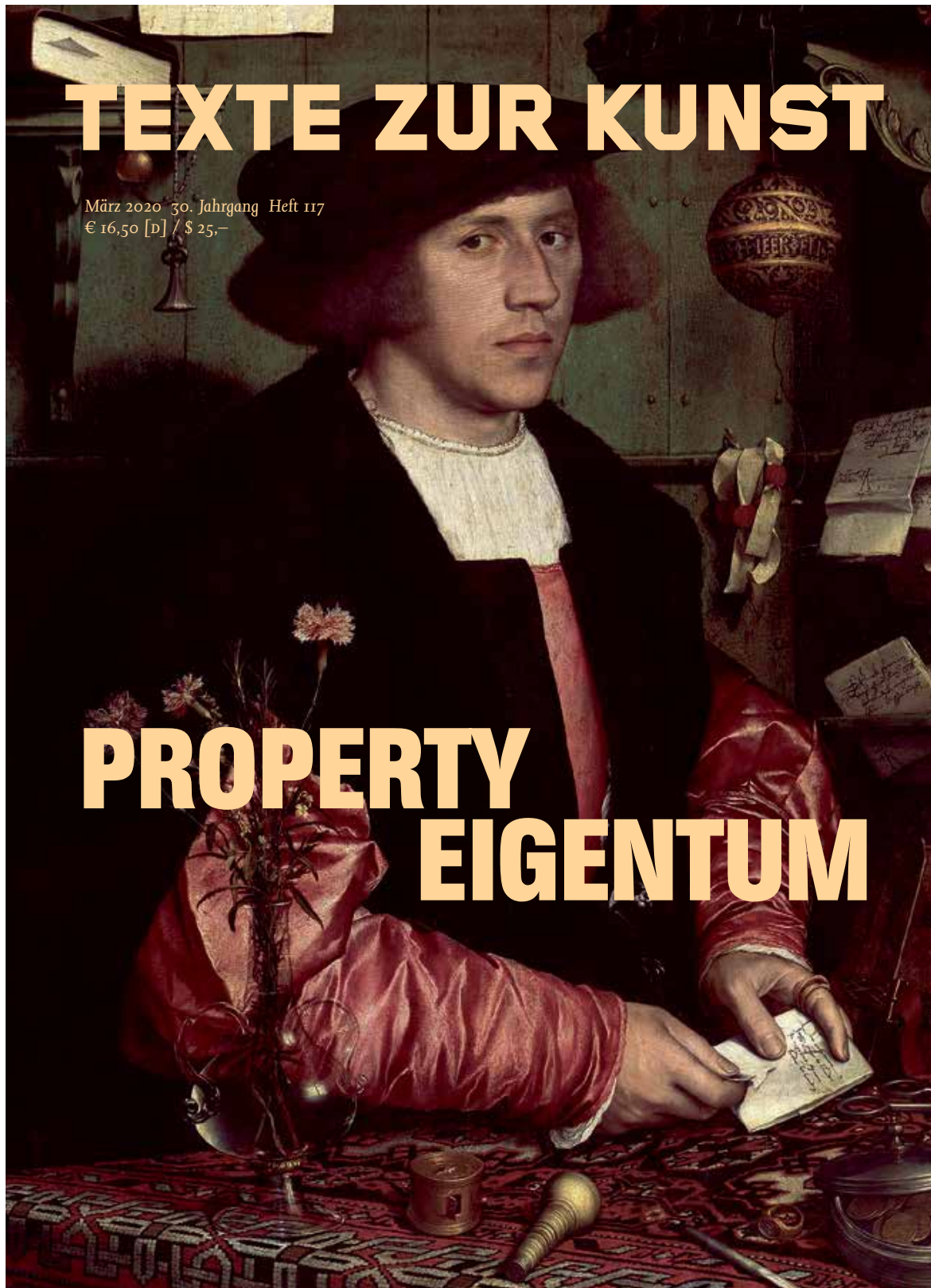


GLADSTONE

Els Roelandt, "It's No Use Crying," *Texte Zur Kunst*, March 1, 2020



IT'S NO USE CRYING

Els Roelandt on Anne Collier at Gladstone Gallery, Brussels



"Anne Collier," Gladstone Gallery, Brussels, 2019, installation view

The image of the crying woman is a well-established one within art, and the marginalization of women artists within Conceptual art widely acknowledged. With precision and concision, artist Anne Collier reclaims the former as a means for redressing the latter. Els Roelandt visited her latest exhibition in Brussels.

Simple and clear, so is the work of Anne Collier. Collier recently presented a handful of new works at Gladstone Gallery in Brussels: series (some are triptychs) of analog photographs treated with various different color filters. For the work *Filter #1 (Cyan)* (2019), for example, Collier makes use of an instrument and technique for color correction that has become totally superfluous in the era of digital photography.

The analog photographs Collier presents here are close-ups of comic strip figures from the 1950s and 1960s, all found at flea markets.



More specifically, they are close-ups of the faces of crying women, a damp eye in which a tear is being shed, or simply just a tear (Roy Lichtenstein style). Lichtenstein made crying, languorous, and eternally suffering female cartoon characters his trademark because they served so well as icons of Pop – the image of the languorous woman was a popular and overconsumed one in the '50s and '60s. Anne Collier uses the image more consciously and critically, in a cool and detached photographic analysis. She chooses the image of the crying woman not because it sells so well, but because she has something to say about it. In these works, she criticizes the social position of

women and the ways in which they are still often presented and used within mass media, even in 2020.

Anne Collier studied photography at the California Institute of the Arts, where she obtained her BFA in 1993. She was born in 1970, a year before Linda Nochlin wrote her famous essay “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” It was in 1970 that a gallery owner, looking for new talent, asked this question of Nochlin, at that time a young and unknown American professor of art history. Nochlin took the question seriously and subsequently published her groundbreaking essay in response. She then began her life’s work

of taking the œuvres of countless artists from under the carpet in order to explore the ways in which women have been portrayed throughout art history. Little had changed by the time Collier sought her way into the California artistic scene some 20 years later. Despite the growth of feminist activism, the art of women such as Judy Chicago, the influence of Miriam Shapiro, or the creation of the famous *Womanhouse*, Conceptual art on the West Coast was at that time still dominated by men (as it was elsewhere, both in the United States and in Europe, for that matter).

Collier practices Conceptual photography. She isolates found objects (such as records or posters) and photographs them in her studio, lending them a somewhat cooled, even neurotic charge by means of a neutral or cold exposure. She experiments with all kinds of analog photo techniques in order to investigate the technical possibilities of the medium on the one hand, and the subject domain of photography on the other. Collier observes that photography is largely determined by the Western male gaze, and she criticizes this gaze in her œuvre – often with humor. She does this in a very analytical way. Collier dissects (as it were) the different ways in which women are popularly portrayed in mass media (such as advertising photography or comic strips). The female body, the gaze, or even literally the eye is an ever-recurring theme here. It was in 2008 that Anne Collier presented the motif of the "woman with a camera" in her work for the first time. At first glance, these works, in which women are portrayed taking photographs, suggest the women's independence. After all, here it is they who control the mechanism of representation; they control the camera. But the aloofness with which Collier collects the images of these women suggests that at the same

time nothing has changed, and that the masculine gaze still dominates. This becomes even clearer in publications such as *Women with Cameras (Self Portrait)*, from 2018, for example, in which Collier brings together found images of women portraying themselves (in a pre-selfie era) with a camera in the mirror. Here, it is the women themselves who reproduce an existing image of them.

But let us return for a moment to 1970, the year Collier was born in Los Angeles. During this period Joan Didion also lives in Los Angeles, where she writes the novel *Play It as It Lays*, which is largely set in psychiatric institutions and along the endless highways in and around Hollywood. At times the novel has a somewhat clinical atmosphere, which for me resonates with some of Collier's earlier works. But the book also presents a jumble of emotions in which the story's protagonist, Maria, ultimately and resolutely opts for some distinctly feminine values such as motherhood and family. Maria received few life lessons from her parents, except perhaps this one: "Overturning a rock was apt to reveal a rattlesnake." It seems to me as if Anne Collier is still in the process of reversing that proverbial rock that is the male gaze. By reversing the rock, it becomes clear how colored media in general and mass media especially (like advertising) still are, and how much work is still to be done.

"Anne Collier," Gladstone Gallery, Brussels,
November 8–December 21, 2019.