



## AT THE GALLERIES

LONDON

### Margherita Manzelli at Greengrassi



MARGHERITA MANZELLI, *H*, 2002. Graphite and watercolor on paper. 77.5 x 57.5 cm.

You know when something is so close to being okay, yet falls just a hairsbreadth short, remaining utterly and upsettingly wrong? Margherita Manzelli's portraits explore the eroticism and loneliness of that liminal area, their subjects existing so close to the margins of normality that its surfaces abrade them in the cruellest of all possible ways. Her solitary girls float in abysses of blank paper, features slanting and protruding with an incorrect beauty, tubercular and spooky. Drawn with a convincing eggshell-and-gossamer solidity (you feel you

could puncture a forehead with your finger), their bodies tail off and dissipate, unravelling into filaments of line, evaporating into unmarked paper. Wrought by a strong, inventive draftsman, Manzelli's line marries a clean confidence with a feverish fragility: like a dark thread of bacteria delineating its course through an infected capillary. Color blooms across clothing like patches of infection or blushes up beneath the surface of the skin; a touch of scarlet fever here, a trace of creeping cyanosis there. Yet the girls retain the sensuality, the

allure of weird, vulnerable hot-house flowers — skin so fine it could tear, delicate mouths and belladonna-widened eyes. Their erotic, consumptive pallor echoes strands of romantic and erotic thought woven right through the fabric of Western culture, from Baudelaire and Byron to William Gibson and David Cronenberg. Even the most crushed of Manzelli's girls carries the weight of this tradition blithely (or at least insolently), bodies inhabited by selves that neither biology nor viewer has been able to isolate.

—Lee Trimino