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Asher Penn
Works from "Diane Arbus Skateboards."

COMMENT

Arbus, Thrasher

Asher Penn shreds a photographic legacy.

SCOTT INDRISEK

IT'S THE SORT OF WISEASS, lowbrow, self-referential idea that will make contemporary-art purists cringe. Asher Penn, a New Yorker by way of Vancouver, Canada, and a prolific photographer and bookmaker, is debuting a new series of work at Andrew Roth Gallery on November 4, to coincide with the opening of the New York Art Book Fair. The series co-opts classic Diane Arbus photographs and forces them into an unexpected and wonderful relationship with skateboarding culture.

Penn, a cofounder of 100%, an art-book publisher, is no stranger to offbeat appropriation: A previous body of work involved tracing Rorschach patterns atop Wolfgang Tillmans photos of Kate Moss. He also had a youthful interest in skateboarding—a passion whose origin he says coincided with his first exposure to Diane Arbus's classic 1972 eponymous

monograph, published by Aperture.

The two disparate worlds collided and, voilà!—80 appropriated Arbuses affixed to the grip-tape side of 80 skateboard decks. (Penn does cite the precedent of Supreme, a skateboard company that has commissioned such talents as Marilyn Minter, Larry Clark, and George Condo to illustrate its decks.) Why Arbus, exactly? The artist calls his choice "instinctual" but recognizes that the project could have gone in different directions: "I can imagine August Sander skateboards, Cindy Sherman skateboards, Ralph Gibson skateboards."

In addition to the decks, the exhibition, "Diane Arbus Skateboards," will include a set of drawings for which Penn "guillotined" a copy of Arbus's monograph and augmented the images with miniature skateboards and the flaming-head logo of Spitfire, a popular skate-wheel

manufacturer. Instead of an accompanying catalogue, Penn is issuing two full-color illustrated pamphlets. One, *Ubiquitous but Suspect, Gnarly and Impolite*, consists of a series of short essays by Ben Carlson charting previous Arbus appropriations in popular culture. The other, *Beautiful Ride*, contains an interview that Penn conducted with Patrick O'Dell, a renowned skateboarding photographer.

The artist sees a connection between his project and another book, recently issued by Roth's publishing imprint. In *Killed*, William E. Jones developed the rejected negatives made by the likes of Walker Evans under the Farm Security Administration, which hole-punched the negatives so that the images now resemble accidental Baldessarini. "Both are an attempt to reconsider an aspect of an established photographic history in a very personal way," says Penn. **MP**