

Exquisite Mariposa

Fiona Alison Duncan

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Fiona Alison Duncan's *Exquisite Mariposa* is a funny, thought-provoking novel that levels pointed critiques at gender and class inequality and captures what it's like to be a young person today.

The novel's narrator—a woman in her late twenties also named Fiona Alison Duncan—moves from New York City to Los Angeles and lands in Koreatown, where she sublets a room in La Mariposa with an ever-changing collection of housemates. She loves this new group of friends so much that she successfully pitches a reality television show featuring their relationships and conversations. The decision leads to immediate regret, explored alongside questions of identity, technology, love and sexuality, and what people mean by “real.”

The novel's ideas and voice are a pleasure. The story is structured around Fiona's movement away from reality television and toward writing to communicate what she loves about La Mariposa. Within this scaffold, the narrative's meandering is held together by Fiona's acute observations about herself and her world. She is insightful about self-fashioning on social media, and describes the money and career problems of her friends (and generation) with direct, wry wit. She is an amusing and frank narrator, writing about sexuality and the ups and downs of her relationship with her boyfriend Lucien in forthright detail.

Fiona's search for the “real” leads her into astrology, visions, and drug use, wherein her voice becomes hazier, more earnest, and more prone to clichés. The novel's language is freshest and most inventive in its critical, satirical moments.

Exquisite Mariposa is an incisive story about the struggles of sensitive, artistic young people as they figure out how best to live.

REBECCA HUSSEY (September / October 2019)

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