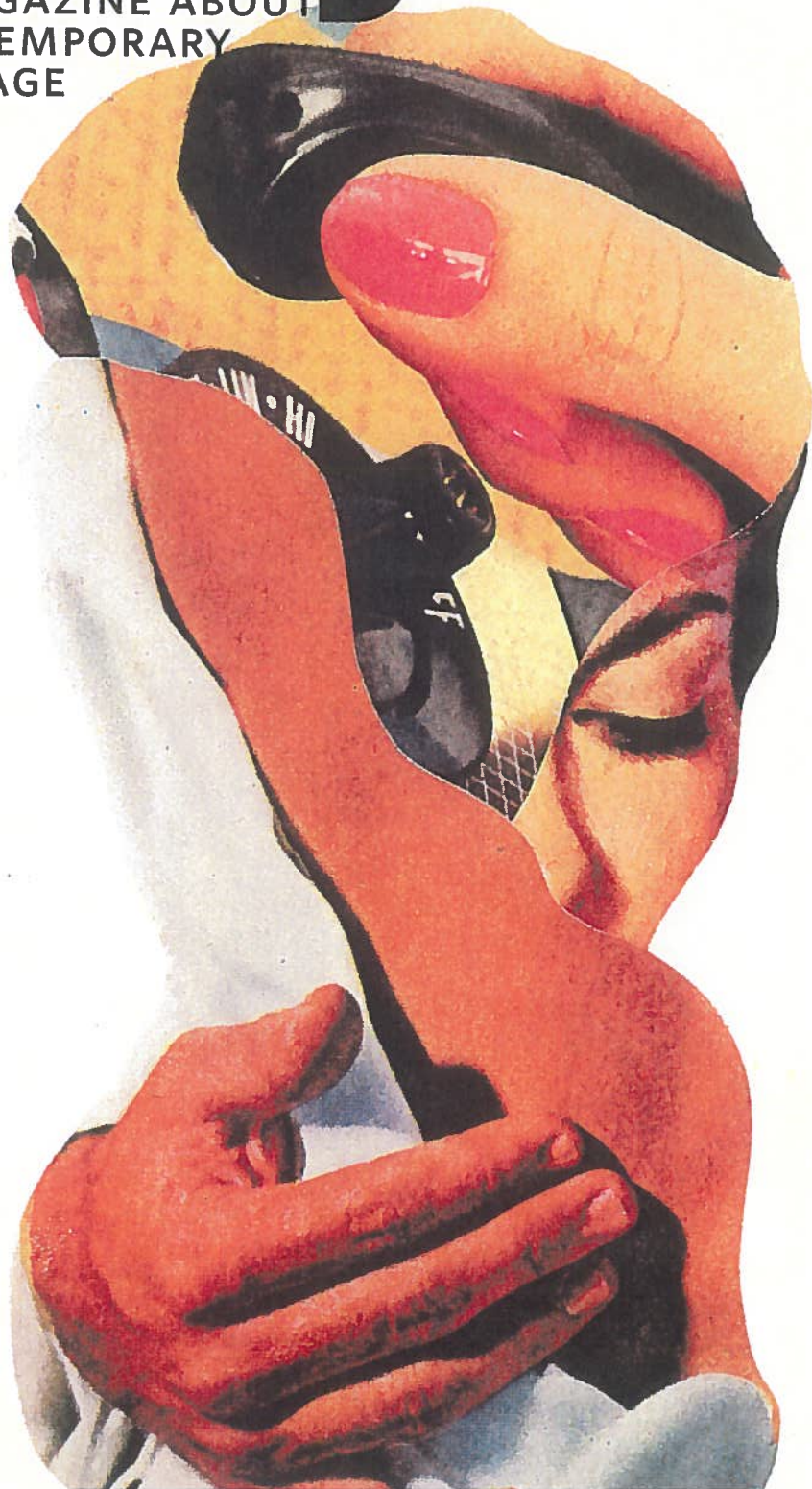


kolaj

#20

A MAGAZINE ABOUT
CONTEMPORARY
COLLAGE



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FRONT COVER

She's a diamond. I'm the rock
by ChangGang Lee
(8.5"x6"; collage on paper; 2014)
Read more on page 48

BACK COVER

Vista
by Pauline Tonglet
(12.6"x10.2"; collage, acrylic, sewing,
flakes; 2017). Read more on page 60

GIRLPLAGUE, INTERRUPTING

How pasting glitch collage in the street helps a Montreal artist heal

by Sofia Misenheimer

Glitch entails a process of trial and error, ensuring no certain outcome, which appeals to the artist. In fact, her femmeglitch practice takes collage into an even more abstract realm.

In cities with towering wall designs and commissioned murals around every corner, it takes a keen eye to spot the smaller, independent street art gems—the surprise encounters that claim the bricks of an alleyway, the base of a lamppost, or the door on a rooftop—that interrupt the everyday and encourage contemplation. For those fortunate enough to discover a girlplague original, one of her ephemeral collages scattered across Montreal, that brief interruption may leave a lasting impression. Faces from her magazine cutouts and torn vintage photographs dissolve into pixelated patterns. Limbs emerge from digital voids. Deconstructed objects overlap in surreal repetition. These glitch collages, or “femmeglitches” as girlplague calls them, invite curiosity. Each one is equal parts whimsy and concept—a duality embodied by the artist herself, as she often switches from playful to serious in person. Her youthful appearance, sporting long braids, a black baseball cap embroidered with a happy face, and jean jacket with an oversized pink button that reads, “Go catcall in hell,” belies the maturity reflected in her work. Less concerned with conveying narrative than embracing collage as an emotional outlet, girlplague meticulously layers found images with self-made textures to not only imbue her creations with meaning, but to channel her mental illness.

Diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) in 2014, a condition characterized by distorted self-image and emotional variability, girlplague found solace through the artistic outlet she had been practicing for nearly a decade. “Art in general is always something I’ve done to unleash difficult emotions and soothe myself. Now I really focus on projecting struggles with mental illness into my collage as a way to survive,” she tells me at our meeting. Soon thereafter, the overcast June morning gives way to heavy rain droplets that audibly pelt the window outside. “Nice to be out today!” she laughs, adding earnestly, “I mean, it is. I’m often alone. It’s pretty much just me and my collage.”

Images by girlplague

Page 15
Between Sleep and Awake
found magazine, holographic paper, rhinestones, and original illustration; 2016

Page 16
Empty 00
found photo and glitch art made from DV tapes; 2017

Page 17
Lottery
digital collage and glitch art made from databending; 2017

Page 19
Co-dependency
vintage magazine and glitch art made from DV tapes; 2015





Faces from her magazine cutouts and torn vintage photographs dissolve into pixelated patterns. Limbs emerge from digital voids. Deconstructed objects overlap in surreal repetition. These glitch collages invite curiosity.



Cutting images by hand and scanning them into her computer for hours has become a daily form of therapy for girlplague. So, too, has the act of assemblage. Many of her creations express personal struggles with BPD and aim to counteract the often-debilitating identity crises she suffers. Her glitch collage evokes loneliness, heartbreak, rejection, and anxiety. *Between Sleep and Awake* (2016), for instance, features a faceless woman whose profile is replaced with a silver fractal. The reflective surface, an eruption of metallic polygons, claims the identity of the photographed figure, suggesting an inner turmoil. In contrast, the overlapping hand-drawn outline of a sleeping form exudes an empty calm. So, which figure reflects the real self? Girlplague says her work is up for interpretation. "I like being vague, because I can sometimes be very irrational," she said.

But girlplague's creations frequently involve hijacking collaged characters with glitched disruptions to explore questions of identity and encourage self-reflection. Glitch entails a process of trial and error, ensuring no certain outcome, which appeals to the artist. In fact, her femmeglitch practice takes collage into an even more abstract realm. Through harnessing corrupt data to find aesthetic value, and sometimes manipulating those digital errors to create texture, girlplague finds she is able to reflect "what's in [her] head". "My friends tell me when they see my work that they know it's mine. I haven't seen much art like mine that incorporates glitch into handmade collage...I often don't feel like I fit in anywhere," she said. Creating femmeglitch has thus become an act of self-love, one that embraces personal and technological imperfection to produce beauty. In this way, girlplague uses femmeglitch to assert herself as a female artist, as well as share "a digital

“Whether you love [my art] or hate it, it’s there and valid and if you try to rip it down, I’ll just put it up again. There, and somewhere else, and everywhere. I’m not going away. I’m just getting started.”

expression of femininity”. Though she doesn’t consider her collage overtly feminist, it is a core part of her self-identity, one that often propels her actions.

Two years ago, she created a femmeglitch zine to claim space as a woman in a male-dominated art community. When shared with fellow members of Glitch Art Collective, an online forum dedicated to the art form, however, the resulting backlash was extreme. Girlplague was continually spammed with pornography and denigrated as an artist. “One of the moderators of the group congratulated me on having one of the longest threads in the history of the group...A lot of men were angry because they said glitch isn’t gendered. It made me want to paste [those works] up in the street,” she said.

Street art is a compulsion that keeps girlplague grounded. Through its production, she finds self-affirmation and reward. “I like leaving my mark, because it’s so hard for me to go out a lot of the time. The world easily brushes off those who are mentally ill, [but] pasting powerful imagery into the streets forces my energy, voice, and presence into public. It insists I exist, unapologetically,” she said. But there are limits to her desire to be seen.

In recent years, personal safety and privacy have become critical concerns. Just over a year ago, girlplague was attacked by a stranger at a bar who wouldn’t accept “no” as an answer to his physical advances. She received two black eyes and stitches across the bridge of her nose, as a result of the encounter. When her story went viral, ensuing online harassment sustained the trauma. In true artist form, she produced art about the experience—a collage that features her injured face surrounded by violent online comments insisting she deserved worse abuse. The cuts and bruises almost resemble glitches on an otherwise anonymous face.

Viewers less familiar with her work often think girlplague is a feminist movement. And she may as well be. Girlplague’s pseudonym stems from her identity, once a girl, and now, an “unstoppable force” as a woman. “I found [the name] empowering and something really bold to attach to myself and heal from,” she said. “I’m always pushing the envelope and being more and more open about my struggles has proven to be the best coping method...Whether you love [my art] or hate it, it’s there and valid and if you try to rip it down, I’ll just put it up again. There, and somewhere else, and everywhere. I’m not going away. I’m just getting started.”

Montreal-based artist girlplague focuses heavily on collage, found materials/objects, and design. In 2011, she received a degree in graphic design and illustration from Niagara College in Welland, Ontario. After freelancing in Toronto for a few years, she moved to Montreal where she works as a freelancer, curates exhibitions, and co-hosts collage events as part of CTRL + V Collective. You can catch girlplague in the streets wheatpasting/stickering collage work and digital art in public places. Follow her at girlplague.com or on Facebook or Instagram under girlplague.

