

JESSICA SILVERMAN GALLERY

MATT LIPPS: Where Figure Becomes Ground

September 12 – October 19, 2019

Opening reception: Thursday, September 12, 6–8pm

Event: Matt Lipps in conversation with Drew Sawyer (Curator of Photography at the Brooklyn Museum), October 10, 6:15pm

Jessica Silverman Gallery is pleased to present “Where Figure Becomes Ground,” a solo exhibition of new photographic work by Matt Lipps. In this large-scale series, Lipps selects and cuts out iconic 1990s fashion campaigns from women’s magazines and combines them with documentary photographs culled from *US Camera Annual*, a magazine published between 1938 and 1969 for a largely male audience of professional and amateur photographers. As revealed by the glossy reflections of scotch tape, the works are created by analog means. The artist cuts paper with X-acto knives, layers the fashion shots on top of the documentary pictures, creating a visual puzzle where inside becomes outside. By these means, Lipps challenges the clichés of both genres and ultimately implodes a series of polarities: shallow commerce versus deep investigation; ephemeral style versus timeless documents; and femininity versus masculinity.

When Lipps was a teenager in the 1990s, he escaped the banal normativity of high school by immersing himself in the glamorous world of magazines like *Vogue* and *Harper’s Bazaar*. He became an obsessive fan of individual supermodels and a connoisseur of fashion photographers such as Richard Avedon, Irving Penn, Herb Ritts, Bruce Weber, Steven Meisel and Ellen Von Unwerth. “These highly constructed, stylized pictures are emblematic of the idea that every photograph is a construct,” says Lipps. “Fashion photography is, ultimately, not superficial. Its hyperbolic space of idealized female figures invades our bodies and minds, channels desire, coaches gender performance, and structures class identities. It has a profound influence on culture.”

Lipps removes all product and brand markers from his chosen fashion photographs, leaving only the figures that gave him an aspirational sense of belonging, whether they were vanguard clusters of androgynes or Amazonian women in lethally high heels. Rather than languorous odalisques, his figures are often in impossible poses – active, precariously balanced superwomen. Somehow, in the way he chooses and conjoins the images, Lipps conveys his youthful optimism about the psychological and social emancipation enabled by fashion. Indeed, liberation is enacted when Lipps’ feminine silhouettes are filled with wide-open spaces (as in *Peaks*), dramatic skyscapes (e.g. *Fluid*), and empowering views of cityscapes (*Ferry*).

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In his youth, Lipps was a street photographer, a budding auteur in search of existential meaning. *US Camera Annual* is emblematic of the photographic canon, which publicly celebrated specific versions of quality and implicitly endorsed certain incarnations of heroic manhood. Appropriating and reinvigorating works by W. Eugene Smith, Ansel Adams, Dorothea Lange, Leo Aarons and Pirkle Jones, to name a few, Lipps infuses their uncanny familiarity with strangeness. "It is important to look again at these historic images and study how memory functions, how these pictures that are external to our everyday lives invade our personal memories and become entangled in affect," says Lipps.

The exhibition also features a suite of smaller black and white silver gelatin prints, shot on 4x5-inch sheet film. Although Lipps taught darkroom printing for fifteen years, he has not exhibited analog prints since his undergraduate degree show. These images all have plain gray backdrops in homage to Avedon and use images of supermodels from his campaigns for Gianni Versace, made in the brand's heyday before the designer's death.

At a time when American society is caught in a perpetual present of selfies and digital news images, Lipps engages with the physicality of photography and explores its gendered history. With "Where Figure Becomes Ground," the artist elevates a feminized photographic genre while interrogating a masculine one, recombining them in ways that renew the relevance of both.

Matt Lipps (b. 1975) has a BFA in Photography from California State University and an MFA from University of California Irvine. His work is in the permanent collections of The Getty, LACMA, SFMOMA, MOCA Los Angeles, the Hammer Museum (Los Angeles), the Saatchi Gallery and the Pilara Foundation/Pier 24 (San Francisco). He has also participated in exhibitions at MCA Chicago, J. Paul Getty Museum, Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, SFMOMA, Josh Lilley Gallery (London) and Klemm's (Berlin). Lipps lives and works in Los Angeles. This is his fourth solo show at Jessica Silverman Gallery.