

Interview

WHITNEY CLAFLIN: WHEN THERE'S NO STARBUCKS NEARBY



“Isadora” 2012. Mixed media on canvas, 18 x 14 in.
Photo: Andreas Vesterlund, courtesy the artist and Thomas Erben Gallery, New York

For her solo show at Thomas Erben gallery, New York-based artist Whitney Clafin is drawing inspiration from the comedic greats—specifically, the iconic feminist stand-up and actress Sandra Bernhard. “When I was living in LA, I watched this Sandra Bernhard one-woman show, *Without You I’m Nothing*, and it really informed the way I use text and approach my work,” explains Clafin, who moved from Los Angeles to the East Coast to attend Yale’s MFA program in 2007. “The way she flips characters and voices—there are always so many layers of self-criticism and self-awareness, but also sincerity.”

This desire for emotional complexity and purposeful textual ambiguity forms the basis of Clafin’s current exhibition, a multimedia collection of cheekily tilted abstract oil paintings (*Forget the Salad* is

a deep blue, eyeshadow and feather-covered canvas), collages (e.g. the playful, Spandex-incorporating *Hates: Berets*, *Alexa Chung*, *When You Have to Pee Wicked Bad* and *There is No Starbucks Nearby*), and performance.

The performance, which takes place at the gallery at 7 pm tonight, is a sort of participatory parlor game-cum-self-mocking performance piece. “I have a girl posing as a kind of cliché of a New York performance artist, leading people in the gallery in a word game called ‘Impulse,’” says Clafin. “It’s a performance that isn’t really a performance, and it sets the tone for looking at the paintings.”