

VIRGIL MARTI  
HOLLY SOLOMON

Virgil Marti displays an operatic passion for the bad taste of middle class existence. In baroque screen-prints of beer cans, high-school bullies, and suburban kitsch, he lays claim to a tacky Americana that works as counter-myth to our plastic, moneyed era. Marti's current installation is wallpapered with prints of the "Beer Can Collection" amassed by the artist and his father. Still stored in his parent's basement, Marti's cans represent lingering conflicts between a trashy upbringing and cultivated tastes. The elegant printing, framing, and selection which refines this display of alcoholic consumption questions the base needs underlying connoisseurship. Conversely, the effete presentation of American eagles, hunters, and Mustangs on Budweiser cans, calls into play a set of blue-collar values which can be equally exclusionary. High art becomes the stuff of memories, degraded and sentimental, because Marti refuses to relinquish the past.

Rococo suburban home decor, photographed 70s style, and recolored in Warhol's hallucinatory oranges and reds conveys Marti's second obsession; lifestyle porn. Some photos come paired with seedy snippets from "naturist" magazines, others are coupled with fantasy teenage hang-outs or glossy silver backings. The lurid coloring of the sunken dens and shag carpeting discolors suburban harmony and drags his classic pop palette into the realm of bad taste. The empty bachelor pads remind us of friends and lovers, once desired, now gone. Marti climaxes the exhibition with a series of glitzy, yet awkward, self-portraits. The artist's display of pale-skin and scrawny physique is reminiscent of Steven Meisel's fashion spreads of heroin chic. For Marti such ads appropriate his youth, but teen-age memories can only come up short against such attractive models. Hip corporate entertainment reaches into the past, so Marti's portraits gaze blankly at tomorrow. Rejecting inferiority, Marti defines a new type of sex symbol: "antiheroic, self-aware, the wave of the future."

**Michael Cohen**



**VIRGIL MARTI, Beer Can Library, 1997. Detail of installation (Art Alliance). Screenprinted 4-color process wallpaper.**