

FALL FASHION WITH LINDA KATE AMBER AND NAOMI!

PLUS: SWEDISH ROCK NEW YORK LEGENDS ART IN VENICE

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IT'S LADY GAGA'S WORLD

...WE'RE JUST LIVING IN IT!

LADY GAGA IN MARC JACOBS COAT AND GLASSES PHOTOGRAPHED BY MARIO TESTINO



PARANOID PARK

DIRECTOR ZEINA DURRA'S FEATURE-LENGTH FILM DEBUT IS A PORTRAIT OF BOTH HERSELF AND POST-9/11 NEW YORK

"You're not in the CIA, are you...or Mossad?" Asya asks Javier, her swarthy Mexican lover, as they lounge in bed post-sex. Director Zeina Durra's feature-length film debut, the black comedy *The Imperialists Are Still Alive!* is filled with such scenes of over-the-top paranoia, desperation, and off-kilter glamour. Set in New York after September 11th, the film stars French actress Élodie Bouchez, who plays Asya, a young Arabic artist whose politically extremist artworks are attracting unwelcome attention. And she has every reason to be suspicious. But while Bouchez's portrayal is unfailingly over-the-top, Durra's picture of New York looks like reality.

"No one of our generation really does natural-looking film," explains the 32-year-old director, who shot *Imperialists* on Super 16 and prides herself on the film's realistic portrait of New York now—from the clothes (Margiela) to the clubs (a password-protected speakeasy behind a Chinatown deli) to the characters (Whit Stillman, Rita Ackermann, and Sophie Auster make appearances). "So many films tell you 'This is the good guy' and 'This is the bad guy,' which is completely not my perspective on film. Life is so much more complex. Anyone can be put into either of those roles."

Imperialists centers around the disappearance of Asya's boyfriend Faisal. He is thought to have been kidnapped by the CIA for suspicious activity, which sends Asya and her Middle Eastern hipster coterie into a tailspin. Because she produces incendiary artwork involving nude bodies, keffiyeh scarves, and fake machine guns, Asya believes she's under investigation. In the middle of the night, she scrawls THEY MAY BE LISTENING on a notepad with Sharpie and flashes it to Javier, too scared to utter a word and risk being recorded. In one absurdly hilarious scene, the two of them pack her mock weapons into Bergdorf Goodman bags and dump them behind a Chinatown fruit stand.



Outlandish as it may sound, Durra claims that Asya's behavior is an honest reflection of how she and her expat friends felt living in the city in the weeks and months following the attacks. "It's not necessarily paranoia," explains Durra, who was born and raised in London but has roots scattered across the Balkans and the Middle East, from Bosnia to Palestine. "We grew up in a world of closed systems. Our parents would say, 'Don't be public about your views; 'Don't say what you think.' After 9/11 all the stuff we grew up with became a reality. Even though we look back now and laugh at how ridiculously we behaved."

Imperialists is the follow-up of a short film Durra created in 2005 called *The Seventh Dog*, which was filled with the same political undercurrents, dark comedic elements, and penchant for style. Durra's aesthetic is antflash and antigloss; she favors reality, one that's often based on her own experience. The daughter of a Bosnian/Palestinian mother and Jordanian father, her outlook

is fiercely international, though her favored setting is New York. Topics of displacement and diaspora are common within her family's history, which explains why they so often make their way into her films. Her grandfather, the Jordanian nationalist Said Durra, was jailed in Lebanon in the 1920s for his poetry and political affiliations; her Bosnian grandmother escaped her war-torn home at the age of 80. "Meanwhile I've been living this great life in New York!"

Indeed Durra's home of ten years has informed her films as much as her family's storied political past. "New York is a city full of expats," she says, "and this is a film about people like us." **Christopher Bartley**

Still from Zeina Durra's *The Imperialists Are Still Alive!* 2009

www.theimperialistsarestillalive.com

BLOW HARD

BALLOONS ENTER THE REALM OF SERIOUS ART. MEET BUSTER BALLOON, THEIR MASTER

In a time when shark carcasses and elephant dung are lauded artists' mediums, balloons seem a little quaint. Child's play, you might say. But the colorful, phallic latex tubes favored by twisters—as those who craft shapes from balloons call themselves—have more potential than most realize. They form figurative representations of Americana: happy puppies, sad Elvises, ice cream cones, vintage autos. And then they deflate, quietly losing their shape and their identity, until they are swept into the waste bin. In a matter of days, balloon sculptures play out the transformation our culture is most obsessed with: the disintegration of youth into decrepitude.

Buster Balloon just sees their fleeting nature as "job security."

This September he unveils a show of his creations at Half Gallery on New York's Lower East Side. "I became fascinated with drawing and sculpting when I was 3 and then discovered magic when I was 5," he explains. "In high school, I worked in every imaginable medium, including wire, Styrofoam, and crumpled butcher paper. At 18, I discovered balloons."

And yet it was only recently that 38-year-old Buster found himself embraced by the art establishment—thanks to an association with Jeff Koons. Koons's staff found Buster on the Internet and recruited him to help on a project. While it may have taken a while for his work to be accepted, Buster never doubted his chosen medium. He had no choice, he says. "None of the others spoke to me the way that balloons have." **Jacob Brown**

Buster Balloon's solo show begins September 8, 2009, at Half Gallery, NYC. www.halfgallery.com

