

A Talk About "TEARS" At Team With Mark Verabioff

FEBRUARY 2018

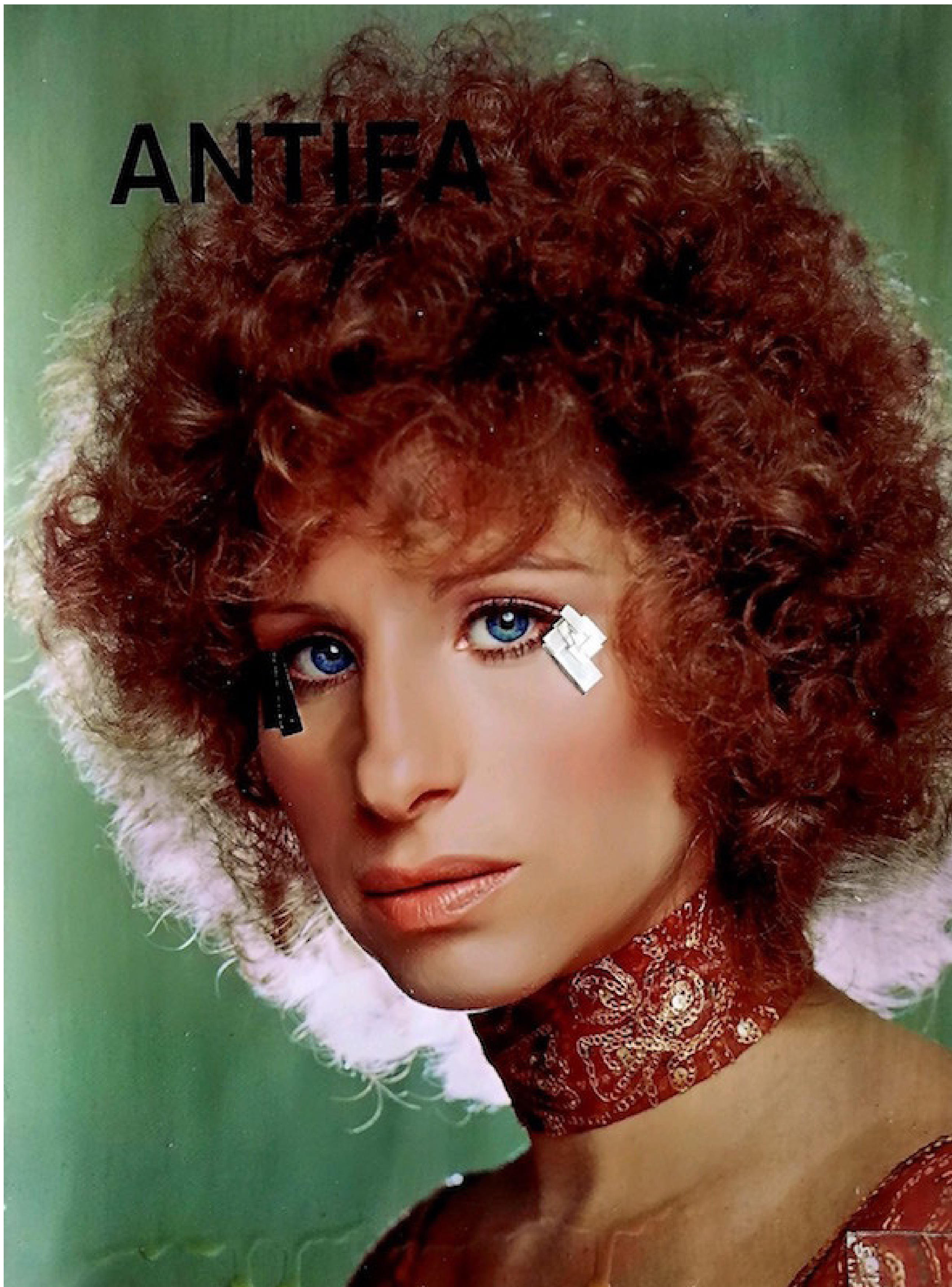
"THE BEST ART IN THE WORLD"

"TEARS"

January 11 – March 3, 2018

Team Gallery

83 Grand Street, New York, NY 10013



MARK VERABIOFF, "ANTIFA", 2017, Page tear, acrylic medium, HP-564, artist tape, and black zig memory system, 11-1/2 x 8-1/2, inches, Courtesy of the artist and team (gallery, inc.)

By **BARRY N. NEUMAN**, FEB. 2018

Upon entering Team Gallery, New York, one is immediately immersed within the environment that Mark Verabioff has created for his solo exhibition, "TEARS." The Los Angeles-based, Canadian artist agreed to be interviewed by e-mail this week.

Barry N. Neuman: The deep blackness of the floor-to-ceiling, vinyl wall decals of intervened-upon photographic images of, respectively, a young Brooke Shields, and, on the adjacent wall, a mature Nick Jonas, makes an impression on a gallery visitor. However, the comparative lightness of the other planes, forming the room, allows a visitor to roam through the space with a great sense of wonderment. What lead you to create such an extraordinary environment?

Mark Verabioff: You've bypassed Diana Vreeland! She is between Brooke Shields and Nick Jonas on the vinyl.

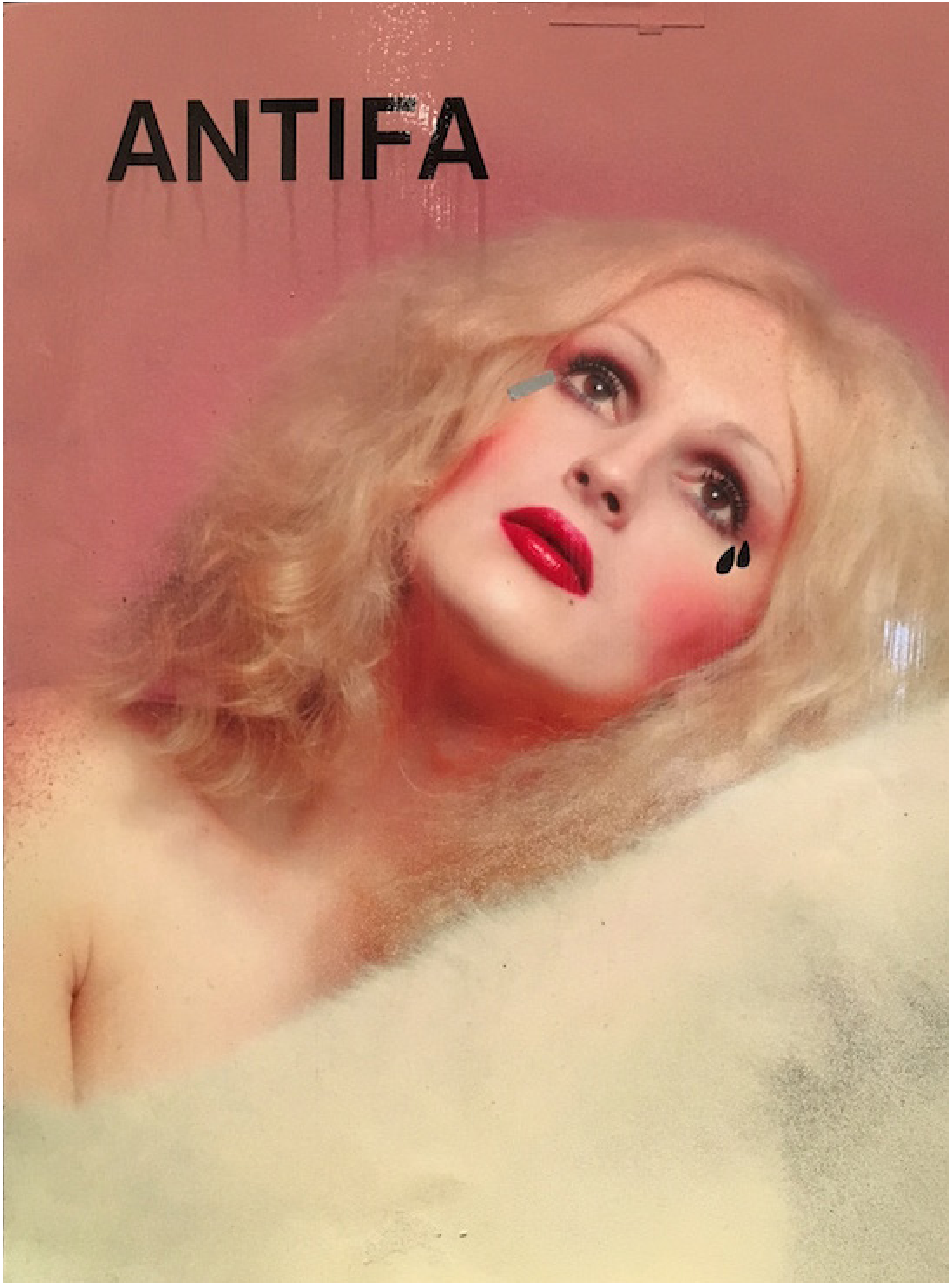
For some time now, I've wanted to work with vinyl decals purely to create grandiose façades. I could not have gotten to "TEARS" without having been given the opportunity to participate in the Hammer Museum's biennial, "**Made In L.A. 2016: a, the, though, only.**"

During the very first studio visit, made by the curators Aram Moshayedi and Hamza Walker, I knew exactly what I wanted to do. "MARXISM AND ART BEWARE OF FASCIST BROISM" enveloped the gallery there with a floor-to-ceiling, vinyl wall decal, page tears, and canvases.

In my Team Gallery show, the application of these three distinct materialities continues, but without recapitulating the Hammer's installation context. "TEARS" anchors my conceptual visual signature of looking through a queer, feminist lens.



MARK VERABIOFF, "TEARS," 2018, Team Gallery, New York (exhibition installation view), Courtesy of the artist and team (gallery, inc.)



MARK VERABIOFF, "ANTIFA", 2017, Page tear, acrylic medium, HP-564, artist tape, and black zig memory system, 11-1/2 x 8-1/2, inches, Courtesy of the artist and team (gallery, inc.)

BNN: The works in your exhibition appear to arise from minimalism, but they are ultimately expressionistic. The torn-away magazine pages, the flattened blobs of chewing gum (resembling projectiles, shot at high-velocities), the sprayed-upon tableaux, and the conspicuously hand-applied, black lettering and adhesive tape - they all subtly yet decisively reveal the intervention of the artist on a manufactured world. Can you please describe your approach to achieving such distinctive results?

MV: My ongoing approach to making art is to concretely engage with new material, transmuting each into a new outward model. For example, the act of tearing apart fashion photography books, museum catalogues, and magazines is a private performance in the studio with the end-result being the performative residue of the page tears that have become an authored term and material. The chewing gum first appeared in my "FASCIST BROISM" body of work, and it sharply ignited conversations around Hannah Wilke's gum wounds, or, in Hannah's own words, "cunts" from her "S.O.S. - Starification Object Series" of 1974 - 82. The two canvases at the Hammer had page tears from a "Flaunt" magazine pictorial spread of the sexually fluid Nick Jonas; his pose resembled Wilke's in her iconic 1975 poster, "MARXISM AND ART: BEWARE OF FASCIST FEMINISM."

The pieces of gum on the page tears and the canvases in "TEARS" were spray-painted through a template, and this action anchored their embellishments. The wads of gum do, indeed, take on the appearance of projectiles; one of my L.A. artist gal pals, Alike Cooper, brilliantly likened them to spitballs.

The adhesive tape organically grew out of the simple need to cover up my handwritten text on the page tears, posturing its own evolution from lazy editorial device into an element of piggy decoupage.

BNN: In your tear sheet works, the female or female-appearing subjects - icons of the 1970's - are richly depicted in black-and-white or in color. The gridded work calls to mind talent agency roster displays, but this work is different in character than "Talent," by David Robbins. Likewise, the modified, individual portraits, presented at intervals in a row upon two adjacent walls, lean more toward what Gerhard Richter and Sara Greenberger-Rafferty have expressively done in painterly terms. What prompted you to perform this particular kind of tightrope act, balancing technique and interpretation (or commentary)? Also, why have you chosen these individuals and their portraits from the 1970's?

MV: I love that work by David Robbins! I mean, how can you not go there in reference to the gridded square install of the 80 page tears that make up the single work, "CONCERNED WOMEN FOR AMERICA RIM GLUE POUR CULTURAL CONFINEMENT RUNDOWNS POOLSIDE" - the linguistic landscape of "TEARS."

It was the brilliant idea of José Freire, the owner of Team Gallery, to install them in a square grid, as I had no comprehension of how we were going to incorporate them into the space without taking up valuable real estate. José and I were very clear with each other that we didn't want to cover up the vinyl wall decal. I'm very happy with the result, as it ends up looking like a pop-up window on a computer screen. All of these women represent concerned women who are combatants - like myself - against all afflictions of the oppressed, some of which are identified in text on Brooke Shield's chest: "ABORTION ABOLITIONIST," "RACIST RIMMER," "CONFEDERATE SKIN," "FAG FREAKER," "LIZZIE LASHER," "TISSUE TERRORIST," and so on.



MARK VERABIOFF, "RIM CULTURAL CONFINEMENT", 2017, Acrylic on canvas, page tears, HP-564, spray paint, dupli-color clear coat, artist tape, and, gum, 72 x 54 inches, Courtesy of the artist and team (gallery, inc.)



MARK VERABIOFF "CONCERNED WOMEN FOF AMERICA RIM GLUE POUR CULTURAL CONFINEMENT RUNDOWNS POOL SIDE" 2017, Page tear, acrylic medium, HP-564, artist tape, and black zig memory system, 104 x 100 inches, Courtesy of the artist and team (gallery, inc.)

The "ANTIFA" page tears were initially a break from making the black-and-white canvases and page tears. I had no intention of including them in this body of work. It wasn't until I read the press release that I found out we were showing them! Everyone reacts to them with a sense of nowness ; certainly, they are present-day works, acting as the 11th hour call to take up action to squash the brewing, fascist regimes in this country. It was very important for me from the beginning to depict a child - in this case, Brooke Shields, when she was a child actress - into this larger-than-life girl-warrior with a fierce force of unprejudiced youth empowerment and cultural insurgency, combatting those oppressive characters. Having her next to another "gangsta" of cultural insurgency, Diana Vreeland, sets up a cross-generational passing of the baton. Meanwhile, Nick Jonas, the exhibition's white male representative of passivity, happens to be usurped by a gay, mid-life, white, male visual cultural insurgent, who privately swoons from the back room.



MARK VERABIOFF, "CONCERNED WOMEN FOF AMERICA RIM GLUE POUR CULTURAL CONFINEMINT RUNDOWNS POOL SIDE" (detail), 2017, Page tear, acrylic medium, HP-564, artist tape, and black zig memory system, 104 x 100 inches, Courtesy of the artist and team (gallery, inc.)

BNN: The paintings may be perceived as objects. They clearly counterpoint the planer, media-centric works. What are some of your objectives in creating works on canvas, mounted on stretchers of a particular depth? How did you arrive at creating such a material and ethereal presence, individually and collectively?

MV: They are not paintings. They're canvases. I use black paint, straight out of the tube. Therefore, I'm not a painter, as another L.A. artist gal pal, Rebecca Morris, has pointed out. So, how did I achieve such a presence? It was with butch-ass, gay backbone!

It's always been important for me, as a gay artist and a gay, visual, cultural insurgent, to reach over the abridgments and address the concerns of immediate necessity of others. The inequality of women - economically, culturally, historically, and politically - is of utmost importance to me. I firmly believe that the only way to crush down those walls of oppression is to address concerns of another disfranchised populace along with one's own activism. I passed the baton by making queer, direct address on the body politic years ago, during my juicy days, as a young artist, living in New York in the late 1980's.

Concerning the materiality and ethereality of the canvas works, it's critical that I offer my audience enigmatic seductions, which arise from the intellectual gestures and poignant cultural insurgency I've been intently sexualizing into various linguistic landscapes.

I remember the first time I saw the 1979 Soviet science fiction, art film, "Stalker," directed by Andrei Tarkovsky. That film was my inducement to make art that exuded both seduction and allusion.

BNN: What's up for you next?

MV: Secret ANTIFA billboards in a secret city by a secret curator.

The overt operation that is Mark Verabioff's "TEARS" exhibition may be experienced by entering the front door of Team Gallery, in SoHo. WM