

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Familiar Photographs Re-imagined; Drag Queens Raise Iwo Jima Flag

By Alexandra Cheney
July 15, 2010



Entering the heavy glass door of the Steven Kasher Gallery in Chelsea, gallery goers encountered an odd sense of déjà vu as they saw familiar albeit altered images. Viewers slowly came to understand the contemporary photographs on the wall were reworked, reconfigured and manipulated versions of past pictures.

Introducing “Inspired,” a show dedicated to iconic photographs re-imagined by nearly 50 contemporary photographers. Wednesday evening over 400 people packed into the gallery and overflowed onto 23rd Street to catch a glimpse of opening night.

“We make original thoughts from things in our brains, things we’ve already seen,” said Beth Rudin DeWoody, the curator and creator of the show. “These artists are seeing it in a different way, from a new angle.”

DeWoody contrasted emerging artists with older, more established photographers, purposefully creating an exhibition that toys with a variety of mediums and varies in price.

Ranging from Liz Magic Lazer’s “Faced #8,” a digital C-print inspired by Cindy Sherman’s “Untitled Film Still #21” for \$1,100 to Meghan Boody’s “Guard! What Place is This?,” a framed Fujiflex that reinvents Ruth Orkin’s “An American Girl in Italy” for \$15,000, each photograph tells a very purposeful story.

STEVEN
KASHER
GALLERY

“My photograph is a more gothic, romantic version of Orkin’s piece. It’s almost vampiric in the story it tells of a woman lost,” said Boody, looking out behind blue-framed shaded lenses. “Will she make her way or pick the wrong male?”

Appearing in her first show, 20-year-old Chase Koopersmith could barely contain her excitement. Based in Los Angeles, Koopersmith flew out for the opening, her blonde ringlet curls bouncing as she described her feelings on the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, the launching point for one of her two pieces in the show, a photo transfer to wood entitled “Hush, Hush.”

Inspired by Joe Rosenthal’s “Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima, February 1945,” Koopersmith’s piece takes the familiar pose and substitutes four drag queens and a rainbow-colored flag. Staying true to the photographic process, the graduate student used digital technology but introduced another element.

“There was something lacking,” Koopersmith said. “There has to be a human factor. I introduced chance, human flaws. The image didn’t transfer perfectly, but part of it did; that’s the art.”

A common theme strung the pieces together: family. Many of the artists included significant others throughout their work positing them as models, like Boody’s usage of her boyfriend. DeWoody’s daughter was featured, both as an artist and a model in the show. Friends photographed friends, many of whom came to the opening.

Versed in the careers of many of the artists in “Inspired,” Kasher capitalized on his knowledge of these relationships, purposefully hanging the show in a manner to further evoke these emotions.

“I found the emotional center of each piece and made sure the pieces around it supported the emotion,” explained Kasher, who wore tennis shoes, jeans and a tailored black blazer. “It’s a crazy idea, a fun idea. All in all it’s a crazy juxtaposition of fun, freaky moments.”

Other artists featured include Eric Kroll, Alexandra Penney, Lyle Ashton Harris and Erica Lennard.

The show runs until August 13 and can be viewed Tuesday thru Saturday, 11 am – 6 pm.