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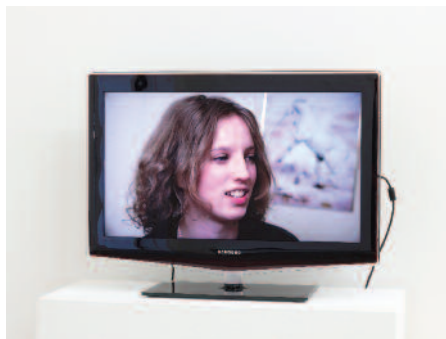
Richard Kern

Feature Inc, New York

By **Danielle McCloskey**

Best known for his uncompromising portraits of women in sexualized situations, photographer Richard Kern delves deeper in this show, taking on the often glamorized role of perspiration drugs in the daily life and struggle of his, nonetheless, sexy subjects. In the tradition of Studs Terkel’s ground breaking *Conversations with America*, Kern’s *Medicated*, etc. records conversations of America on drugs — prescription drugs. Through video and portrait photography, the show draws the viewer into the lives of several young women, none of whom appeal to the “reefer madness” type of drug user or someone who pushes drugs on the streets. These are women who live day to day, hold decent jobs, but on doctors’ orders they are all on drugs. Through hazy-eyed and not-all-there stares, Kern lays bare America’s pharmaceutical drug craze.

Filming and photographing these women in their safe and comfortable homes, his subjects open up about their drug use. These women structure themselves in their own spaces, showing the viewer the plethora of medications they store in the safety of their own homes. Eventually it emerges that, for



Richard Kern *Medicated*, 2013 (Still from video).
Courtesy : Feature Inc., New York.

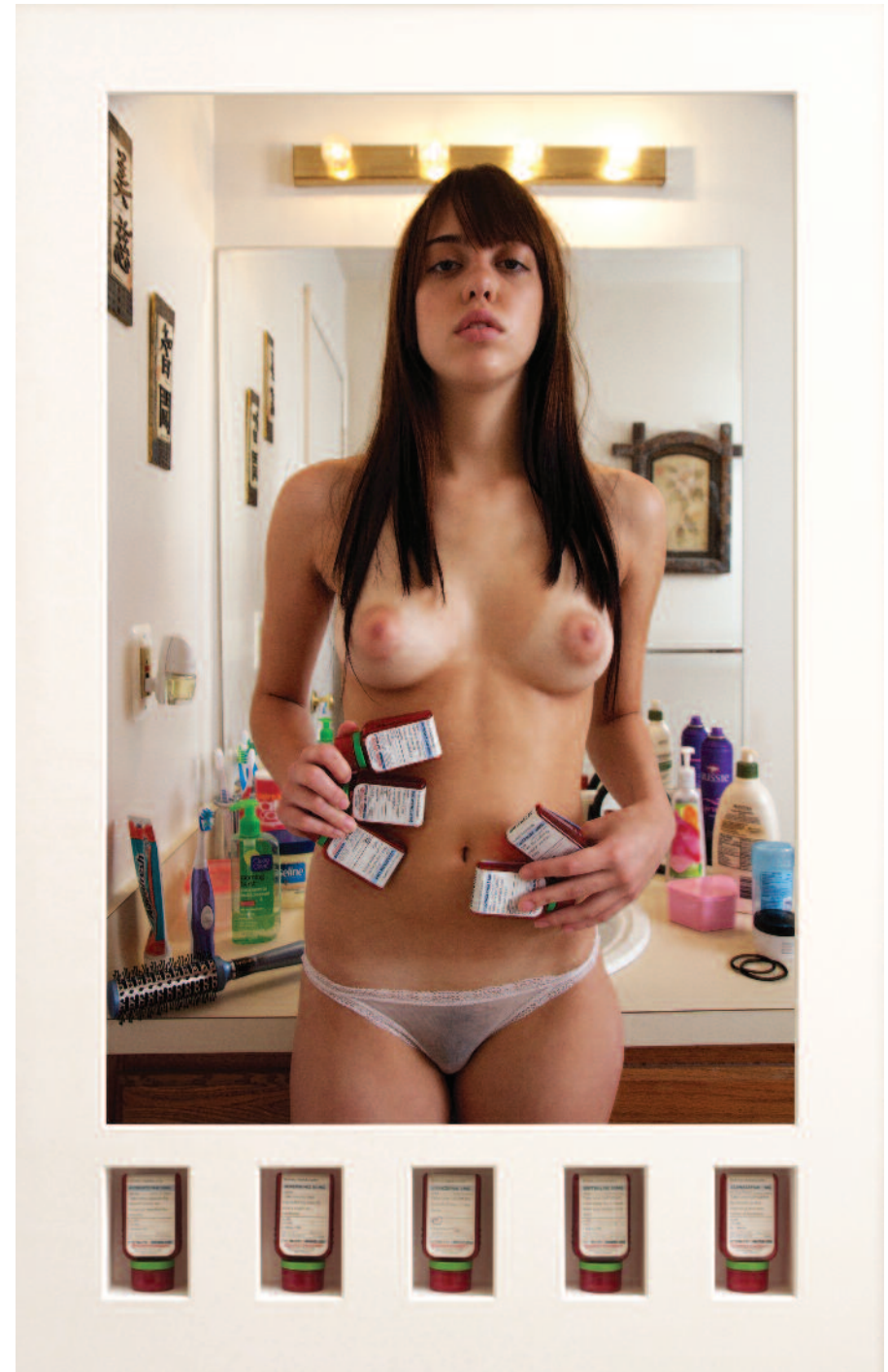
the most part, these women are to doctors what street addicts are to pushers: customers. No more and no less. One woman, a registered nurse, begins her story in her teens, physically harming herself because of her OCD. She asks to be put on medication after years of therapy, and years later, the medication stops working.

So she is put on another drug; and then another, after that one no longer works.

Soon she finds herself no longer able to remember how many drugs she has actually been on. And some prescriptions she is taking are not even used to treat anxiety disorders, her original prescribed condition, but neurological disorders and seizures. She laments about how she can only imagine what it is doing to her brain. Scarily enough, you don’t have to imagine, but look at her physiology as she speaks about her day to day life.

Ushered in under a facade of beautiful women with “nice tits and great hair”, Kern deftly tricks the viewer into getting serious, into looking up-close and personal at a drug addled world, where these women, who upon first glance could be the well-off faces you see going to their jobs every day, or living next door, are slowly disintegrating in the clutches of a pharmaceutical that has an army of pushers — all dressed in white coats — and a fifth column on the march in Washington, the industry lobbyists, who keep it all street legal.

There is a certain irony in this show, that an artist provocateur who is often accused of objectifying women in his sexually explicit photographs would in fact de-objectify these women. Kern gives voice and puts a human face to their suffering, while America’s biggest pusher of them all, Big Pharma, gets a pass. **M**



Richard Kern *Hydroxyzine Pam / Doxepin / Lorazepam / Sertraline / Colonazepam*, 2011. C-print, pill bottles, 32 x 22 inches.
Courtesy: Feature Inc., New York.