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Hillary Clinton, Psy, and more star in Julia Wachtel's latest show



Portraits of Hillary Clinton, Korean pop star Psy, and a Jamaican dancehall artist named Vybz Kartel are among the Internet-sourced images that appear in “Empowerment,” Julia Wachtel’s new show of paintings opening at Elizabeth Dee on May 16. While it’s entirely possible that the original photographs feel familiar from frequent Internet meanderings, Wachtel is full of surprises when it comes to her uncanny pairings.

Wachtel, whose work hangs in museums around the world, including the Museum of Modern Art, is clearly indebted to Pop. She first emerged on New York’s art scene in the 1980s with her own edgy, trenchant take on mass-media appropriation. She continues to use painting as a vehicle for cultural critique, but now with a vast digital trove of images to dig into. The seven recent large-scale paintings on view here feel fresh, partly because their subject matter is so topical, but also because the elements of her painted mash-ups—cartoons, video stills, news photographs—are arranged more like a screen of images than, say, a collage.

The curious seven-paneled *Stripe* shows Psy doing his famous “Gangnam Style” dance moves, as both a cartoon character and a more photorealistic version, juxtaposed with a repeated image of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. In *Wild*, a Warholian series of photos of a forest fire is interrupted by a cartoon cigarette holding a lighter and smiling wickedly. “We’re viewers of images all day long, and we live in a surreal environment of juxtaposition. Images have an explicit and sometimes even hidden agenda,” says Wachtel. “My work, I hope, is a poetic response to that experience, and an attempt to pull apart the language and grammar of pictures.”



There are clearly some unexpected pithy cultural connections that emerge, not to mention smart formal relationships, such as the machine-gun-toting video game commando paired with a drunken cartoonish character slumped against a lamppost in *The Dissipation of Authority*. While there's nothing blatantly didactic about these paintings, Wachtel has much to point out about all the information bombarding us daily

May 16 through June 27 at Elizabeth Dee, 545 West 20th Street, New York; elizabethdee.com

