

DENNIS HOPPER TONY SHAFRAZI

If memory serves, when *Easy Rider* was released, in 1969, it was both terrifying and bewildering. Now it's easier to see why. The movie Dennis Hopper directed, starred in and co-wrote was both randomly violent and deeply nihilistic. Not among the year's anthems to a new age (Woodstock) nor one of its dirges (Altamont), it is instead a gorgeously crafted fashion treatment. Its protagonists are a pair of drug dealers who visit a commune and ride fancy bikes though they are neither hippies nor bikers but free-lancing road-trippers, just looking for the main chance and trying, mightily, to stay cool.

The 100-plus gelatin silver prints (most of them 16 by



Above, Dennis Hopper: *Double Standard*, 1961, 2009, oil on canvas, 79½ by 120 inches.

Left, Andy Warhol and members of the Factory (Gregory Markopoulos, Taylor Mead, Gerard Malanga & Jack Smith), 1963, printed 2009, gelatin silver print, 20 by 30 inches; both at Tony Shafrazi.



If the artists tend to look like movie stars, the actors find themselves in some of the artier images. A radiant Paul Newman is shadowed by chain-link fencing that patterns his bare back and legs like a fishnet body stocking. Jane Fonda and Roger Vadim, shot on their wedding day, eye each other like tigers. At the Chateau Marmont, Bill

Cosby takes shelter behind thick greenery, which exposes only his Converse-clad feet and deeply wary face. The Grateful Dead, the Byrds and Jefferson Airplane all look like they just stepped off album covers. Hopps, the shape-shifting curator, is captured—barely—between glare and gloom in an over-furnished parlor.

It being the '60s, Hopper duly went south, catching shots of Martin Luther King, Jr., Ralph Abernathy and some protestors in Selma. But the photographer is no activist. (Not long ago Hopper became a committed Republican, donating heavily to the party during the 2004 campaign before finding himself on Obama's side in 2008.) There were dashes, in this show, of urban grit, seen in New York, and of Latin flavor, in Mexico, but they seemed pro forma. More vibrant are the paeans to car culture: *Double Standard* (1961), taken from the driver's seat in L.A. and presided over by a rearview mirror, careens right into a Standard gas station and anticipates by two years Ruscha's famous *Standard Station*. Hopper's photos of Rosenquist-like billboards are equally sharp and powerful.

As a kind of coda, the exhibition included roughly three dozen clips of movies starring Hopper, which ran on 11 monitors and created an effect something like the film medleys shown during Academy Award ceremonies. There were also some recent painted enlargements of the photographs. Both felt almost comic in their grandiosity.

On view at the Metropolitan Museum in New York at the same time, Robert Frank's *The Americans* provided a useful comparison. While Frank aimed under the skin of the nation's character, Hopper seems always to have been less interested in who we really are than how we'd like to be seen—fantasies he observed keenly during a period when the rest of the world was paying close attention to us, too.

—Nancy Princenthal

24 inches or the reverse) that were on view in "Signs of the Times," all taken between 1961 and 1967, provided a handy guide to the intersecting worlds within which Hopper moved in the years leading to his best known film. As now, they include the California and New York art scenes along with Hollywood. Hopper is a great flatterer but also an astute observer, and while capable of combustible behavior (in the cenotaph-size book that Taschen has just published on his work of this period, the late Walter Hopps tells a chilling story of gunplay, with automatic weapons, in the Hopper household) he mostly stays out of the picture. His subjects seem to have been comfortable with that. Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Jasper Johns, Ed Ruscha, John McCracken, Billy Al Bengston, Wallace Berman—all, as Hopper saw them, were young and handsome and happy to strike beatific poses with their identifying attributes: James Rosenquist with a billboard, Allan Kaprow with a block of ice. Despite some mild antics—Robert Rauschenberg sticks out his tongue to show it's been stamped "souvenir of Claes Oldenburg wedding"; curator Henry Geldzahler blows cigar smoke in the camera's eye—most offer their best sides. Nikki de Saint Phalle and gallery owner Virginia Dwan show up among the art crowd but in Hopper's view they were mainly boys' clubs, and proud of it.

Hopper's work was on view at Shafrazi, Sept. 12-Oct. 24.