

Drawn through Degradation and Desire: In Conversation with Larassa Kabel  
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I am often attracted to the vulnerable in images. Those photographs, drawings, or paintings that capture attention through an immediate emotional pull. Where detail directs the eye toward a source of empathy or fear, that strikes deeply and pushes inward. When viewing such works, there is for me almost always a momentary intake of breath when I encounter that emotion. It requires a steadying of my body, as I consider the impact of the image, and it challenges me to recalibrate my immediate considerations. This happened for me most recently when I was shown Larassa Kabel's drawings in *Stag Park*. Viewing these dramatically rendered drawings, I was captivated by the emotion portrayed, through the eyes of the women; their vulnerability presented simultaneous with their effort to mediate and regain control. These drawings pushed me to confront what might next unfold, a potential for violence always just at the edge.

To further understand Larassa's practice, I spent time viewing her website before interviewing her by email. Where I encountered her paintings, and her use of photorealism as a primary medium for exploring experience. I found each work to be technically exquisite, its execution exacting, yet also personal. For it was not beauty alone, conveyed through the skill of her hand, that drew me most intensely, but instead, Larassa's emphasis on the personal in her reproductions of experience. Across her practice, displayed in the images online, I was taken in by her considerations of the arousal and excitement of youth, and their challenges when confronting desire. Those experiences that left them off balance and most vulnerable. I came to understand these teens in Larassa's paintings and drawings, to empathize with them as they were trying so hard to control their developing selves; to contain a multitude of emotions, yet failing deeply to do so. As I experienced with the drawings, I immediately was left wondering about the future – where these youths were next to sit.

Across Larassa's work, through her small, direct strokes, there exists a strong emphasis on dissecting difficult emotion, as it is portrayed in such sources as porn; on parsing the thoughts and feelings we attempt to keep deeply hidden. And she is exquisitely sensitive to nuance, within what most challenges our efforts at maintaining control. By focusing directly on the face, the eyes and mouths of these young women in these drawings, Larassa is able to consider a dialectic of desire and aggression, gendered roles and their confinements, of self-efficacy and its failures. She engages with the vulnerability to loss that is always present, whether forefronted dramatically, or lying subtly in the background. Through her hand, these drawings contain both a potential for violence and diminishment, and a possibility of redemption. But always with an uncertainty of response. It is this uncertainty that causes us, as viewers, to approach and engage as each piece arouses and repels us. Larassa allows us to align, despite our reservations, with the possibilities that are most drawn to the surface. To empathize and to fear, and to confront what underlies our own potential for degradation.