

ANNANDALE-ON-HUDSON, NEW YORK

Anne Collier

CCS Bard Galleries // June 28–September 21

FEMINISM IS FASHIONABLE, or at least palatable, in this pop-cultural moment. (Consider Beyoncé's recent MTV Video Music Awards performance in front of a giant backdrop emblazoned with the F word.) And yet the aims of critical feminist artists and mainstream couturiers would seem out of sync, if not directly oppositional. It's worth noting, therefore, that Anne Collier's midcareer retrospective—as concerned with subtext as with casting a critical eye on the representations of gender—is sponsored by Dior, complete with a glowing catalogue blurb by Raf Simons.

Like the best Conceptual art, Collier's straightforward pictures manage to elicit emotion with an economy of formal means. Her portraits of worn, obsolescent, personal objects (LPs, photography books annotated with colorful Post-it flags, self-help tapes, paper calendars) shot against seamless white backgrounds hint at complex desires for consumption and identification. It is this fusion of cool surface and subjective affect that attracts the fashion and lifestyle industry she holds at arm's length. Curator Michael Darling addresses this contradiction in his catalogue essay, which describes Collier's images as "deflected self-portraiture." Her "portrait" subjects range from eccentric collections to avatars for the artist as California girl and photographer.

The recent "Woman with a Camera" series, in particular, examines how Woman has been continuously objectified for the rapacious male gaze, even when she is holding the means of representation (a camera). The exhibition begins with a slow-moving 35 mm slide projection of stills from the 1978 movie *Eyes of Laura Mars*. In the film, actress Faye Dunaway plays the role of a fashion photographer who has premonitory visions of murders. The projection piece, made in 2009, ka-thunks through a sequence of Dunaway drawing back from her lens in horror as she sees a woman killed "in her

mind's eye." Other images from the series show women as fetishized part-objects, eerily fused with the photographic apparatus. Blown-up pictures from 2013 illustrate the recto and verso of a postcard of a topless African tribeswoman holding a camera, her head seemingly replaced by the device. Another set of rephotographed trade-magazine pages depict plainly sexist advertising images from the 1970s that juxtapose headless nude female bodies with camera equipment signifying a disembodied phallus. *Cut (Color)*, 2009, explores the violence of representation and its utter artificiality through a cinematic allusion. In this image, a color photograph of Collier's own eye sits horizontally bisected against a trimmer that resembles a clapboard—an unmistakable reference to the opening, eye-slicing scene in the Surrealist film *Un Chien Andalou*, as a second catalogue essay by Chrissie Iles makes clear.

The generously spaced exhibition and thoughtful catalogue elucidate many other important aspects of Collier's career, including her interest in Warholian doubling and the endless renewability of the blonde-bombshell celebrity icon.

Yet Darling and Iles do a disservice in linking Collier's work too far backward and forward, respectively. As Darling states, the artist's studies with noted West Coast Conceptualists like Michael Asher and James Welling certainly influenced her direction, but her interest lies less in 1980s concerns with authorship than in the physical circulation of imagery. Likewise, Iles's linking of Collier to a generation of post-Internet artists erases Collier's preoccupation with the photograph-as-object. Collapsing the hierarchy of commercial and fine-art photography in her rephotographed images, Collier revels in the details of things, from a folded poster to a destroyed cassette. Acknowledging that not just images but their physical formats contain layers of indexical meaning, Collier finds a distinguished place among her Generation X peers, from Wolfgang Tillmans and Roe Ethridge to Moyra Davey. In contrast to extreme Conceptualists, Collier's photography explores the materiality and idealization of the body and self—and this is exactly where fashion and feminism's concerns meet. —Wendy Vogel

Anne Collier
Cut (Color),
2009.
C-print,
45¾ x 55 in.

