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‘And She’s Not Even Pretty’: The Art of Courtney Loveby **Judy Berman**. Posted on 10:30 am Thursday May 3, 2012

You already know whether you’re going to like Courtney Love’s visual art. This is not to say that *And She’s Not Even Pretty*, the first-ever exhibition of her drawings, at New York’s [Fred Torres Collaborations](#), is a celebrity vanity project with no value beyond the name attached to it — although some will inevitably judge it as such. What I mean is that Love’s art is exactly like her music; either you love it for its unflinching expression of all-out female id-ego-superego chaos or you hate it for being the self-involved ramblings of an out-of-control woman who can’t decide whether fame is a chronic illness or the only worthy goal in life.

For those, like me, who fall into the former category, *And She’s Not Even Pretty* is an illuminating visual companion to the music of Hole. Courtney Love’s lyrics revolve around a small and specific constellation of images: torn dresses, smeared makeup, perfect and irreparably flawed bodies, disheveled beds, stars of the literal and Hollywood varieties, various debauched scenes and people. In both her life and work, Love always seems to be oscillating between destructive punk-rock rage and cosseted Victorian femininity, the nervous breakdown and the head-to-toe makeover that’s supposed to give her a clean slate (but never does). She’s always — often rightfully — bemoaning the artificial world of celebrities while lusting after its jeweled tiaras and empty promises of universal adoration.

These are the contradictions that rule her drawings, made over the past year or so in colored pencil, graphite, and pastel layered on so thickly and smudged so freely you might mistake it for lipstick. At the center of each image is a woman — usually yellow-haired, almost always beautiful. Some are billed as pictures of famous blondes (Amy Phelan, “Gwyneth”), but even the ones that aren’t self-portraits feel like them. Reminiscent both of fashion sketches and cartoons, these are the kind of slim but curvy, wide-eyed, full-lipped avatars that an awkward high-schooler aspiring to be popular might draw.

Despite their girlish style, these pieces are more complex than they look. Many of the women in the pictures appear consumed by decadent misery; others are bleeding or even dying (some representative titles include *La Mort de Courtney* and *And Then She Jumped into the Hudson*). A lipstick-stained white Galliano wedding gown with the words “NOT MY CUNT ON MY DIME MOTHER” embroidered on it is lacy and delicate, but explodes with uncontrollable anger. (According to [Sound of the City](#), the dress was meant for Love’s wedding to Edward Norton, which never happened, and the piece is not for sale.) Walking through the show, as in listening to Hole, you realize that in Courtney Love’s world, there can be no beauty without violence and self-loathing.

But it’s not just the darkness that gives this work depth. There’s self-awareness and surprisingly

perceptive humor, too, two attributes that Love has never gotten enough credit for. Most of the images come accompanied by text, often apparently self-mocking snatches of Nirvana, Hole, and even Smashing Pumpkins lyrics. “I’m a celebrity, get me out of here,” reads the reality TV-referencing caption above the head of a blonde crying blood. The words, “But don’t you know who I am,” are scrawled across the bottom. A large, bright, attention-grabbing picture of a distressed, naked woman with a giant purse proclaims, in frantic, red-and-orange capital letters, “SHE HAD 42 BIRKIN BAGS.” It reads like a tongue-in-cheek epitaph, a bitterly funny depiction of ridiculous rich-bitch problems that also looks a whole lot like getting what you want and never wanting it again.

Courtney Love’s *And She’s Not Even Pretty* opens today and runs through June 15th at New York’s Fred Torres Collaborations. Click through for a gallery of images from the show.



Courtney Love, *42 Birkin Bags*, 2012, pastel, watercolor, colored pencil on paper, 60" x 40".
Courtesy of the artist and Fred Torres Collaborations, New York

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