

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER by Zach Wampler
Anne Collier at Anton Kern, NYC
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Anne Collier. "Woman Crying (Comic) #2," 2018. C-Print. 63.21 x 49.7 inches (160.55 x 126.24 cm).

What is the most contested thing on this earth? Well, readers, not to make any bold claims, but I think the female body is certainly at the top of the list. All forms of media and representation throughout history lends itself to the male gaze and female subjugation, but in the past sixty years, liberation for women of all kinds has come a long way. Or has it?

The work of **Anne Collier** quietly and intelligently interrogates the notion that women are independent, taken seriously, or seen through a lens that isn't sexualized or stereotypical simply for male pleasure. At a new exhibition at **Anton Kern Gallery** in New York, Collier presents ongoing bodies of work that directly takes aim at these perceptions around the female body and psyche.

Collier employs a process that could almost be described as artist-as-art-director. In a strategy taken from artists of the 1970s and 1980s, Collier appropriates imagery and then enlarges, shrinks, or crops for conceptual purposes. In this exhibition, we see numerous prints from three series titled *Tears (Comic)*, *Crying (Comic)*, and *Women Crying*. Using advertisements and album covers (often directed towards women), we see eyes filled with tears or running down a cheek. Like a **Lichtenstein** painting, the enlargements reveal the printed surface of these photos and illustrations. They're slick and glamorous in their polished Pop styling, but something darker lurks. The image of women in despair- or hysterics, if we're being honest -is nothing new. This banality, of seeing a woman in pain, is what makes these images horrifying. Assuming one can see, we are constantly absorbing images from birth until death, including images regarding the mental and emotional capacities of a woman. Pain is normalized, irrationality is expected, and constant degradation ensues.

These images culminate with a projected work called *Women With Cameras (Self Portrait)*. This piece is a collection of photos Collier has accumulated over the years. Showing various women taking photos of themselves may not seem radical now in the era of Instagram, but these are all film and long before social media consumed our lives. As a result, these photos seem much more intimate, but what were originally meant as snapshots for these photographers have now been abandoned. Along with that loss comes another loss of intention and



ANNE COLLIER. "WOMAN CRYING (COMIC) #3," 2018. C-PRINT. 49.7 X 68.84 INCHES (126.24 X 174.85 CM).

control. The harsh click of the slide projector feels clinical, like viewing X-ray results. When I visited this show, I was left with the uneasy feeling of prying on something private. These women might not look the same, some may even be dead, but they're here under our gaze, nonetheless.

Even when a woman holds a camera, which is a signifier of her own authority and desire, who really is in control? It's an ugly question to grapple with, but I'm grateful that Anne Collier and so many other women and men have chosen to confront it. However, in times like these (Trump, #MeToo, and all the rest), it is a question we all need to face with renewed urgency.