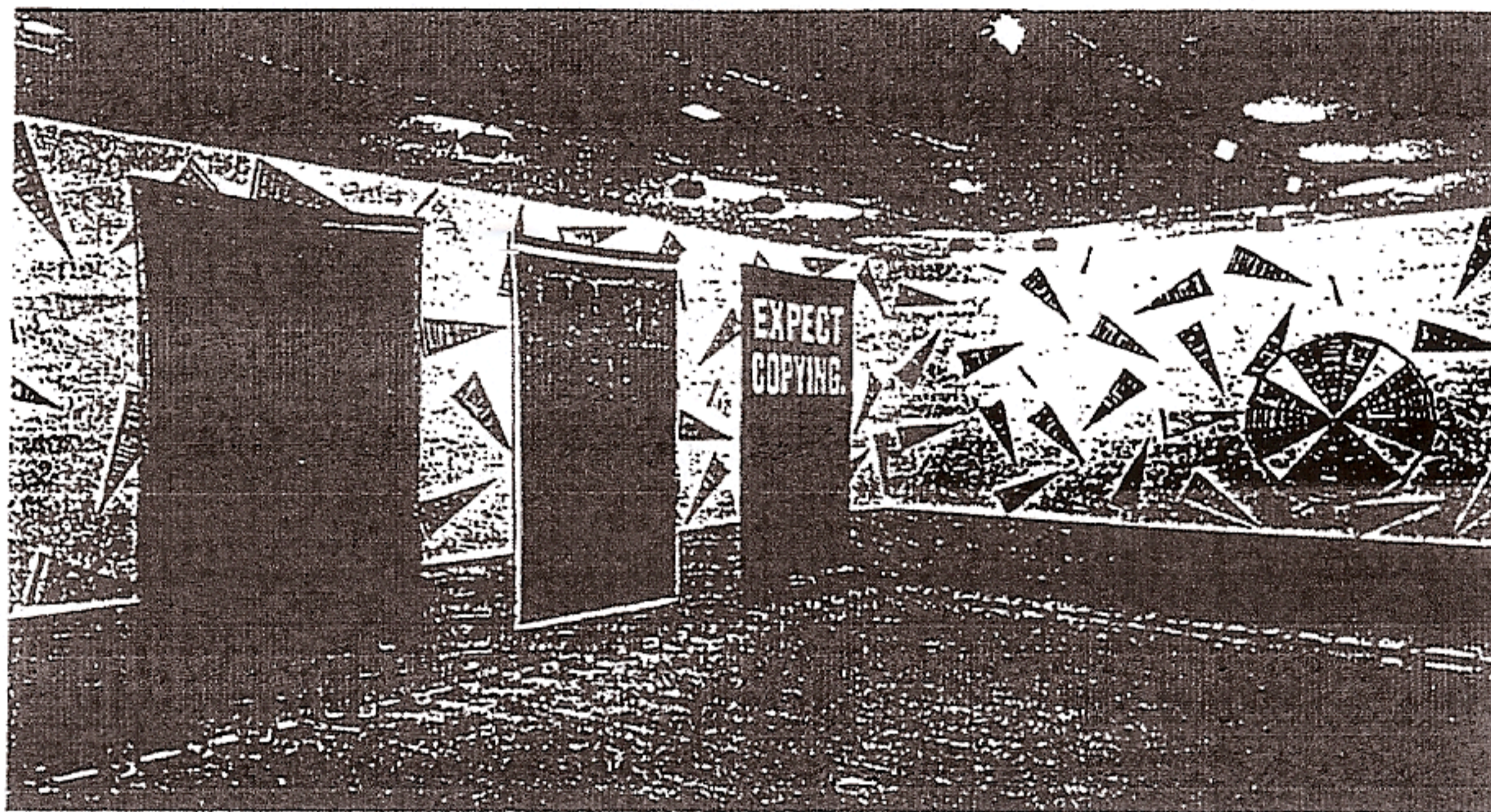


Art in America

November 1990 \$4.75



Cary S. Leibowitz/Candyass: Installation view of exhibition, 1990; at Stux.

Cary S. Leibowitz/ Candyass at Stux

Cary S. Leibowitz goes by the alias Candyass because, like a certain type of comedian—Pee Wee Herman, for example—his art revolves around the projection of a fictional persona. This character is a young, gay, depressed, petulant, weak-willed, self-pitying, self-indulgent, self-obsessed, manipulative neurotic who charms us with his disarmingly confessional wit.

With this, his second New York solo show, Leibowitz took a surprising turn toward commodity-critique Conceptualism. He turned the gallery into a store stocked with mechanically produced multiples: rugs, dinner

plates, teddy bears, pennants, miniature baseball bats, felt banners, wallpaper and so on; each of these items is imprinted with a Candyass-style text. The gallery thus became a mock souvenir shop dedicated to Leibowitz's own trademark persona. The 18-inch baseball bats are printed with the words "I want to love you butt [*sic*] I don't know how"; a hundred little teddy bears wear little yellow vests that say, "I will make a Cubist painting someday but right now it is not important,"

a text that also appears on an edition of black floor mats. Dinner plates carry texts such as the poem "A Whiney Asshole," which reads in part, "I don't

deserve anything I have/I say bad things about good people/I am a terrible person/My friends should kill me." This is also printed on 200 large cardboard boxes that were stored in flattened states and were intended, one imagined, to be used by customers to carry away their Candyass-ware.

Visually, it was a handsome installation. Leibowitz cannily imitated boutique decor, wrapping silver wallpaper (bearing the phrase "I am a miserable and selfish person") around the lower part of the gallery walls and applying multicolored triangular flags—"Depression Pennants" saying things like "Life Sucks"

and "Misery Rules"—all over the upper walls to produce a jazzy background. The added repetition of object multiples created a gratifying feeling of visual unity. Thus, unlike his wimpy Candyass persona, Leibowitz seemed an artist of considerable self-assurance, ingenuity, clearheadedness and energy.

But it was primarily the conceptual aspect that gave the show its edge. On one level, it was a funny parody of the marketing of certain celebrities—Dollywood and Spike's Joint are two enterprises that come to mind. It was particularly funny because the character being marketed—a rather creepy "whiney ass-

hole"—is not the sort likely to be admired by the masses. This was further complicated by the fictive-circumstance that Candyass is marketing *himself*. Replacing art-making with self-promotion, Candyass enacted a narcissistic ambition similar to that represented by Barbara Bloom's 1989 installation *The Reign of Narcissism*, which was an ironic museum-cum-shrine dedicated to the artist herself in the guise of a famous writer. Like Bloom's persona, Candyass is narcissism personified; he epitomizes the kind of ambition that aspires not to do anything of real value but rather seeks desperately to become recognized, admired and, ultimately, loved by the world, even if it means shamelessly exploiting himself. His work represents a fundamentally neurotic fantasy of success that is all too prevalent in our society.

—Ken Johnson