

#ICACARYLEIBOWITZ



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CARY LEIBOWITZ: MUSEUM SHOW
FEBRUARY 2–MARCH 25



THE EDNA S. TUTTLEMAN GALLERY



Cary Leibowitz, *Fried Chicken (Being Jealous of Everyone)*, 1990. Latex paint on wood panel, 48 × 48 in.
Courtesy of the artist and INVISIBLE-EXPORTS.

Cary Leibowitz, also widely known by the moniker Candyass, creates comically self-effacing works that are by turns crass, heartbreaking, hilarious, joyful, quizzical, and touching. A self-deprecating tone that is on occasion flamboyantly Jewish, but always dryly queer runs throughout his paintings, videos, drawings, sculptures, and multiples. He told the *Village Voice* in 1990, “The defense I’ve always had about my work is that, all right, it might not be like genius stuff and it might not be earth-shattering and it copies a lot of other people, but it’s documentation. This is some guy who grew up in the suburbs in 1963 and he’s gay and he’s making work and a gallery’s showing him.” With Leibowitz, interrogations of form quickly cycle through neurosis, leading into self-analysis to find a place of droll acceptance. Two intertwined questions — What is inappropriate? What is love? — often run as undercurrents, flavoring his anxieties and enthusiasms.

This exhibition, organized by The Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco, is the first comprehensive survey of Leibowitz’s work to date. The objects of Leibowitz are always pedestrian. His signature style includes a casual scrawl on stock paper, plywood, wallpaper, fabric, and middlebrow ceramics. Anyone can make them. He is largely renowned for multiples and editions in the guise of trash-cans, mittens, socks, pendants, stuffed animals, windshield visors, footballs, paper napkins, buttons, belt buckles, mugs, and more. Anyone can produce them. He sometimes finds himself on stage or in front of the camera recounting colloquial anxieties and partaking in gossipy gabfests. Anyone can share them.

There’s a little Charlie Brown self-loathing *sigh* in the demeanor and design of everything Leibowitz does, and this makes his range of underperforming exclamations and dreams of identification relatable. Leibowitz stands with the long lineage of entertainers and comedians who take deeply serious emotions — acceptance, death, belonging, exclusion, depression, desire — and present them as

foibles, wry asides, and sad-sack punchlines. As a painting of Cary's tells it, "don't hate me because I'm mediocre." Because identification always comes easier if more subversively with a nervous chuckle.

The gag underlying all of the work is that Cary is, at the end of the day, quite sincere with his objects and subject matter. Whereas most artists declare singularity and shirk their influences and connections, Cary boldly wears his attachments to, and connections with, others. Allegiances, allusions, and appropriations are clearly visible and labelled. In the catalogue for this exhibition, Leibowitz's husband Simon Lince writes, "By far, the people who have influenced Cary the most are Andy Warhol, Robert Venturi, and Denise Scott Brown. These individuals are more than voices. They are kindred spirits."

Pop artist Andy Warhol, through paintings, prints, and movies, was contemporary art's greatest proponent for the commonplace, and social circulations. His droll demeanor made the outsized personalities of scenesters, artists, and celebrities around him shine all the more. Cary borrows Warhol's spirit of fandom, sharing the casual tone of chitchat, the incessant repetition of commercial materials, and aspirational celebrity identification.

Philadelphia-based architects Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown are often lauded for ushering in architecture's postmodern attitude through their engagement with and love for the everyday. Their evocations of the commercial exuberance of Las Vegas and the ugly ordinariness of the highway continue to both inspire and generate hackles. Their work is bright, bold, enunciates function, and celebrates contradiction clearly. Cary's colors, plentitude, and charmed tchotchkes find home in Venturi, Scott Browns's architecture, and not just formally — Cary and Simon had the architects design their house in 2009.

Cary might shirk from admitting his own strengths and talents, but he readily admits his tastes in popular culture, actresses, and artists; as well as fears for his weight, his standing, his racism, his worth, his welcome. As Simon summarizes in the appropriately titled essay, "Full Disclosure," Leibowitz aims to be:

- Ordinary AND Beautiful
- Disarming AND Challenging
- Funny AND Heartbreaking
- Solid AND Fleeting
- Casual AND Obsessive
- Defiant AND Shy
- Glib AND Wise
- Awkward AND Poetic

What is more loving, and potentially inappropriate, than having your husband spell out your goals in your own catalogue? This is against all proper intellectual decorum. A more succinct and astute summation of Leibowitz's art likely doesn't exist.

Given the scope of *Museum Show*, consider again the conjoined questions: What is inappropriate? What is love? Love is many things, and sometimes, and in some company, the ways it is expressed might be deemed inappropriate. But by whom? And why? As answer, Leibowitz deserves the last word. The conclusion of an artist statement he wrote in October 2016 reads:

I have been doing this too long to say it was just a hobby
I do look for the uncomfortableness and problematic in life
and daily routine
I do believe quality of life is important for every living being
(please don't ask me to explain expand)
I do think stuff happened to me for a reason
and I do think it didn't/doesn't happen for me for a reason too
Like I said I have a happy marriage and a good job
making art cant destroy me

— Anthony Elms, Chief Curator

Cary Leibowitz: Museum Show is organized by The Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco and is curated by CJM's former Associate Curator Anastasia James. Accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue. Organized at ICA by Chief Curator Anthony Elms.

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Invocations of identity and idol worship, as well as formal appeals to kitsch, critique, and celebratory souvenirs fill the space.

MAR 14, 6:30 PM

Cary Leibowitz and Wayne Koestenbaum in Conversation with Chief Curator Anthony Elms, in conjunction with the release of Wayne Koestenbaum's *Camp Marmalade*

ARTIST BIO

Cary Leibowitz (b. 1960, New York; lives New York) also known as "Candyass," is an American artist whose work has shown in museums and institutions across the globe including ICA Boston; the Walker Arts Center, Minneapolis; the Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt; the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, CT; Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Whitney Museum, New York; The Jewish Museum, New York; MoMA PS1, New York; Indianapolis Museum of Art, the Indianapolis; the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH; the Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, PA; Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe, Germany; White Columns, New York; Philadelphia Museum of Jewish Art, Philadelphia, PA; Art Metropole, Toronto; Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf; Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn, Germany; Cabinet Gallery, London; The Kitchen NY; Galleri Nicolai Wallner, Copenhagen; Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago; Galerie Claudio Botello, Turin, Italy; List Visual Arts Center, MIT, Cambridge, MA. Leibowitz's work has been included in the landmark exhibitions *Too Jewish? Challenging Traditional Identities* at The Jewish Museum in New York; *In a Different Light* at the University Art Museum, University of California Berkeley; and *Bad Girls*, New Museum, New York. Leibowitz is represented by INVISIBLE-EXPORTS.



ABOVE: Cary Leibowitz, *Faggy Faggy Boom Boom*, 2002. Latex paint on wood panel, 24 × 14 in.
BACK COVER: Cary Leibowitz, *Attention All Art Critics...*, 1990. Latex paint on wood panel, 7 × 12 in.
Courtesy of the artist and INVISIBLE-EXPORTS.