

## Barbara Astman

**Corkin Gallery**

**Toronto**

**Bill Clarke**

Born in Rochester, New York, but based in Canada since 1970, Barbara Astman has remained committed to photo-based work for more than 30 years. Early in her career, she produced images that addressed feminist and gender issues, overlaying self-portraits with typewriting texts addressed to friends, lovers and professional acquaintance. Since the mid-2000s, however, newspapers have been Astman's muse, inspiring the eleven collage works included in this exhibition, "It's All About Style."

To make these works, all from 2013, the artist selected images from the style and travel sections of local papers and covered with clear packing tape. By laboriously rubbing the backs of the pages, she transferred some of the dyes out of the glossy photos and into the adhesive, leaving the images somewhat more muted than they had been originally. Then, she cut the modified pages into strips –debasement their perfect depictions of beauty and glamour –and recombined them in horizontal rows that she glued onto sheets of paper. By interspersing slivers from disparate sources, and



**Barbara Astman, *It's All About Style No. 08*, 2013, collage, 22" x 30". Corkin.**

occasionally flipping them upside down, Astman manipulated the images in order to suggest that the media uses similar mechanism to promote arbitrarily selected trends in food, fashion, and home décor. From the cupcakes in *It's All About Style No. 31* to the cozy, gem-colored sweaters in *It's All About Style No. 38*, nothing feels like an innocent indulgence. In Astman's hands, every object is implicated in a cycle of coercion and every image is engineered to encourage consumption.

Also on view in the show were earlier works that further illustrated Astman's penchant for organizing images into linear arrangements. In her large-scale photos of rows of newspapers, the pages fall open just enough for us to read fragments of headlines or catch glimpses of famous faces. Here, as in the new collages, Astman presents snippets of competing information and leaves us to sort through the visual onslaught that has come to define our day-to-day lives.