

works on paper, inc.

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ART REVIEWS

By CLAUDINE ISÉ
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Worth Watching: At Works on Paper Inc., Laura London's portraits of teenage punk rockers, photographed in department store dressing rooms, bedrooms and bathrooms, invite voyeuristic curiosity. Her photographs appear to offer candid glimpses into the private rituals of young women, but in fact, each image has been carefully staged and costumed by London. Our knowledge of this somehow doesn't lessen the sense that we're peeking in at something irresistible, that's really none of our business.

There's a touching lack of irony in these girls' appropriation of punk's rebellious, anti-establishment stance to express their "true selves," since their neo-punk look of black mesh dresses, chunky platform boots, press-on tattoos and studded wristbands can all be purchased at the local Urban Outfitters. Like fashion's glamorization of heroin chic, London's teenagers glide along the razor's edge between

style and substance, where gritty authenticity is always threatening to slide into patently stylized transgression.

It's no coincidence that these girls' search for personal identity dovetails perfectly with their entrance into the consumer marketplace. Yet, London seems as comfortable with these apparent contradictions as the hip generation of "riot grrrl" neo-feminists she portrays.

Most of her images succeed in having it both ways: They could blend right into the editorial pages of a teen fashion magazine, but at the same time we're uncomfortable watching these young women when they're at their most vulnerable. London's portraits beg comparison to the more well-known work of Sharon Lockhart, whose photographs capture a similar sense of being caught between two worlds. But where Lockhart's models appear dreamy and transcendent, London's streetwise teenagers are rooted in the here-and-now.

They know they're being looked at. Instead of playing up to the camera, their blank expressions mirror your desires back at you, their faces as unyielding as steel-plated armor.

■ *Works on Paper Inc., 6150 Wilshire Boulevard, (213) 964-9675, through June 6. Closed Sundays and Mondays.*