

New York

Deborah Kass

PAUL KASMIN GALLERY
293 Tenth Avenue
January 24–February 23

Deborah Kass's "My Elvis +" consists of a collection of works made by the artist in the 1990s, works that are on view together for the first time in this gallery's new space (in a building that recently housed Bungalow 8—a celebrity hangout known for its exclusive guest keys and palm-tree wallpaper). It is fitting that we see so many images of Barbra Streisand on these once-famed walls, and perhaps even more so since the works directly evoke Andy Warhol's silk-screened output. Printed in ink that looks as if it could smudge your fingers, works such as Double Red Yentl (My Elvis), 1993–2012, and 7 Ghost Yentls, 1997, picture Streisand standing in a heavy vestment suited more for a yeshiva boy in 1870s Poland than a headlining chanteuse, and are repeated and synchronized like Broadway dancers awaiting cue.



Deborah Kass, Red Deb, 2000, silk screen and acrylic on canvas, 40 x 40 x 1 1/2".

Out of context, Streisand looks more recognizable as one of the boys who wore those same caps and yelled "Extra! Extra! Read all about it!" in Depression-era pedestrian plazas. In most of the thirteen canvases on display in the gallery's first room, Kass, in manner just as loud, adds big blocks of color to the highly contrasted image—peach for the face, yellow for gold-rimmed glasses, and light pink for lips, their backgrounds sequenced in solid reds or variant blues. In others, just silver suffices, creating in the space an overall effect half Muybridge, half what happens when there's a signal interruption with the analog television.

Kass has said that she appropriated Streisand's image because she saw herself in the actress, embodying Judaism publicly and challenging the strictures of popular beauty. (Kass was probably also attracted to the art of Sherrie Levine and Cindy Sherman for their similar culturally-reverberating effects). But by using someone else's likeness as a reflection of one's own, Kass establishes a fanatical hierarchy foreign to the new generation this debut is targeting, one obsessed less with single-channel fame and more with their own presence in a multivalent network. What's more, the only self-portraits included in this exhibition, such as Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, 1994, which began her Warhol project, are corralled in the gallery's back room like forgotten coats in a closet. We never get to really see Kass, even though nowadays we expect to when someone makes a comment, be it on the Internet or behind closed doors.

— Frank Expósito