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Jeremy Gloster. "Quietly, Banks Violette Reemerges in New York," *Blouin Art Info*, October 23, 2018.

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Quietly, Banks Violette Reemerges in New York



Installation view, Violette Banks at Gladstone Gallery in New York.
(Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels)

Cultivated edginess, black patent leather, teen homicide, Jägermeister, harsh geometry, Vice's "True Norwegian Black Metal" documentary: There was a time, in the early 2000s, when the artist

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Banks Violette's preoccupations dovetailed perfectly with those at the dark center of youth culture; the synchronicity granted him an unsustainable level of art-world celebrity.

Over the course of 10 years, Violette amassed the trappings of a high-profile commercial artist: a string of major institutional shows; high production budgets and a staff of studio assistants; legions of followers, both inside and outside the field of Contemporary art. But fame is a fickle food, as Emily Dickinson once wrote, and expectations, compounded by drug addiction and intensive production schedules, tend to result in burning out, not fading away. Violette eventually abandoned his studio and decamped from New York to Ithaca, his hometown upstate.

Without this context, Violette's current solo exhibition at Gladstone Gallery, his first in New York since the start of this long decade, would seem unlikely, if not unfathomable. It is conspicuously small for an artist who used to revel in the grandeur of black metal Minimalism, Dash Snow notoriety, Steven Parrino style. The last time he exhibited at Gladstone, it was at the gallery's much larger space in Chelsea, a more commodious setting for the large-scale installations — the Nordic church scaffoldings, stage sets, fluorescent tubes — for which he was well-known. In contrast, the current exhibition hangs sparsely at the gallery's Upper East Side townhouse outpost: six drawings, a bouquet of white roses.

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Those drawings, rendered in graphite applied so heavily they appear to be printed, resembling either black-and-white photocopies or tattoo stencils, retain some of Violette's original iconography. An upside-down American flag, a common motif in the artist's earlier work, is drafted on paper rather than fabricated from aluminum and fluorescent lights. More poignantly, "No Title/Orphan," all works 2018, a work of geometric abstraction, is, indeed, a vestige from his big production days, a drawn copy of a digital file left behind by one of Violette's studio assistants who later committed suicide. From an artist who used to approach death from the distance of anthropological nihilism, the inclusion is touching.

As "No Title/Orphan" suggests, the source material here is deceptively simple. Easily recognizable images culled from punk history, mainstream culture, or ripped from the headlines engender, in this exhibition, deeper associations. "No Title/(American Standard)," for instance, reproduces the plumbing fixture purveyor's logo without revealing that the company has been bought and sold, in the past decade, by Bain Capital. Elsewhere, Violette depicts the TV show title card for "Roseanne" at the exact moment its revival has been cancelled, evoking the strange evolution of the show's auteur from working-class hero to failed politician to racist pariah. Whether personal or cultural, these are all icons of resurrection or, at least, recurrence.

This material is all vaguely political, too, though Violette is perhaps less concerned with the narrative implications than the

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narratives themselves, the general ebb and flow of fortune. No surprise, then, that the most delicate work on view is a portrait of the adult actress Stormy Daniels, freshly relevant due to her mid-aughts liaisons with the reality TV president. Both former darlings of their chosen professions, the subject and artist share at least one particular affinity: Daniels derived her pseudonym from a bottle of Jack; Violette once cast them in pewter. And, of course, who better than Daniels to understand the comedown of notoriety, the surreal ways in which the recent past can inform the present, how all images seemingly return, haunted?

"Banks Violette" is at Gladstone Gallery, 130 East 64th Street, New York, NY 10065, through October 27, 2018. More information: <https://www.gladstone64.com>

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