

JULIA FULLERTON-BATTEN: TEENAGE STORIES

If Lewis Carroll's Alice could step into a photographic wonderland after eating from the side of the mushroom that made her grow, she would not look misplaced in Julia Fullerton-Batten's latest series.

In these new works, the British photographer's young heroines loom larger than life. Towering over buildings, lamp-posts, trees and cars, the teenage girls are as amplified as the bloated Alice before the White Rabbit reduced her to her original size. Either the world around them has shrunk or they have grown disproportionately.

Take, for instance, the image of the girl who is trying to pull her white ballet pump free from the sticking piece of pink chewing gum on the ground. The stretch of gum is as tall as the lampposts on the square, while the people walking across it look like midgits. Next to the girl's gigantic frame, the church appears to be as small as an ornament. In a second image, a girl in a pale blue vest top and tie-die skirt is lying spread-eagled on the lawn of a garden after falling off her bicycle. The minuscule motorway is next to her forehead and the cars moving up and down it resemble tiny toys. One can imagine Fullerton-Batten having lots of fun creating these incongruous absurdities, but you can't help

wondering if there's a message in there somewhere. By digitally enlarging the scale of the girls' bodies so they seem dislocated from their surroundings, is Fullerton-Batten commenting on the feelings of alienation known to many teenagers from the onset of puberty? For her characters are certainly disconnected from these surreal scenes.

Pretty, slim, adolescent girls are familiar subjects in Fullerton-Batten's work. Significantly, given how these images are those of a female photographer, there is no sexualised, Lolita-esque aspect. The teenagers are not objectified, but not really given personalities either.

Another of Fullerton-Batten's trademark techniques is to create a harmony of colour between her characters and their settings. A girl in a white bikini and green flip flops is picking up a bottle of milk from the middle of the road, either side of which are white houses and their gardens of manicured lawns and rockeries. Similarly, a girl in a sleeveless red dress and pink shoes surveys a busy cross-junction, and the McDonald's advertising on the side of one of the buildings.

In addition to this exhibition, Fullerton-Batten is displaying a series of 16 portraits at the National Portrait Gallery of people that have played an important role in Britain's health sector. (The NPG focuses on one area of public life each year through a commissioned photographic project.) Photographs of well-known luminaries such as the IVF pioneer Lord Winston and Claire Rayner, the president of the Patients Association, are shown alongside ones of lesser-known frontline workers and campaigners. All the portraits were taken in settings that reflect the sitters' professional occupation, and prove that there's more to Fullerton-Batten's versatility than modernizing Alice. ■

TEXT BY ANNA SANSON

TEENAGE STORIES

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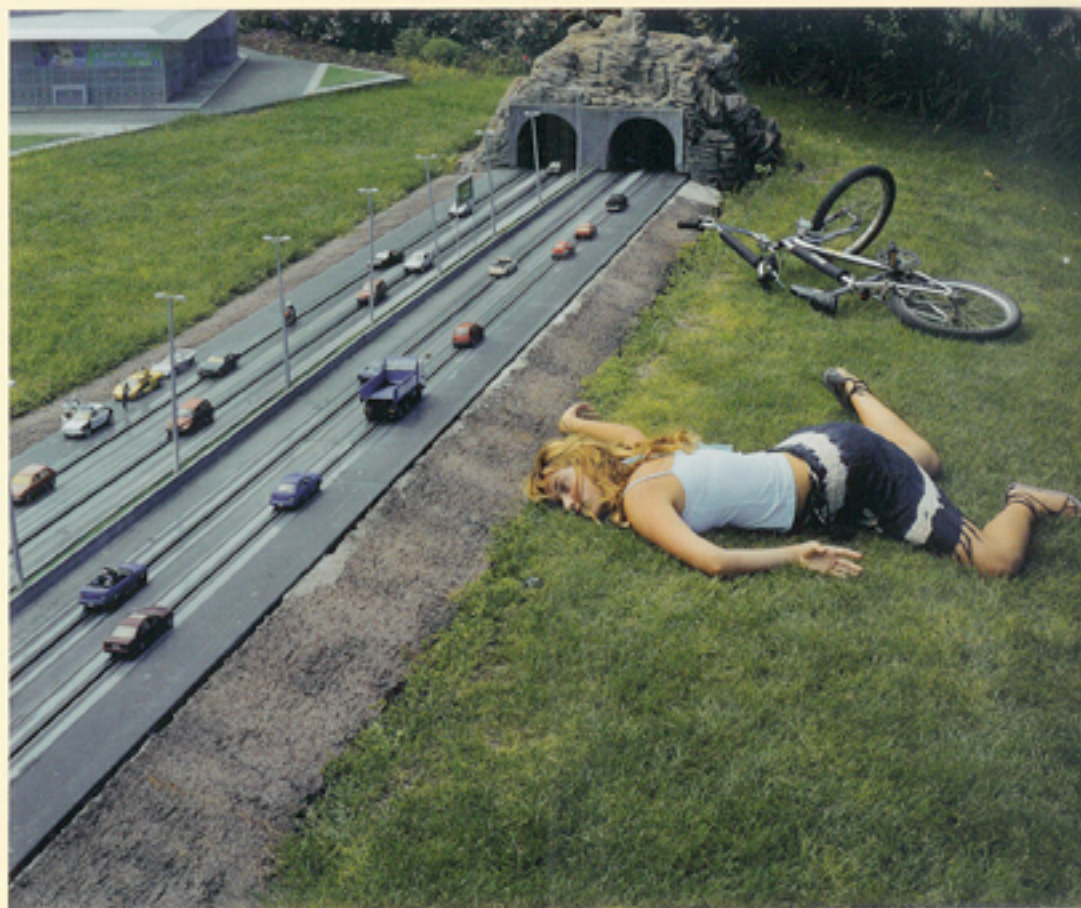
121-125 Charing Cross Road

WC2H 0EH London

t +44 (0) 207 287 1779

A PICTURE OF HEALTH: PHOTOGRAPHS

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