

# NIGHT GALLERY

2276 E. 16th Street, Los Angeles, California 90021

[nightgallery.ca](http://nightgallery.ca)

## CARA BENEDETTO

Love You

April 2 - May 7, 2022

Night Gallery is thrilled to announce *Love You*, an exhibition by Cara Benedetto. This is the artist's second solo show with the gallery, following *The Descent of Woman* in 2016.

"To be a fan is to scream alone together. To go on a collective journey of self-definition," writes British journalist Hannah Ewen in *Fangirls: Scenes from Modern Music Culture* (2019). The works in Cara Benedetto's "Love You" series pay homage to fan(girl) art. These recent paintings celebrate the femme icons of Benedetto's life—including her mother, her dog, Mariah Carey, Zoë Kravitz, the stars of HBO's *Euphoria*, Angelina Jolie, and Sahar Tabar. The latter is something of a fan artist herself. An Iranian social media influencer dubbed "Zombie Angelina," Tabar rose to fame for her dramatic selfies likened to a gaunt, undead Jolie. It remains unclear whether Tabar achieved her look with surgery, cosmetics, digital filters, or some combination thereof. Benedetto similarly draws from various image-making vocabularies: digital and analog, abstraction and text, oil painting and factory-produced décor.

For this exhibition, Benedetto has cleverly unmoored the operations of painting, printmaking, and meme-making. The resulting works are a type of fan art. Benedetto produces the grounds of her paintings—collages of text and digital images of her beloved subjects—through the décor website [easycanvasprints.com](http://easycanvasprints.com). On top of these canvas prints she adds gestural, atmospheric backdrops in oil. Benedetto's painted whorls at times resemble halos, articulating the crisp outlines of her subject's coiffures or profiles. Sometimes these oils bleed directly into the text. Her words range from wry nods to marketing ("Chobani" over an agonized still of Glenn Close from the 1987 film *Fatal Attraction*) to an almost sloganistic unity ("shift the we to me and me to we several times in your mind.")

Benedetto has long invested in printmaking as a material and conceptual foundation for her practice. Here, she extends the logic of the copy to fandom. An audience, after all, only exists in multiple. Fans prove their devotion by consuming secondary tiers of mass-produced content (branded apparel, behind-the-scenes documentaries, the magazine foldout) as well as producing their own cultural ephemera. This fan art—handmade concert posters, zines, fan fiction, meme accounts, reposts, their own musical covers—functions as pure expressions of *love*. For fans and by fans, it circulates in a gift economy one step removed from the celebrity objects of their admiration. Fans forge a group identity around the fervent, unrequited love of a public figure. But this is love from a distance, for a carefully crafted persona, an ache without an anchor.

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Here, Benedetto reclaims the abject identity of the fangirl. The unleashed libidinal energy of a young, feminized fan base has been deemed adolescent silliness at best, pathological at worst. Degraded in the popular imagination for generations—think of the screaming, fainting admirers of Elvis and the Beatles—emotional fans have occupied the vestigial role of the hysteric. They are “enfreaked,” writes fan studies scholar William Proctor. Such neurotic descriptions persist well into the 21st century. In 2015, a *GQ* contributor called One Direction fans “dark-pink oil slick that howls and moans and undulates.” Benedetto recognizes the pleasure forged in crowds of sweat, tears, and collective erotic longing. As an immersive gesture, Benedetto has produced a wall-length vinyl mural based on a photograph of her high school gymnasium. On top, she has appended a fangirl manifesto and graffiti. “We mourn each moment because fangirls love to live,” she writes. They live to love, together.

Text by Wendy Vogel.

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**Cara Benedetto** (b. 1979, Wausau, WI) has had solo shows at Night Gallery, Los Angeles and Chapter NY, New York. She has presented performances at NAVEL, Los Angeles; Cressman Center for the Visual Arts, Hite Art Institute, Louisville; and the Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw. Benedetto’s work has been featured in institutional exhibitions at MOCA, Cleveland; Metro Pictures, New York; Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna; Academy of Art, Stuttgart; and the Jewish Museum, New York, among others. Benedetto was a 2014 fellow at Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart, and the 2014 recipient of a Rema Hort Mann Foundation Emerging Artist Grant. She is the author of two romance novels, *The Coming of Age* and *Burning Blue*, and the editor of *Contemporary Print Handbook*, published with Halmos. Benedetto is an Associate Professor of Painting and Printmaking at Virginia Commonwealth University, and lives and works in Richmond, VA.