

Petzel

Martha Schwendener, "Asger Jorn," *The New York Times*, April 5, 2019, p.C21.

ASGER JORN

Through April 13. Petzel, 456 West 18th Street, Manhattan; 212-680-9467, petzel.com.

"Détournement" means taking an existing artwork or artifact and transforming it into something wiser, funnier and cooler, as evidenced in the show "Strategic Vandalism: The Legacy of Asger Jorn's Modification Paintings," at Petzel Gallery.

Jorn, a Danish artist associated with the Situationist International group in Paris in the '50s, was a master of the method. Starting with cheap, found canvases, he applied gestural splatters and scrawls of paint, "détourning" the works into critiques of "tasteful" European culture, which had become available, mass-produced, after World War II.

"Détournement is the opposite of quotation," says a text on the wall at the gallery, quoting the Situationist provocateur Guy Debord. So is it appropriation? Not exactly. Is it graffiti? No.

The target in this exhibition by Jorn and 30 artists working in a similar vein is not just art history, but political and social institutions. Arnulf Rainer's defaced engravings of European royalty challenge the aristocracy while Betty Tompkins thumbs her nose at patriarchy by obscuring nude female bodies with text in reproductions of famous art works. Jim Shaw's puerile "The Old Masturbator and the Far Away Hills" (2019) shows Ronald Reagan, drawn as smoke wafting out of a country cabin in a landscape painting, while Vidya Gastaldon's near-abstractions and Enrico Baj's mash-ups of kitsch ladies and brutalist monsters serve as hallucinogenic examples.

Détournement is an attitude as much as a form, and generally the work of the underdog, disgruntled or dispossessed. (There are exceptions, like Martin Kippenberger's minimalist table using a monochrome Gerhard Richter painting [!] as a table top.) When executed well, détournement is an exercise in getting the last word in, since art lingers longer than a snarky internet meme.

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