

Deborah Kass, “My Elvis +”



Courtesy Paul Kasmin Gallery
Installation view of Deborah Kass, "My Elvis +"

Time Out rating: ★★★★★☆

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Seasoned artist Deborah Kass—fresh off a mid-career retrospective at the Andy Warhol Museum, complete with a major monograph published by Skira Rizzoli—is back on view in New York for her 11th solo exhibition here in 30 years. Although she started out in the 1970s painting landscapes, Kass switched to appropriation art in the late '80s. In 1992, she began creating silk-screen canvases that directly quoted Warhol's portraits of women celebrities—with an ironic twist. Substituting Barbra Streisand for Jacqueline Kennedy, Marilyn Monroe and Judy Garland, the artist created new versions of Warhol's pop masterpieces for her “Jewish Jackie Series,” which related to Kass's own ethnicity and her developing interests in feminism and gay issues.

For her current outing, Kass has dug deep into the racks, pulling out compositions that haven't seen the light of day in decades. Silk-screen paintings from her “My Elvis” series, which replace Warhol's depiction of a macho, gunslinging Elvis with Streisand in yeshiva-boy drag from Yentl, dominate the dynamic show. A dozen paintings—several of them diptychs—capture the star in solid and ghostly forms on monochromatic backgrounds of red, turquoise, blue and silver. Employing DIY methods of mixing painted areas with multiple pulls from a single screen, the artist focuses on Bab's role as a cross-dressing woman with big aspirations. Meanwhile, on the “+” side, Kass substitutes her likeness for Andy's in his celebrated self-portraits—turning her conceptual screw ever so sweetly and ever so tightly.—Paul Laster