinctiveness, averts any distinctiveness; that the choice is not really yours. What a relief! Yes, everyday living is already better, because "the boxes are exactly the right size, both inside and outside." IKEA denies its customers what it promises them.

Every year there's a new collection, but the items in the catalog – chairs, sofas, lamps, plastic glasses – only appear to change. Like movie stars, chart-busting songs and prime ministers, the switching of items reflects no more than the entertaining power of the stereotype. There is no style here: the designed products actually lack design, because this is the only style that exists, the only conceivable one. The demand to "renew," to "refresh," to achieve a better home and a better life creates a predetermined pace of consumption, as consoling as the noise of the refrigerator

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