
Virgil Marti

*Holly Solomon Gallery
172 Mercer Street, at Houston
Street
SoHo
Through June 12*

At the Armory Show in February, Virgil Marti, a 35-year-old Philadelphia artist, covered Holly Solomon's booth with psychedelic-colored wallpaper. Printed among its floral patterns were yearbook portraits of all the boys who had tormented him in junior high school. The hilarious result is every shy, gay 98-pound weakling's idea of sweet revenge: to enshrine the bullies of the world in a public Hall of Shame.

Adolescence, with its conflicted impulses to fit in and drop out, also plays a role in Mr. Marti's strong debut show at Solomon. "Beer Can Library" in the front gallery is another wallpaper-style installation, this one with images of hundreds of beer cans meticulously lined up on shelves. The cans really exist. The artist and his father collected them over years as a shared project, a hard-to-find bond of mutual interest, and they are still stored in the basement of his parents' home.

In the second gallery, fantasy takes over in manipulated photographs of home interiors: Hollywood bachelor pads, replete with conversation pits, mirrored walls and — one gathers from printed snippets of conversation — hot-trot muscleman occupants. Another room pictured nearby is more down to earth and more grandiose. It's a suburban garage converted to an adolescent's bedroom, but with a rococo salon as its reflective image.

Mr. Marti touches on many things in his work — gender, class, self-image, humor, serious sentimentality, pop cultural connoisseurship — all with wry aplomb. They are summed up in a pair of ink-jet photographic self-portraits. Printed on flocked canvas, they are a cross between Andy Warhol silk screens and black-velvet painting. In them the artist poses like a classic pinup, shirtless and in cutoff jeans. But his skin is pale, his physique unhunky. He's a new kind of dreamboat: antiheroic, self-aware, the wave of the future.

HOLLAND COTTER
