

REGEN PROJECTS

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ArtReview

Elliott Hundley *Balcony*

Kasmin, 509 West 27th Street, New York 9 September – 23 October



Madam, 2021, oil stick, encaustic, paper, plastic, pins, photographs, foam and linen on panel, 194 x 199 x 10 cm. Courtesy the artist and Kasmin, New York

The ten large, intricately collaged and painted panels in Elliott Hundley's *Balcony* are each named after a character in Jean Genet's eponymous play; hung in a circle around Kasmin's open-plan gallery, they form a kind of theatre in the round. In Genet's *Le Balcon* (1957), the Queen, Madam, Thief, Bishop, General, Judge, Rebel and Sinner each enact their desires in a brothel under siege, like archetypes of a corrupt society ripe for revolution. From a distance, Hundley's panels appear to be colourful abstractions, but at close range they reveal collaged midcentury product labels, photographs of friends in costume and cartoon images depicting twentieth-century leftist political struggles, such as the Black Power and decolonization movements, of which Genet was a strong supporter. *Rebel* (all works 2021), for instance features drawings of Angela Davis and

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Che Guevara seemingly cut from graphic novels. *Madam* meanwhile stars a woman who resembles Pina Bausch in dramatic Butoh-like poses, opposite coquettish Bette Davis in a penumbra of mostly nude young men, registering the subversive camp of Genet's literary output quite apart from his political radicalism.

That apartness is an uneasy tension in this show, in which revolutionary politics are repeatedly atomized and aestheticized. Ancient artefacts from Africa, Asia and America also appear in wunderkammer jumble as generic stand-ins for the oppressed Other. Melted plastic pinheads appear to fix these images in place like insects in a nineteenth-century-naturalist's display. Genet's characters are only ciphers for the powerful institutions that he thought were destroying the postwar world and so Hundley has given us a view of history seen from the same allegorical distance—a balcony view perhaps, safely above the pitchforks and burning torches. Hanging in the centre of *Balcony* is *Chandelier*, inspired by the fixture that dangles over all of Genet's drama. Crafted from found pins, wood, metal, plastic and neon, Hundley's luminaire casts little light into the gallery, as if to suggest that the prospects for a revolution now are dim.

Evan Moffitt