

# White Columns

## CR<sup>A</sup>SS OVER

### Gee Vaucher: Crass & Beyond

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September 12 – October 26, 2024

Opening Reception: Thursday, September 12, 2024. 6–8pm.

*“While the stench of corruption and injustice do linger, it is an honorable thing to point or even lift a finger.” - Ian Dury, 1997<sup>1</sup>*

White Columns is proud to present *CR<sup>A</sup>SS OVER - Gee Vaucher: Crass & Beyond*, the most comprehensive exhibition to date in the United States by the pioneering British artist **Gee Vaucher** (b. 1945, Dagenham, England.) This will be Vaucher’s first exhibition in New York in nearly two decades, and coincides with the publication of *CRASS: A Pictorial History* (Exitstencil Press, UK, 2024), the definitive account of the hugely influential British anarcho-punk band Crass (1977-1984.) The exhibition presents Vaucher’s iconic artwork produced for Crass alongside the work that she has subsequently created in the decades following the band’s planned demise in 1984, including her harrowing series of large-scale paintings *Children Who Have Seen Too Much Too Soon* (2006-2024).

Gee Vaucher and Penny Rimbaud were instrumental in shaping the visual identity of Crass (1977-1984) and their determinedly independent label Crass Records. The illustrations she produced for Crass are amongst the defining aesthetic accounts of the punk era. Vaucher’s approach has always been informed by her deep social and political engagement. Her early work collided the agitprop-like aesthetics of collage and photomontage with an often dark and subversive humor. Informed equally by Dada, Surrealism, and the polemical graphics associated with protest movements, Vaucher's practice evolved directly from her own activism and her identity as a feminist, pacifist, vegetarian, anarchist and “whateverist.” Vaucher was a co-founder of Dial House (1967 to the present), a self-sustaining, open-door house located in Essex, England, which played a central role within Crass’ history. It was from this base that in 1972, “ICES 72” (the International Carnival of Experimental Sound) was

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Dury – from *Gee Vaucher: Crass Art and Other Pre Post-Modernist Monsters* (AK Press, 1999.)

worked on alongside members of the Fluxus Movement and other avant-garde luminaries. At the same time, members of the household co-founded the UK's first truly free festival, the Stonehenge Festival, setting a pattern for the UK's Festival Movement of the 1970s and 1980s.

For much of the past fifty years Vaucher's work has circulated outside of, and beyond, the mainstream art world, and has been more typically contextualized within the legacies of punk and political subcultures. However, over the past decade there has been a growing recognition of, and engagement with, Vaucher's practice from both the art world and the academy, resulting in her first career survey, *Introspective*, which took place in 2017 at Firstsite, Colchester, England; the publication of Rebecca Binns' academic biography *Gee Vaucher: Beyond Punk, Feminism and the Avant-Garde* (Manchester University Press, 2022), and Vaucher's inclusion in 2023 in the exhibition *Machinations* at Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain and Tate Britain's groundbreaking exhibition *Women In Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970-1990*. Eschewing easy categorization, Vaucher's work remains among the most powerful and poignant art made anywhere in the past fifty years.

*CR@SS OVER - Gee Vaucher: Crass & Beyond* will provide American audiences, both new and old, with a rare opportunity to explore in-depth the visionary imagination of one of the most prescient artists working today. As the celebrated British political photomontage artist Peter Kennard wrote of Vaucher's work in 1997:

*"The anger that fuels the work has become more 'inward' as time progresses. It is as if the work is now trying to reach inside bodies and find a social truth from the interior of our physical being. Her art tears through the lies that are now the official discourse of public life. Through the images she conjures up the possibility of a different life."*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Kennard – from the foreword to *Gee Vaucher: Crass Art and Other Pre Post-Modernist Monsters* (AK Press, 1999.)

## Satellite Events:

### **Saturday, September 14 at Artists Space. 8pm.**

Penny Rimbaud and Ingrid Laubrock: “Arthur Rimbaud in Verdun,” a performance. Free. First come.

### **Monday, September 16 at Anthology Film Archives. Doors open at 6:30pm. Screening begins at 7pm.**

Gee Vaucher, “Semi-Detached”: a rare screening of Vaucher’s Crass video collages 1978-1984, to be followed by a Q&A with Vaucher and Penny Rimbaud. Free. First come.

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**Gee Vaucher** was born in 1945 into a working-class family from Dagenham, Essex, England. She was accepted into art school at the age of 15, and attended South-East Essex Technical College and School of Art between 1961 and 1966. In the 1970s she developed her signature gouache painting technique – which is often mistaken for collage – and worked for a number of years in New York as an accomplished illustrator for *The New York Times*, *New York Magazine*, *Ebony*, *Rolling Stone* and *High Times*, among other publications. Whilst living in New York she produced the inaugural issue of her pivotal magazine *International Anthem*, an important precursor to the work she would subsequently make with Crass. In 1979 Vaucher returned to Dial House to live and work as a part of Crass. Her work with Crass is among the most important and influential of the entire punk and post-punk era and helped to define the subsequent aesthetics associated with both the wider anarcho and hardcore punk movements. Vaucher’s work was the subject of a first survey exhibition *Introspective* at Firstsite, Colchester, England in 2017. In 2023, her work was included in *Machinations* at Reina Sofía, Madrid Spain and in Tate Britain’s exhibition *Women In Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970-1990*. An academic biography of Vaucher’s life and work, *Gee Vaucher: Beyond Punk, Feminism and the Avant-Garde* by Rebecca Binns was published by the Manchester University Press in 2022. Vaucher continues to live and work at Dial House in Essex, England.

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## **Publications:**

A wide range of publications on Vaucher’s work and print editions will be available to purchase from the gallery including copies of the recently published *Crass: A Pictorial History 1977-1984* (Exitstencil Press, UK, 2024); the first print edition of the previously unpublished *International Anthem, Vol. 5* (Exitstencil Press/Boo-Hooray, 1983/2024); and *Four Years After & Counting*, Jon Savage’s previously unpublished 1989 interview with Crass (Boo-Hooray, 2024.)

**Acknowledgements:**

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