



SALON 94  
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BLOG ON WITH NEWS, VIEWS, REVIEWS, DIARIES, EVENTS, VIDEO &  
PHOTO-JOURNALS

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## DOUG MCCLEMONT ON KATY GRANNAN AT SALON 94, NEW YORK

"Dale, Southampton Avenue (III)" (2007)



"Gail and Dale (Best Friends), Point Lobos" (2006)



"Gail, Baker Beach (II)" (2007)



To stand in front of a photographic portrait by Katy Grannan is to gain an instantaneous clue as to what it means to be human. The rich, fluid concepts of identity and self-perception are at the core of each image. She reveals her subjects, as Jan Avgikos puts it in the introduction to the monograph 'Model American', "in the act of gearing up to be themselves." Unlike the beings captured in the works of August Sander, that skillful documentarian to whom the artist is often compared, Grannan's subjects live in a more modern world where cameras and posing are ubiquitous. It could be said that it is a necessary skill to create a "camera self" for life's many flashbulbs. We can't control the shutters, but we struggle to control what they capture. The intersection of what is intended and what received is where portrait photography thrives. Grannan is expert at mining those levels of the human psyche simultaneously.



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Since identity and how we transform ourselves are Grannan obsessions, what more logical choice of sitters than those whose entire life is precisely about change? For the current show "Lady Into Fox" (one of two concurrent New York exhibitions of the photographer's work) Grannan presents us with Gail and Dale, a pair of post-op Male-to-Female transsexuals entering the second half of their atypical lives. The women are shown making the best of their ungainly forms, dressed and made up as if for some special event. We sense they feel fancified, more than presentable enough for the camera, even if the fashions are dated and the pancake too thick on their faces. Many of the images depict Gail and Dale, alone or together outside posturing on sand and earth experiencing the wind in their hair and more importantly, the sunlight on their faces. (Here, Grannan's edge-of-the-world beach settings seem like Beckettian landscapes.) Though the subjects seldom look directly at the camera, they're acutely aware of being seen. These brave ladies are far more evolved than a Blanche Dubois-type who hides what might objectively be deemed flaws and expends energy to cloak her truth by covering light bulbs. Gail and Dale submit to the sun and the lens and reveal their own stories, not caring about those we create for them.

In one large photograph, "Gail, Baker Beach (II)" (2007) Grannan presents the squinting brunette in recline on a sandbar, blue dress belted across her waist and toes wriggling inside white stockings as she turns her face to the sky. "Gail and Dale (Best Friends), Point Lobos" (2006) depicts the pair seated on a hill wearing identical polyester skirts pulled up to expose their knees and the big black sensible pumps on their feet in the foreground. Grannan conveys a long friendship quite poetically by posing them breast to breast, their cheeks almost touching, like comfortable Siamese sisters. What is most moving about these portraits is that despite the unconventionality of the subjects, the images never feel exploitative. Even a frontal nude, "Dale, Southampton Avenue (III)" (2007) with its bleached-out tones, the subject's rudimentary breasts and platinum wig almost blending into the bare wall behind her, conveys a regal journey, one clearly respected--and possibly even envied--by the photographer. Grannan's newest portraits seem like lost classical paintings, the posers in charge, claiming their place in the universe and ready for anything. However, the forcefully photographic nature of the works make that confidence feel somehow temporary, as if seconds after the photo was taken, life's more difficult tests did intervene. Yet for these captured moments, Gail and Dale are not archetypes nor activists nor freaks nor ideas. They're human, and with all the difficulties that fact entails, life seems mostly manageable. Lovely, occasionally.

Katy Grannan  
Until 23 February  
Salon 94  
12 East 94th Street  
New York  
T: +1 646 672 9212  
[www.salon94.com](http://www.salon94.com)

An exhibition of work by Katy Grannan entitled "Another Women Who Died in Her Sleep" is on display uptown at Greenberg Van Doren Gallery through February 16th.

Doug McClemon is the former Editor-in-Chief of "HONCHO", "Torso", "Mandate", "Inches" and "Playguy". His writing regularly appears in publications such as "Publishers' Weekly," "Library Journal," and "Screw." He has written introductory essays for several monographs on contemporary art and is currently at work on a book of short stories entitled "Little Morticians."

