



# DOUBLE STANDARD

:: BY CATHERINE WAGLEY

A retrospective of Dennis Hopper's visual art at the  
Museum of Contemporary Art

**W**hen Jeffrey Deitch, an entrepreneurial New York art dealer with a penchant for white-rimmed glasses and a fondness for camp, took the reins as the director of the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art this spring, the art world waited with bated breath to see what would happen. No

dealer of Deitch's caliber has ever helmed a major contemporary art institution and Deitch is a figure with countless market connections and a sprawling art collection of his own. In the past, a wall (or at least a façade of one) has run between art's for-profit and non-profit sectors. "Deitch's unusual appointment drives a bulldozer through that wall," wrote *L.A. Times* critic Christopher Knight this past January, just

PHOTO BY DENNIS HOPPER

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after MoCA's board announced Deitch's appointment, "and he will need to tiptoe through the rubble." He's been on the job for two months now, however, and he's not tiptoeing.

*Dennis Hopper: Double Standard*, MoCA's first major exhibition under Deitch's leadership, straddles a number of precarious lines. It hovers between persona-worship and historicism, and pits Hollywood nostalgia against nostalgia for the machismo-soaked early days of the L.A. art scene. It raises a question that seems especially relevant and debate-worthy right now: in the persona-soaked era of Banksy, Mr. Brainwash, and more recently, James Franco, can an artist whose personality often overshadows his work be exhibited effectively?

Better known for his radical acting career than his art-making, Dennis Hopper participated in the exhibition's fast-paced

exhibition's fast-paced planning – *Double Standard* was announced in early April and opened on July 11 – before his death in May from complications of prostate cancer. Film director, painter, and impresario, Julian Schnabel, who directed Hopper in the 1996 film *Basquiat*, acted as guest curator and took a chronological and segregated approach, presenting each body of work more or less independently.

A single room in the middle of the exhibition, the retrospective's centerpiece, displays most of Hopper's black and white photographs. Hung salon-style, these reveal a hungry artist who fed on the energy around him and captured a rebellious moment in history on camera. There's Robert Rauschenberg with his tongue stuck out, Andy Warhol reclining with his posse, and Bruce Connor posing in the bathtub. Martin Luther King Jr. speaks from behind a podium and protestors and politicians con-

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gregate in Selma, Alabama. Then there's the iconic *Double Standard*, the image that inspired the exhibition's title. It depicts a former Standard gas station at a West Hollywood intersection. The word "Standard" repeats twice and the view from the car window, coupled with image from the rearview mirror, makes urban space feel like it's collapsing onto a single plane.

The rest of the exhibition plays out like a sprint through history. Hopper lived as a chameleon. Each time an era changed, he changed with it. He dabbled with Abstract Expressionism in the 1950s and Rauschenberg-like assemblage and tongue-in-cheek pop sculptures in the 1960s. His graffiti-inspired mixed media work from the 1990s has a roughness that recalls neo-expressionism and his black and white photorealist paintings pay homage to Robert Longo

to look for it. But the exhibition's installation does no favors to the viewer who lacks an encyclopedic knowledge of art history and can't immediately recognize the extent to which Hopper fed off of his contemporaries. Edward Goldman, KCRW's diplomatic critic, had a smart remedy: Why not exhibit Hopper's own work alongside the artists he collected, many of whom influenced his work? Then *Double Standard*, like Hopper's life, would be an open conversation between diverse media and characters.

In fact, the exhibition's most unconventional addition may be its strongest moment. In a small theater behind the main gallery space, Julian Schnabel has curated a brief survey of Hopper on film. Hopper appears as the cavalier hipster of *Easy Rider* fame, the overeager and slightly crazed



Opposite: *Double Standard* (1961) by Dennis Hopper Above: *James Rosenquist* (1964) by Dennis Hopper

and Gerhard Richter. The weathered, free-standing walls and chain link fences from the late 1990s could have resulted from a strange collaboration between iconoclastic Gordon Matta Clarke and the ever-industrious Angeleno Ed Kienholz.

This ecstasy of influence isn't a bad thing; in fact, it's a goldmine if you know

photojournalist from *Apocalypse Now*, and the irreverent ex-cop from *True Romance*. In each clip, the actor-artist, who once famously asked David Lynch to cast him as *Blue Velvet*'s sadistic Frank Booth because he was Frank, plays some version of himself and it's hard to get his performances out of your head. ❶

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