

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS - New York

Michele Abeles

47 CANAL

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Criticism leveled at male artists who fracture, abstract, and mutilate the female form—de Kooning being the most readily available example, but others like Edward Weston, Hans Bellmer, and Richard Prince fit the bill—has codified something of a subgenre of sexist art. But what happens when the tables are turned? This is one of the questions raised by Michele Abeles's photographs, which are replete with the fragmented bodies of sprawled, splayed, and supine naked men who inhabit a world of garish colors and playfully draped and arranged bric-a-brac. It would perhaps be a stretch to purport that Abeles's images attempt to act as a corrective to the history of female objectification in art, a goal already more explicitly pursued by artists like Sylvia Sleigh, with her comely male odalisques, and collectives like the Guerrilla Girls, with their tireless activist agitations. There is no doubt that Abeles's photographs possess a strange and occasionally dark psychosexual charge as a result of their off-register representations of male bodies. Yet their mode of historical address is less one of indictment or polemic than one that takes up a mischievous, open-ended question: What if we look at men's bodies like this?



Michele Abeles, *Red, Rock, Cigarettes, Newspaper, Body, Wood, Lycra, Bottle*, 2011, color photograph, 40 x 30".

Abeles's work is concerned not simply with the male form but also with the conventions and possibilities of the still life and the photographic medium. Within the confines of her studio, Abeles has developed an inscrutable, yet strangely recognizable vocabulary of studio props—potted plants, empty wine bottles, decontextualized letters and numbers—often coexisting with elaborate arrangements of Plexiglas and colored gels that generate the illusion of Photoshop intervention, despite the fact that her images are created entirely in-camera. As a result, the photographs appear to waffle ambiguously between a loving, ironic engagement with tired tropes and low-tech trickery of studio photography's past, and an interest in the rabid eclecticism and psychotropic visuality of our digital present.

— Chris Wiley