

Anne Collier

CENTER FOR CURATORIAL STUDIES AT
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OVER THE PAST DECADE OR SO, Anne Collier has developed a photographic practice that straddles the romantically emotive and the conceptually cool. She performs this balancing act by making images of psychologically laden clichés: motivational and self-help guides, album covers, posters, photographic landscapes, celebrity portraits. This survey, tightly selected and elegantly presented in Bard's CCS Galleries, may not have been complete enough to call a retrospective, but it nevertheless offered a welcome opportunity to assess Collier's accomplishments across approximately forty works, all made since 2002. What viewers found was an artist who masterfully confronts us with material that solicits our identification, even as her formal approach prevents that circuit of affinity from ever being completed.

The earliest work in the show depicts a vacuum-formed plastic binder archiving a series of cassette tapes that bear the names of basic emotions (*Introduction, Fear, Anger, Despair, Guilt, Hope, Joy, Love/Conclusion*, 2002/2014). Such self-help and pop-psychology material continued to find its way into Collier's work in the form of therapeutic and new age workbooks—all notably left blank—and cassettes from Christian audiobooks. Early on, she had recognized her characteristic vocabulary: found material shot in the studio under even light in a dispassionate manner that drains a great deal of whatever affective charge the subject might be expected to carry. But

over time her approach to subject matter, initially redolent of a '70s West Coast spirituality imbibed during her Los Angeles childhood, shed these overtly psychological valences for a broader, more oblique range of reference.

Collier's breakthrough dates to 2005, by which time she had relocated to New York and begun shooting photographic material unearthed from flea markets, junk shops, and the Internet; the archness of her earlier works disappeared, allowing something more mysterious and complex to surface. Old pop records provided her with one important source of iconography. In a number of her works, small stacks of albums lean against the white wall of her studio, the gray or black floor providing a horizon line along the bottom third of each image. *Double Marilyn*, 2007, with its repeated covers of a rare 1976 disc of the star's recordings—an obvious nod to Warhol—is emblematic of this shift in Collier's practice: the rephotography of an image, in this case the shot on the album cover, that circulates as an object inseparable from its material support; the complicated relay of appropriations that long predates her own gesture; and, not least, a fascination with imagery suggestive of melancholic introspection.

Of course, Collier is best known as an archivist of femininity under and behind the gaze of the apparatus, the photographer of the "woman with a camera," and this survey presented some of her finest works in this mode. These include *Woman with a Camera (Dptych)*, 2006, two publicity stills—one color, one black-and-white—of a Nikon-toting Faye Dunaway in the title role of the 1978 thriller *Eyes of Laura Mars*, a film the artist revisited for her slide projection *Woman with a Camera (35mm)*, 2009, also on view at Bard. Collier found other women with cameras on the covers of photography magazines, in the advertisements within, on postcards, or in glossy coffee-table books. These works have often been aligned with the critique of representation undertaken by the women artists of the Pictures generation. However, if Collier is not averse to indicating her sympathies—as in *May/June 2009 (Cindy Sherman, Mark Seliger)*, 2009, a double stack of *L'Uomo Vogue* featuring a cover image of the artist—ultimately her project cannot be straightforwardly assim-

lated with those of Sherman, Sarah Charlesworth, Laurie Simmons, et al.

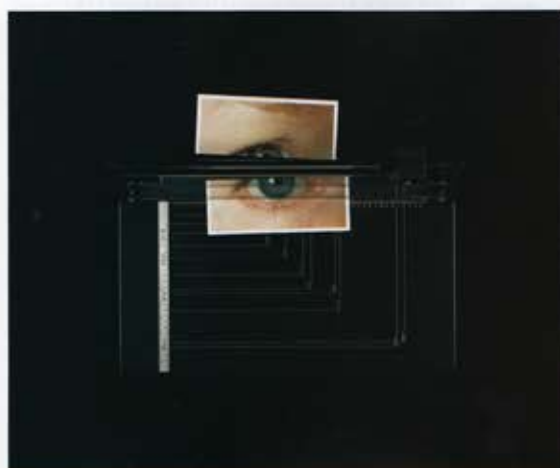
Collier, that is to say, is less interested in appropriation than in repetition, something hinted at by all the doublings in the exhibition (most mischievously in *Endpapers #1* and *#2 [Nude Landscapes, Arnie Hendin]*, both 2012, with their frame-filling geographies of pendulous breasts). Such repetition occurs under her own "forensic" gaze, to take up a term she has used to describe her practice. Far from being an extension of the human eye, the camera for Collier necessarily interposes the mediation of the mechanical, impersonal lens on the act of looking and rebuffs the humanist conviction that the device might serve to seamlessly enlarge our organic sense of vision. Hence, perhaps, the profound strangeness of her women

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with cameras, who come to appear like so many assemblages of the human and the machinic. Throughout the exhibition, we find examples of what we could call a rostrum aesthetic, in which the artist has trained her camera downward at a perpendicular angle to her subject—the opened book or unfolded poster laid out horizontally on her neutral work surface—a choice that imposes, via the unconventional angle, a distance between the artist and her subject while giving her viewers permission to look closely, even clinically. When that subject is a photograph of the artist's own eye, as in *Developing Tray #2 (Grey) or Cut (Color)*, both 2009, the result can be unsettling. The selection of works in this exhibition underplayed some of that discomfort, but the overview certainly provided a compelling demonstration of the peculiar affective bind of Collier's photography, her simultaneous mobilization of our sympathies and denial of those bonds. □

Travels to the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Nov. 22, 2014–Mar. 8, 2015; *Aspen Art Museum, CO*, Apr. 2–July 15, 2015; *Art Gallery of Ontario, Canada*, fall 2015.

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From left: Anne Collier, *Cut (Color)*, 2009, C-print, 45 1/2 x 55". Anne Collier, *Double Marilyn*, 2007, C-print, 48 1/2 x 63 1/2". Anne Collier, *May/June 2009 (Cindy Sherman, Mark Seliger)*, 2009, C-print, 40 1/2 x 50 1/2".

