

ARTFORUM

Barbara Astman

CORKIN GALLERY
55 Mill Street, Building 61
September 10–October 30

Barbara Astman's latest series of photographs, all reproductions of collages, takes the artist's long-standing interest in the circulation of iconic public images into the rich territory of the quotidian. Astman collected the images presented in this exhibition from newspapers over the course of a year, clipping each as she read the daily paper and pasting them into a small Moleskine notebook. A selection have been reproduced as large-scale photographs and sixteen are exhibited in the gallery.

Rather than being an attempt to distill news stories, Astman's combinations are playful and impulsive, clever montages that call attention to the ways that we understand world events through repetitive visual representation. In *16, Daily Collage* (all works 2011), a lone, howling coyote on the left-hand page stands in contradistinction to an image of former Libyan dictator Mu'ammar Gadhafi balancing the heads of several Hollywood celebrities and a couple of bedbugs on one of his outstretched fingers. The juxtaposition makes a witty analogy about the anxiety that accompanies the representation of aggressors—both human and animal—in mass news media.

Much of the exhibition's aesthetic punch comes from the strategy of accumulation: One sees the same forms recombined into new characters, much like a childhood paper doll set. Recurring figures include Gadhafi, who reappears a few images later in *09, Daily Collage*, this time adorned with an oversized diamond engagement ring and accompanied by a Barbie doll sporting a black felt beret nearly identical to his iconic military cap; and actress Gabourey Sidibe, who struts across several other figures' heads. While contrasting political imagery with luxury goods is a familiar strategy in contemporary collage work, Astman's work avoids the reductive visual symbolism that dominates this genre. Working with banal images from newspapers that have subtly entered and cemented themselves within the greater collective unconscious, the slight tweaks in each work make ubiquitous images seem fresh with semiotic significance.



Barbara Astman, 12, *Daily Collage*, 2011,
 collage, digital print, 34 x 43".

— Gabrielle Moser

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