

VANITY FAIR

—| Spotlight |—

UNEASY PIECES



She creates images of things that never happened, a world that never was, but at the same time is very familiar—we have been here before. A Los Angeles native, Alex Prager is among four photographers to be featured in “New Photography 2010,” opening at New York’s Museum of Modern Art this fall. Born in the back room of her grandmother’s Los Feliz apartment, Prager is self-taught, having learned about photography through library books and yard-sale finds. She never graduated from high school—instead, she spent her teens selling Swiss Army Knives in Lucerne, Switzerland. It was an exhibition of William Eggleston’s work that got her hooked—she bought her first camera the next day and ordered darkroom equipment via eBay. Taking aesthetic cues from film, fashion photography, and the world of pulp fiction, Prager constructs darkly playful cinematic moments, charged with melodramatic glamour. Her heroines are retro-styled women on the verge. “The construction of the images is intentionally loaded,” says MoMA curator Roxana Marcoci. “It reminds me of silent movies—there is something pregnant, about to happen, a mix of desire and angst.”

“I find my inspiration in the city of Los Angeles,” says Prager. “The sky is always blue; the birds are always singing. It’s a strange picture of perfection—but there is an eerie monotony that creeps in. It can slowly drive a person crazy, that sense of unease under the surface of all this beauty and promise.”

Desert (top) and Desiree, by photographer Alex Prager, whose work will be featured in this fall’s “New Photography 2010” exhibition at New York City’s Museum of Modern Art.

—A. M. HOMES