

For any further information please contact:

Joseph Allen Shea
mail to : joseph@galerieallen.com
+33 (0)6 33 72 78 20
6 passage st Avoye
75003 Paris France
+33 (0)1 45 26 92 33
galerieallen.com

Artist : Vikky Alexander
Title : Dream Palace
Date : 7/09/2024 – 5/10/2024
Location : Galerie Allen, Paris
Photo : Aurélien Mole
Courtesy : the artist, Galerie Allen, Paris and Tara
Downs, New York
Text : François Aubart

Do you remember the 1980s? The time of Margaret Thatcher's England and Ronald Reagan's United States allying along the lines of an unchecked liberalism, marking the dawn of a new era whose watchwords would be commerce, performance and efficiency. In order to stimulate consumption, advertisers distributed images that would shine and sparkle ever more spectacularly, the pursuit of immediate pleasure was their moral core. Images of desirable objects, people and places multiplied, appeared on television screens, among the pages of magazines, were plastered across advertising billboards. The public space grew covered with fictions and injunctions, the domestic environment crowded with parasitic information, publicity and entertainment. Faced with this deluge of fabricated representations, constructed, misleading and ill-intentioned, a population could easily lose its grip on reality. Jean Baudrillard prophesied then the disappearance of lived experience, to be replaced by simulations¹. And during this moment, Vikky Alexander created works that not only recall the decade, but encapsulate its spirit and its representations, and the violence and domination that they express.

In the late 1970s, Vikky Alexander was a student at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. She practiced photography, but not of people or places she encountered; rather, she turned her lens on television and billboard advertisements, on their characters and locations, their perfection only matched by their irreality. Moving to New York in 1979, she discovered the work of artists there, many barely older than herself. Some had participated in Douglas Crimp's group exhibition *Pictures* in 1977; others gathered around the *Metro Pictures* gallery, opened in 1980 by Helene Winer and Janelle Reiring. This group would come to be known as the *Pictures Generation*, and included Sarah Charlesworth, Jack Goldstein, Louise Lawler, Robert Longo, Sherrie Levine and Cindy Sherman. The artists invented a new mode of expression: the copy. Their works reproduce advertising and cinematic images, made to entertain, impress, or ignite desire, and through their manipulation, probe the intentions behind such representations, and the psychological impacts they are designed to effect. Many artists of the *Pictures Generation* are women, who often bring a critical regard to mass media representations that are intended for their consumption, concerning their idealised appearance, their availability, their submission. This objectification, Laura Mulvey's *Male Gaze*, is painstakingly dissected by feminist theory.²

Vikky Alexander began, then, to photograph images from adverts, in magazines and calendars. These images that penetrate the domestic space are manipulated by her: moved, rotated, associated, presented behind coloured plexiglass. When photographing them, the artist frames the models and landscapes in such a way as to exclude their accompanying text. Like this, the image's justification disappears, and we are left with that which would give her 2020 retrospective at the Vancouver Art Gallery its title: *Extreme Beauty*.³ Stripped of its commercial or decorative explanation, its legitimisation, such beauty reveals itself to be chillingly objectified.

Vikky Alexander explains it simply: in some of her works "there is an image of a super-beautiful model surrounded by images of super-beautiful landscapes."⁴ It is the prosaic description of works like *Portage Glacier*, 1982, in which the images used are the result of a brutal domestication, in which the subjects represented are locked in their stereotypes, their appearance fixed. Alaska's *Portage Glacier*, a source of local pride and a tourist destination, is represented in a similar way to its accompanying model. Bodies and natural environments undergo the same process of artificialisation, the *Male Gaze* is mixed with the anthropocentric vision beneath a regard that subjugates all to its own desires.

This association of body and landscape continues in the *Between Living and Dreaming* series, created in 1985 and 1986. Here, Vikky Alexander combines reproductions of images with her own photographs of locations. She manipulates her image bank on a light box and sets down on paper the compositions that catch her attention. Couples embracing, desirable bodies and pensive figures are combined with images of nature, itself simplified and idealised. Human relationships, like our relationships with nature, are saturated with cultural assumptions. These encounters are not wild adventures. They are normalised, become banal. In the compositions the artist orchestrates, the meaning of the word 'natural' seems to evaporate into the limbo created by these colliding images. Regarding this practice of superimposition, she explains "at the time, I was thinking about flaws, in fact the impossibility of 'desire'. The slippery character of these images seems to encapsulate that."⁵

Desire and its intensification for commercial gain are the focal points of Vikky Alexander's oeuvre. One such example is the work *Magenta St. Sebastian*, 1982, which consists of an image of a woman lying on her back that the artist has rotated and twice reproduced. The model is leant against a support around which her arms might be tied, recalling the posture of Saint Sebastian, the martyr whose execution, attached to a post and riddled with arrows, has been the subject of abundant pictorial iconography since the Renaissance.

Raising these commercial images to the rank of works which centuries of art history has grappled with is not merely a sarcastic commentary on the passion and quasi-religious fervour engendered by consumerism, but also a testament to the collective state of mind of an era. In the 1980s, following Roland Barthes' discovery of Mythologies in consumer and entertainment goods, many thinkers in turn examined these products for morals, founder narratives or links with ancestral histories.⁶

Do you remember the 1980s? Unabashed consumption took hold, driven by the stimulation of our desires. It relied on the objectification of people and nature, which it transformed into a set of data deprived of contexts and histories. It became an art form, a religion, a myth. Working with these representations, amplifying their intentions and underlining how they function, the work of Vikky Alexander effectively synthesises the spirit of these years.

– François Aubart

Translated from the French by Flora Hibberd

1 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacres et simulation*, Paris, Galilée, 1981.

2 Laura Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, *Screen*, Autumn 1975, p.6-18

3 Vikky Alexander : *Extreme Beauty*, 6 July 2019 – 26 January 2022, Vancouver Art Gallery.

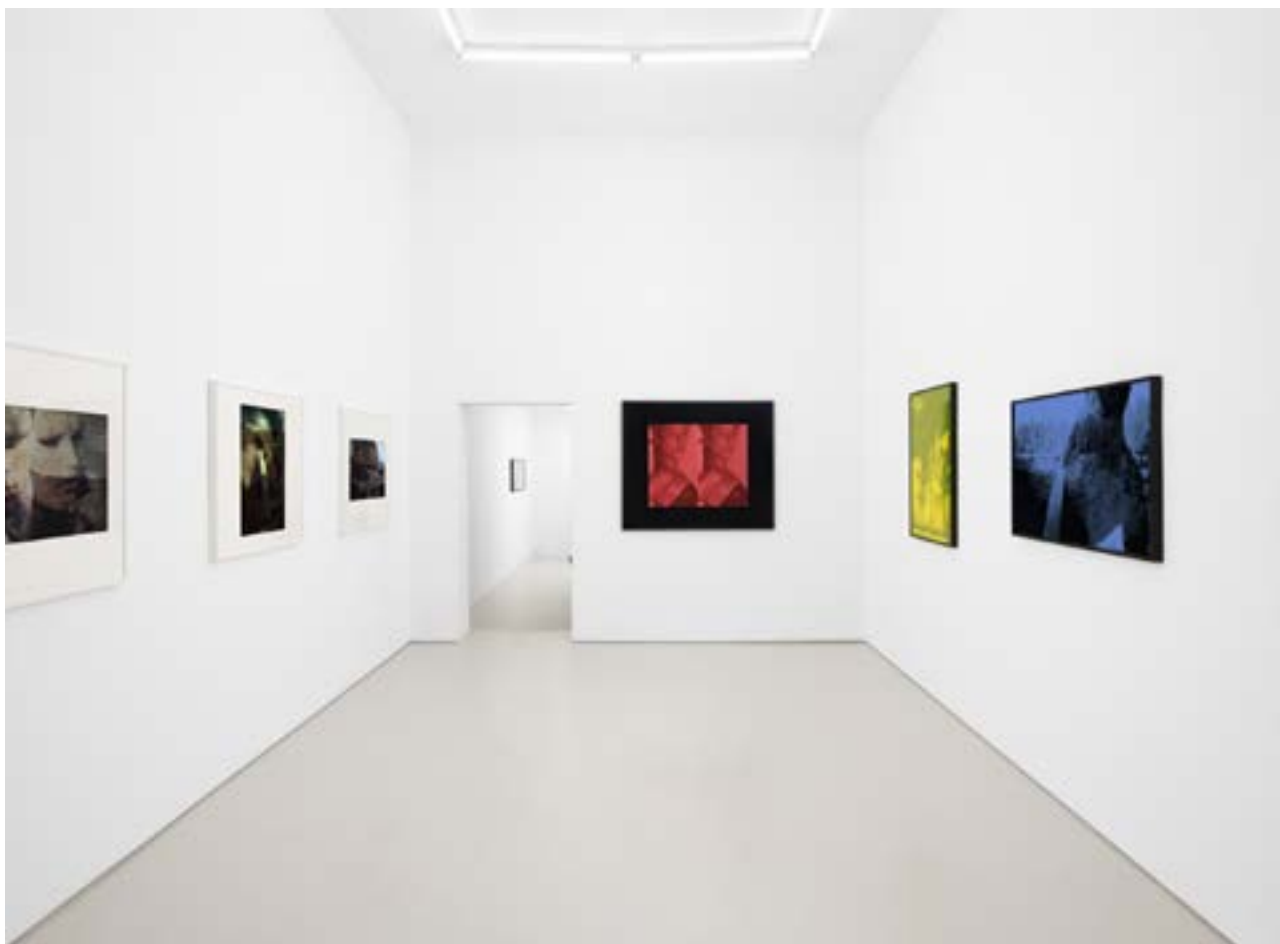
4 Tiffany Jow, Vikky Alexander: *Artificial Intelligence*, *Gray Magazine*, n°46, June 2019, p. 93

5 Email exchanges with the artist.

6 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, Paris, Seuil, 1957.

Vikky Alexander (b. 1959, Victoria, BC) is a Montreal-based artist celebrated for her ongoing contributions to Pictures Generation strategies of critique by appropriation. Engendering a quietly reflective feminism that investigates the power of framing devices within the architectures of corporate branding, her works assess the fetishistic, bureaucratized and aspirational—generating recombinatory mixtures of appropriated scenes of natural landscapes and typifications of beauty that demarcate the romanticization of nature and the naturalization of romance. Activating a jarring fracture between embodied experience and its idealized presentation, her sensual and stylized works spanning installation, sculpture, photography, and video cumulatively denature the commercial annexation of personal capacities for self-reflection.

Vikky Alexander's work has been exhibited internationally at venues including The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver; Dia Art Foundation, New York; White Columns, New York; Musée d'art moderne et contemporain, Genève; Downs & Ross, New York; New Museum, New York; Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei; Seattle Art Museum, Seattle; Kunsthalle Bern, Bern; Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, Montreal; International Center of Photography, New York; Cooper Cole Gallery, Toronto; Canada House, London; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; Barbican Art Gallery, London; and Yokohama Civic Art Gallery, Yokohama. Her works are included in the permanent collections of the International Center of Photography; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Musée d'art moderne et contemporain, Geneva; Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles; National Gallery of Canada, Art Gallery of Ontario, and the Deste Foundation, among numerous others. A graduate of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, she lives and works in Montreal, Quebec. Upcoming presentations of her work include exhibitions at Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; Sprengel Museum, Hannover; Museum der Moderne, Salzburg; and Museo d'arte della Svizzera italiana, Lugano.



VIKKY ALEXANDER
Exhibition view, Dream Palace at Galerie Allen, Paris, 2024
Photo: Aurélien Mole



VIKKY ALEXANDER

Between Dreaming & Living #08, 1986

archival digital print on Moab Lasal Matte, orange plexiglass, frame

Edition 5 of 5 + 1 AP

61 x 91.5 cm

N° INV VA86240006

Courtesy the artist, Galerie Allen, Paris and Tara Downs, New York



VIKKY ALEXANDER

Between Dreaming & Living #10, 1985

archival digital print on Moab Lasal Matte, yellow plexiglass, frame

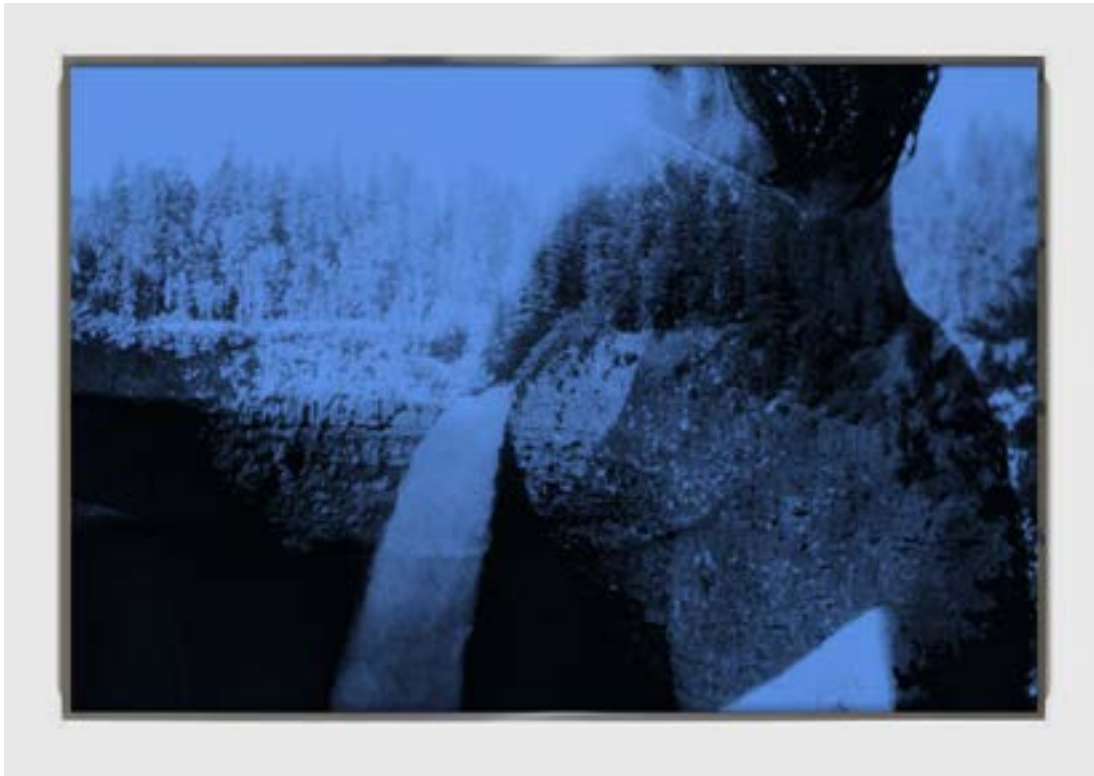
Edition 3 of 5 + 1 AP

91.5 x 61 cm

N° INV VA85240007

Courtesy the artist, Galerie Allen, Paris and Tara Downs, New York

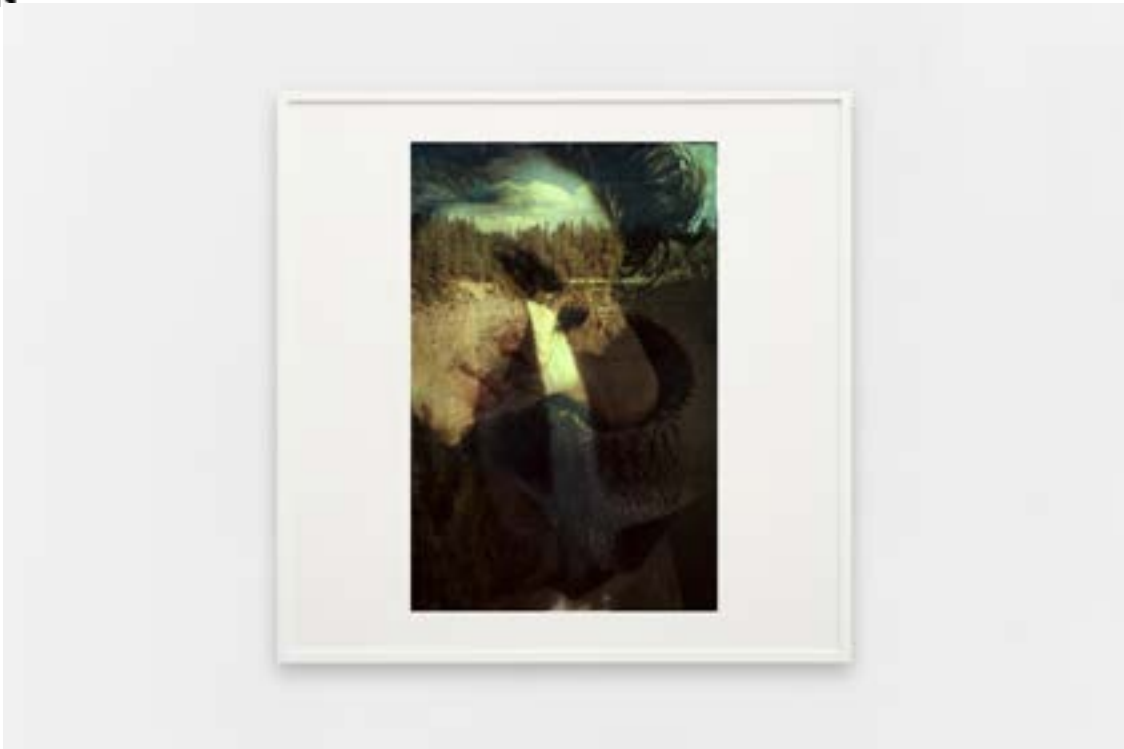
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Allen, Paris



VIKKY ALEXANDER
Between Dreaming & Living #11, 1985
archival digital print on Moab Lasal Matte, blue plexiglass, frame
Edition 2 of 5 + 1AP
61 x 91.5 cm



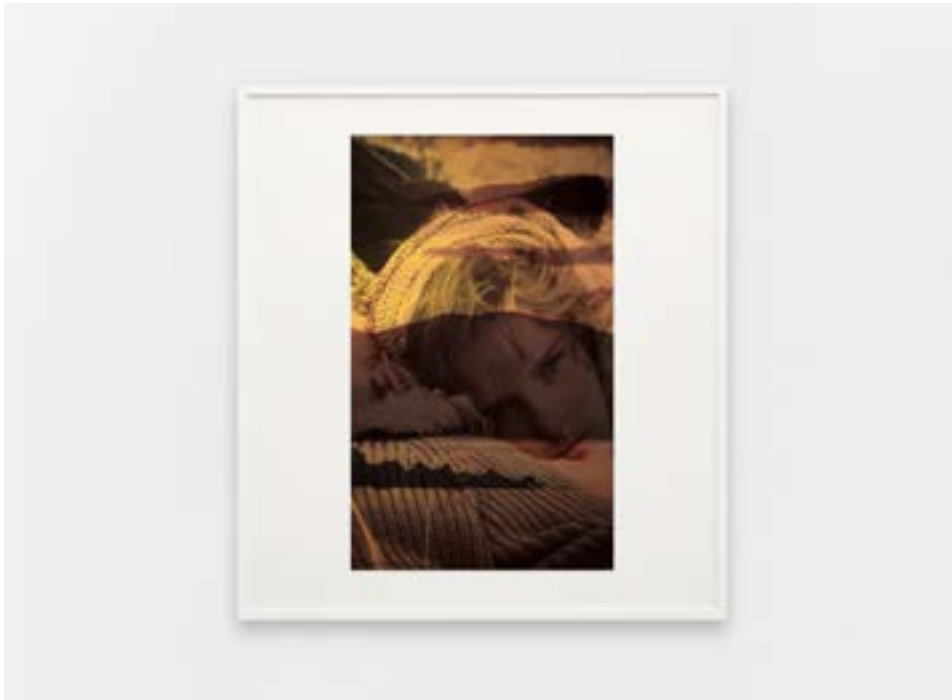
VIKKY ALEXANDER
Magenta St. Sebastian, 1982
Archival inkjet print on Moab Slickrock Metallic Pearl acid free paper, frame
99 x 129.5 cm
Edition 2 of 5 + 1 AP
N° INV VA82240010
Courtesy the artist, Galerie Allen, Paris and Tara Downs, New York



VIKKY ALEXANDER
Between Dreaming & Living Ilfochrome #06, 1985
Ilfochrome print
Edition 2 of 3 + 1 AP
76.2 x 76.2 cm
N° INV VA85240004
Courtesy the artist, Galerie Allen, Paris and Tara Downs, New York



VIKKY ALEXANDER
Between Dreaming & Living Ilfochrome #01, 1985
Ilfochrome print
Edition 2 of 3 + 1 AP
76.2 x 76.2 cm
N° INV VA85240003
Courtesy the artist, Galerie Allen, Paris and Tara Downs, New York



VIKKY ALEXANDER
Between Dreaming & Living Ilfochrome #05, 1985
Ilfochrome print
Edition 2 of 3 + 1 AP
76.2 x 76.2 cm
N° INV VA85240001b
Courtesy the artist, Galerie Allen, Paris and Tara Downs, New York



VIKKY ALEXANDER
Between Dreaming & Living Ilfochrome #11, 1985
Ilfochrome print
Edition 2 of 3 + 1 AP
76.2 x 76.2 cm
N° INV VA85240005
Courtesy the artist, Galerie Allen, Paris and Tara Downs, New York

**GALERIE
ALLEN**



VIKKY ALEXANDER

Portage Glacier, 1982.

Moab Slickrock Metallic Pearl acid free paper

Edition of 1 + 1 AP

45.72 x 101.6 cm

N° INV VA82240011

Courtesy the artist, Galerie Allen, Paris and Tara Downs, New York