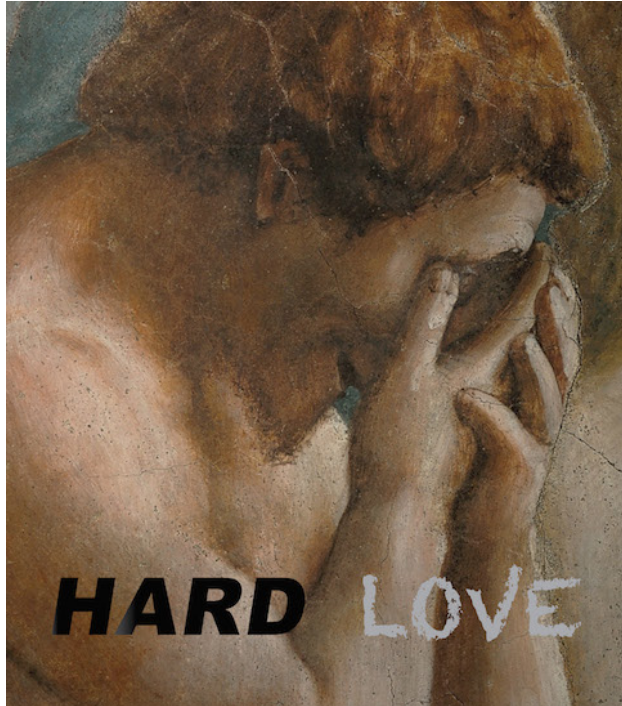


MARTOS GALLERY



John Ahearn, Mike Cockrill, Jane Dickson, Tracey Emin
Jennifer Gustavson, Keith Haring, Deborah Kass
Marilyn Minter, Walter Robinson, Aura Rosenberg
Sue Williams, David Wojnarowicz, Martin Wong

curated by Barry Blinderman

January 21 - March 5, 2016

Opening reception: Thursday, January 21, 6 - 8 pm

St. Paul got it wrong with that “love is patient, love is kind” stuff. Love is a come on, love is release. Love is exhausting, love is enduring and enduringly difficult. Works by the thirteen artists in **HARD LOVE** range in tenor from the romantic to the political to the prurient, and in many cases all in a single work.

Eroticism and the social body are central to several paintings in the exhibition, including **Mike Cockrill's** *St. Sebastian* (2007), a biting satire on war, religion, and taboo attraction set in a '60s suburban backyard barbecue, the banality of which is disturbed by helicopters in the distance. A reference to the martyred saint appears also in **David Wojnarowicz's** *Fuck You Faggot Fucker* (1984), a searing, boundary-breaking collage

consisting of two men kissing waist-deep in the water, amidst fragments of world maps, lurid black & white photographs taken in a crumbling interior, and men's room graffiti featuring the titular phrase. Situated like a priest in a confession booth, the black inmate in **Martin Wong's** tightly compressed *Come over Here Rockface* (ca. 1994) taunts the hunky white cop on the other side of the bars with a lascivious request.

With its photorealistic fragments of teeth, lips, and hair suspended in clear, viscous liquid, **Marilyn Minter's** *Cracked Up* (2013), a painting on metal, is an unsettling collision of glamor and violence. **Sue Williams' The Relatives in Yellow** (ca. 1997) is a one-artist game of *cadavre exquis* in which brazenly sketched female bodies in party attire butt against a sordid variety of appendages. There's a double-wink at patriarchy in **Deborah Kass's** eye-boggling *Daddy I Would Love to Dance* (2008), whose bold-cap-lettered lyric from *A Chorus Line* emerges subversively from a prismatic hard-edged abstraction à la Frank Stella. Dance and societal restriction is also at the center of **Keith Haring's** chalk-on-black paper "subway" drawing (1982), which conveys with telegraphic expediency the frenetic motion of two bound-together figures.

The immersion of oneself in the desired other is spotlighted in **Tracey Emin's** neon wall sculpture, *I Think It's All in My Head*, a lover's handwritten, clichéd rumination—replete with a crossed out phrase—blown up to the scale of a store window sign. And in **Jennifer Gustavson's** video, *I Love You* (2015), the artist faces us, reciting "I love you" incessantly in real time, growing progressively sadder as she chain-smokes and drinks beer.

Love is hard, and we inscribe our lustful proclivities into the order of things, even the inanimate world. **Aura Rosenberg's** floor installation of *Dialectical Porn Rocks* (1989-2016)—which hits the exhibition's title on the nose—is a hybridized artistic-natural overlay in which fragments of photos from pornographic magazines are bonded to the smooth surfaces of creek rocks. Porn, no matter how natural, is nothing if not artifice. **Jane Dickson's** starkly confrontational *Peep 2* (1992-96) situates the viewer uncomfortably as the "client" who has fed a coin slot in order to ogle a performer who feigns ecstasy on the other side of the glass.

John Ahearn's compelling *Luis and Virginia Arroyo* (1980), a lifecast relief of two lovers captured in impassioned yet wistful embrace, is the only truly forthright expression of love in the exhibition. The perceptive viewer is aware, however, that Luis's hidden hand bears the dark four-letter obverse of the "L-O-V-E" tattooed (à la Mitchum's Reverend Henry Powell) on his visible fingers. Finally, as in most of **Walter Robinson's** paintings, it is difficult to determine just how many grains of irony apply to the male-female stereotypes pictured in *Randall and the River of Time* (2015), in which the '50s pulp-sizzler protagonist turns away dejectedly from a temptress in a loosely gathered robe. But that moment of conflicted engagement captures the fraught reality of love and its hard- and softcore seductions.

For information or press requests, please contact info@martosgallery.com or call 212-560-0670.