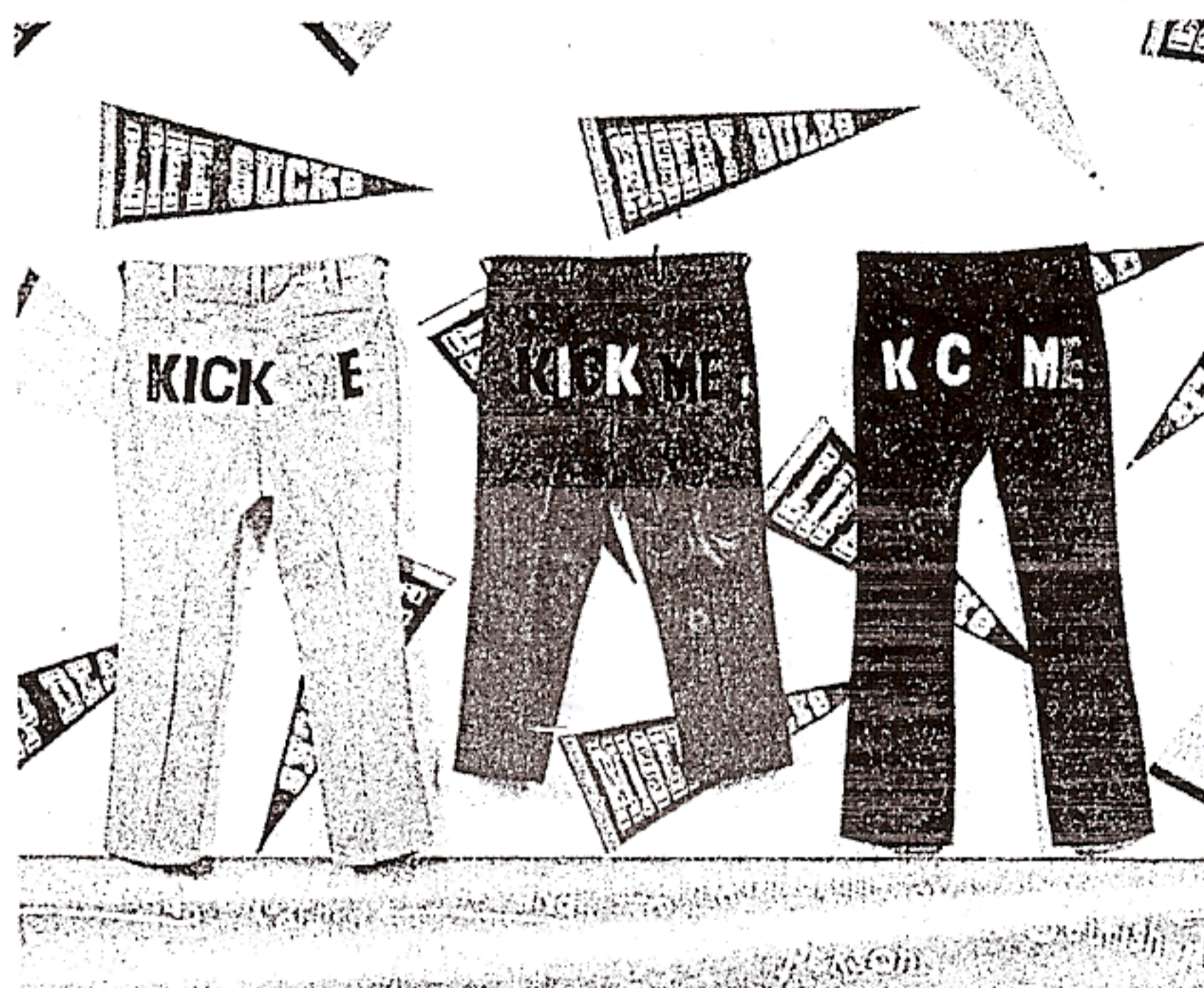


ARTFORUM

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CANDYASS, from "bric-a-brac," 1990, mixed media. Installation view.

CANDYASS STUX GALLERY

"i like to pretend i,m someone else as much as possible so i wont get too depressed. well i cant do alot of things, lots of things indeed and i;m not as smart as i would like to be and not as politically aware/politicaly correct as i would like to be and this is nerve-ous making if i let it so i like to try and kill time and avoid the serious issues i was tought to well sort of avoid by making art. . . ."—so reads the notarized artist's statement for

Cary Leibowitz's (a/k/a CANDYASS) recent show of pennants, felt banners, door mats, plates, wallpaper, plaques, and cardboard boxes emblazoned with mottos, maxims and stories. The visual form of the work, a patchwork of styles borrowed from such artists as Allen Ruppersberg, Matt Mullican, Albert Oehlen, and Mike Kelley is deliberately dispensable. It serves primarily as a pretext for peculiar manifestos that at first glance seem to exude self-loathing.

Though the artist's statement is clearly faux-naïve, its confessional tone may fool viewers into thinking that Leibowitz has momentarily dropped his pose; peeling away the CANDYASS facade, however, fails to reveal anything—or anyone—except another CANDYASS. This studied superficiality seems closer to Oscar Wilde's art-for-art's-sake esthetic than to any recent visual art with perhaps the exception of Andy Warhol. The works here that employ extended narratives are the most engaging. Terse pieces like the Depression Pennants ("Life Sucks," "Misery Rules," "Go

Sadness," "Drop Dead") and the felt banners ("Expect Copying," "Don't Pretend 2 Like It") lack resonance.

Despite disclaimers ("avoid serious issues"), this show crackles with politics. The admission "i'm . . . not as politically aware/politicaly correct as i would like to be . . .," coming from the mouth of a supposed "dumb ass," undermines the very notion of political rectitude from the outset. One large rug that reads "There Are 2 Things I Need To Watch 4 The Rest Of My Life; My Weight And My Racism" raises the specter of an evil barely held in check, ready to burst out at the first chance. While apparently trivializing the problem of racism, the statement suggests that, by now, racism is not so much the result of bad intentions as it is of indifference. In the absence of affirmative action, racism can easily perpetuate itself and all its evils without necessarily resorting to outright hatred—a fact often lost on liberals.

Issues of sexual politics dominate the show. A cheesy brass wall plaque tells the tale of a guy named Jack who wasn't really Jack—this from an artist who works under a pseudonym. ". . . I MEAN ONLY THE PEOPLE AT WORK KNEW HIS REAL NAME BUT NONE OF THE PEOPLE FROM WORK KNEW THE PEOPLE JACK MET AFTER WORK HE NEVER WANTED THE TWO GROUPS—WORK AND AFTER WORK TO MEET. . . ." This double life becomes insidiously paranoid by virtue of the deception on which it depends, an artifice that closely—and uncomfortably—mirrors the condition of art as well. The paranoia reaches a crescendo in Jack's desire for acceptance:

"BUT HE WANTED PEOPLE TO LIKE HIM OR AT LEAST NOT LOOK AT HIM IN A WAY LIKE THEY KNEW HE WAS THINKING ABOUT SUCKING COCK ALL DAY." The phrase "WANTED PEOPLE TO LIKE HIM" serves to encode the social mechanism for legitimation and repression of gender orientation. Leibowitz invokes the closet in order to smash out of it.

Just as the pseudonym CANDYASS sugar-coats an animal orifice, the very novelty items Leibowitz chooses make the confessions inscribed on them less credible but more pathetic and more appealing. The principle of art-for-art's-sake negates the world as it is given in favor of the world as it might be imagined. Leibowitz, for example, presents the viewer with a bunch of toy bats leaning in a corner, each inscribed with the legend "I WANT TO LOVE YOU BUTT I DON'T KNOW HOW." The bats are miniature, as hapless and impotent as the complainer himself must be, yet barely concealed in this lament is an exuberant demand for anal intercourse: I want to love you "butt." The reversal occurs just when the viewer might least expect it. This deployment of a demand disguised as a lament reflects an underlying impulse of the romantic tradition: libidinal revolt against the patriarchal order.

—John Miller