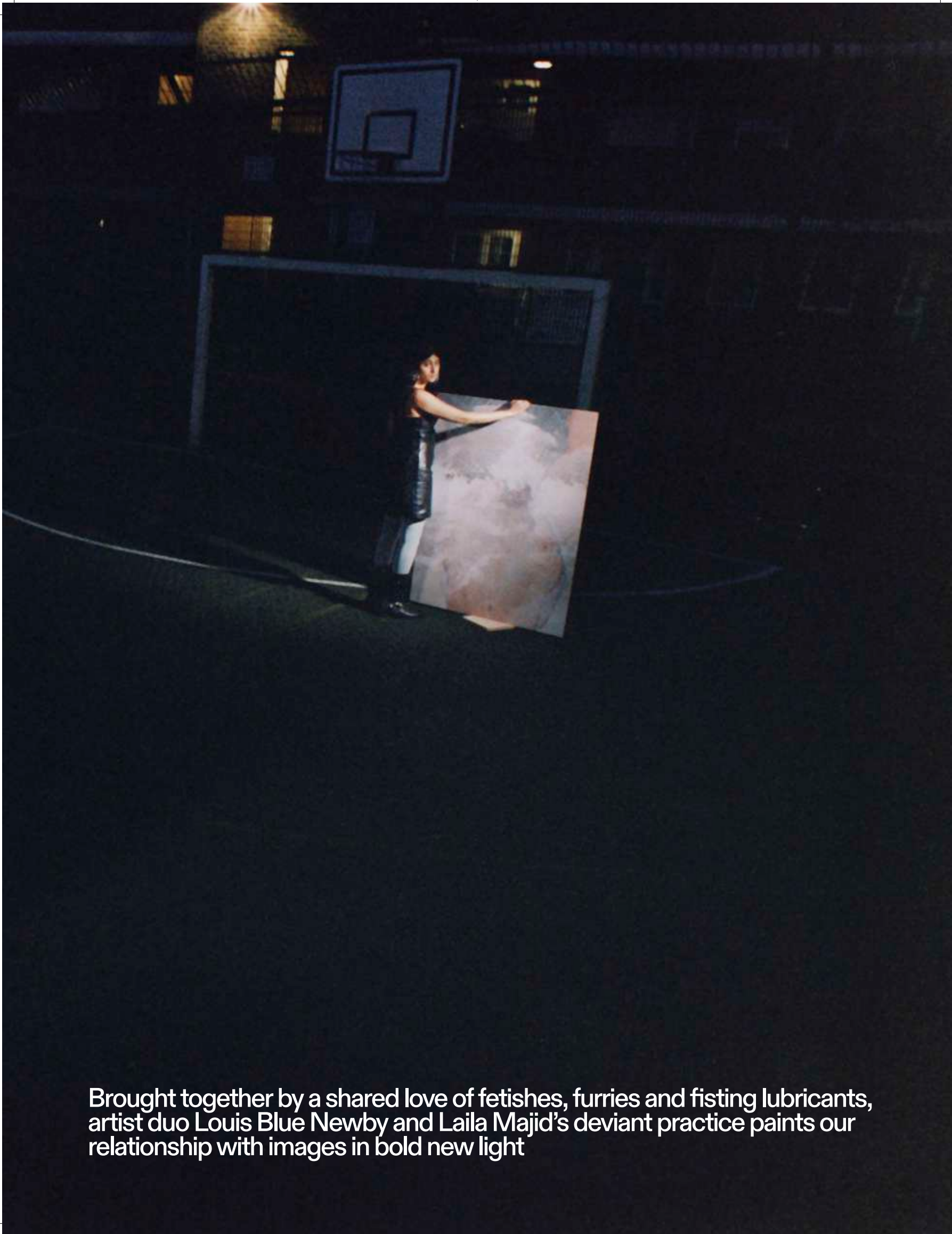


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Artworks from left: Laurel 01 (2022), Laurel 02 (2022)



Brought together by a shared love of fetishes, furies and fisting lubricants, artist duo Louis Blue Newby and Laila Majid’s deviant practice paints our relationship with images in bold new light



Previous spread, left: Louis wears cotton track jacket **ROKH**, cotton vest **GUESS USA**, cotton track pants **CARHARTT WIP**.
Right: Laila wears leather dress and boots **COACH**, tights stylist's own, brass acrylic earrings **HUGO KREIT**.
This page, from left: Louis wears cotton shirt **CARHARTT WIP**, wool trousers **MARGARET HOWELL**. Laila wears cotton shirt
MARGARET HOWELL, wool skirt **LE KILT**, palladium-plated brass earrings **HUGO KREIT** (worn here and on opposite page).
Opposite page, from left: Louis wears cashmere vest **MARGARET HOWELL**, jewellery his own. Laila wears wool jumper **LE KILT**, earrings as before

Photographic assistant **FEDERICO COVARELLI**

Bonding over a shared interest in fetishes, furies and sci-fi art, London-based artist duo Louis Blue Newby and Laila Majid have built a collaborative, interdisciplinary practice that both celebrates and interrogates our private obsessions, scrolling habits and pervasive hunger for content. Their *Beautiful Girls on Top!* show at Sadie Coles HQ's The Shop last year was an intimate, open-plan peep show, a conveyor belt of off-centre, familiar-unfamiliar scans and portraits (a few of which were salvaged from Pornhub): think jesmonite casts of pillowcases, film stills painstakingly drawn by hand on to paper, found images and resin.

As classmates and friends at the Chelsea College of Arts, the pair obsessed over scans of SFX manuals, fetish magazines and hentai comics. Their interest in kink accessories and aesthetics, as explored in influential zines such as *Rubberist* and *Skin Two*, influences their use of materials, with special emphasis on latex, silicone and other slippery plastics. Crisco, a vegetable fat which moonlights as a fisting lubricant, for example, is used to create transparencies between layers, allowing viewers to peer deep into the dimensions of their portraits.

Dipping fluidly between mediums and cultural epochs, the pair mix visual references with a rich materiality, creating worlds that invite us to reflect on our relationship with images. Here, Newby and Majid discuss deviant imagery, resin spreads and the strange, otherworldly power of illicit filmmaking.

Hi Louis and Laila. Tell me a little bit about how your collaboration began.

LAILA MAJID: We only started working together the year after we left our BA. It began in a really natural way; we would send each other a lot of images just to stay in touch or find things that the other might like. It started as this image-based dialogue over text/messenger, and then we realised there was something to explore within that.

LOUIS BLUE NEWBY: We started to notice that there was a very strong recurring thread that connected a lot of the images and the conversations we were having about them. They slotted into our individual practices, but there was also this overlapping space that started to generate between our practices and what we were interested in. The early works we made together were found images which we then reprinted. We would show them in a large body and it became a visual essay; it was a really simple gesture in that way. As time progressed, we began to form an intricate relationship with the way we were forming these things. We started collaging and layering. This was around the time of Covid, so for a lot of the early works we were separate. I was in London; Laila was at home in Abu Dhabi.

LM: Working digitally together like this was the only option afforded to us by being in separate places. We've both noticed the shift in our work [since then], because we've been able to be in a studio space and work physically together. The work has really changed because of that.

What attracts you to certain images?

LM: Something that we're both quite drawn towards is touch, or things that touch on this feeling of desire. It will never come up in a way that's normative or expected. There's always something that is cutting against the grain of something else. That feeling of subversion is quite important.

LBN: A deviant image. 'Deviant' is a word we always seem to come back to.

Your spreads series juxtaposes images from assorted magazines and overlays them with a translucent layer of resin. The effect is very tactile, but you're in a gallery so you can't touch them! Can you speak a bit more about that?

LBN: That's a good place to talk about our relationship with images. The relief that sits on top of the print is a resin cast of a leather surface. We were interested in this idea of what it would be to read or consume an image through the body. Through the site of the body...

LM: ...and the skin, specifically.

LBN: So this transparent skin is the lens through which you read the image. It forces this intimacy with this viewer. But it also withholds because it's creating something you want to touch and engage with, but you can't as it's treated quite formally as an object.



LM: The spread works generate a feeling of wanting to be very close to the work. Wanting to go *into* the work. There's something about this surface that [creates] a feeling of intimacy with the work.

There's also a closeness in being able to recognise images. You can sometimes pick them out. For example, there's the Maggie Gyllenhaal...

LBN: Yes, the still from *Secretary*. We had a long conversation about that image because it's such a strong one. Typically you're not quite sure what the source of the images we work with is, because they can be from anywhere. It felt nice to have something a bit more concrete in there as well.

What role does the idea of community play within your work?

LM: One thing we were focused on was this idea of a 'counterpublic' – of specific communities concentrated around specific printed materials, for example. You have these magazines that will have different networks of people who consume them, but it's also things that are not normative.

LBN: They're connected through consumption but they never meet. These people aren't aware of the other people who are reading the same thing as them, but they know that they're out there. There's this huge level of intimacy though it's completely anonymous, existing purely in the private realm. That's something we were drawn to.

You both also have independent practices – how does the work that you create together differ from the work that you make alone?

LM: There are so many overlaps. We pool together mutual things that we're interested in to create the thing that happens in-between. We've noticed that my work is very stripped-back in many ways and Louis' work is more maximalist, so they have their own identities.

LBN: The collaboration is constantly going through this process of regeneration, because we're bringing in new ideas and interests as the two practices around it grow and develop. The collaboration is a conversation that's always responding to what we're bringing in from the outside.

In that sense you get the best of both worlds.

LM: We're both big believers in giving things the time they need to grow. Those gaps when we're not necessarily making together, those spaces are vital.