

SEASON: FW 2017/18

Eliza Douglas between collaboration and the self

In Eliza Douglas' series of abstracted life-sized self-portraits, her form is repeatedly reduced to a pair of hands and feet, positioned in either a standing position or a series of illogical movements systematically rendered in a photo-realist style. Her limbs are partially decorated in the designs of Balenciaga or the fashion collective Vetements, whose androgynous outfits Douglas has frequently modeled either on the catwalk or in advertising campaigns. The application of paint is intentionally flat, creating a level surface removed of any raised areas or indentations, comparable to a printed page or a digital screen. The remainder of her body is comically substituted for colorful expressive trails and swirls of paint that begin from her ankles, wrists or the cuffs of her clothing, applied in a style that is evocative of Abstract Expressionism.

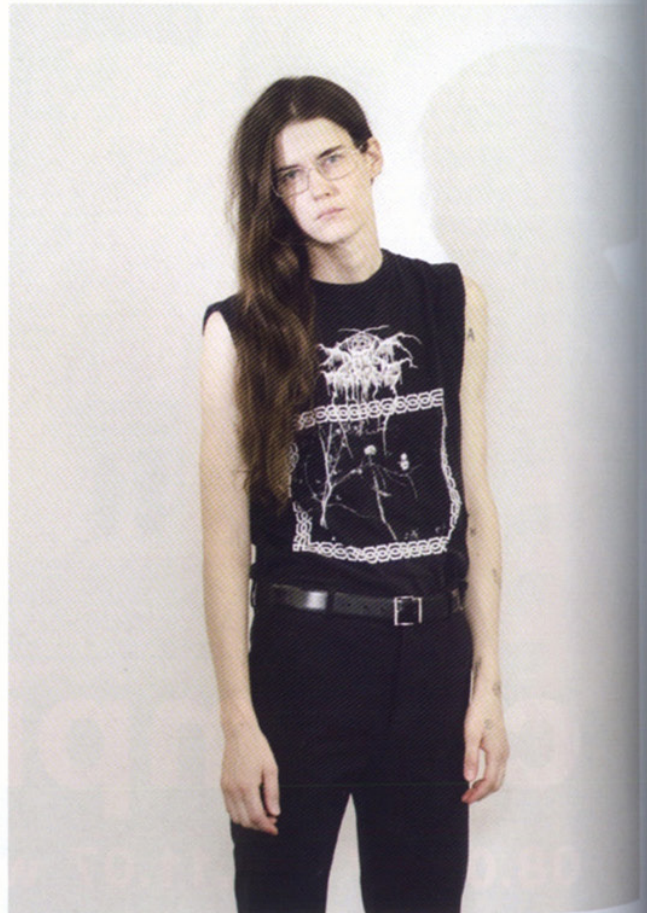
Art and fashion have had a long-standing relationship prior to the current proliferation of collaborations between artists and brands, such as Sterling Ruby and Raf Simons for Calvin Klein, or the more product-based ventures between Jeff Koons and Louis Vuitton. Douglas' association with the Vetements phenomenon, coupled with the judicious use of their clothing in her paintings, suggests a commitment beyond simply commerce: a shared ideology and understanding of the tensions prevalent during this complex period of social and technological adjustment. This is demonstrated in Vetements' strategic use of anonymity, combined with their collaborative approach with numerous brands and disruption of established procedures of production and distribution within the fashion industry.

Douglas adopts a similar methodology in her artistic practice, albeit on a smaller scale, assuming the position of art director, actor and artist; she has worked in unison with other practitioners including Anne Imhof, with whom she has performed extensively in her ambitious operatic productions. A forthcoming two-person exhibition at Galerie Buchholz will present an iteration of their collaborative paintings.

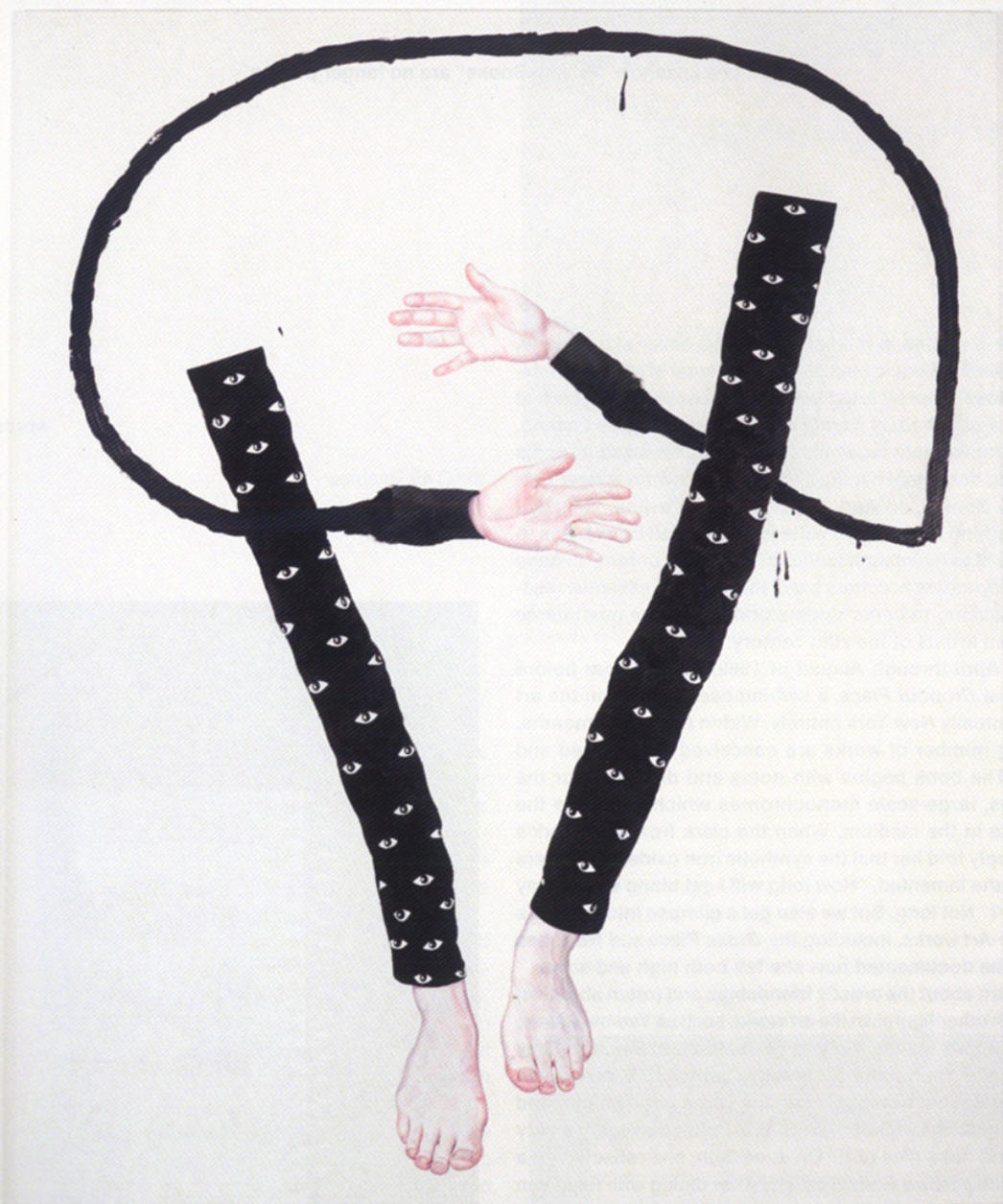
Her collective approach is further evidenced in the production of Douglas' paintings for the exhibition "I Am All Soul" at Air de Paris, whereupon she developed the works by arranging her extremities in a series of digital mockups that were then outsourced and executed by professional photorealist painters. Once this stage of the process is completed, the paintings are resolved by her applying large gestural strokes of paint, which operate as surrogates for her body. This morphing of her appendages with the aforementioned articles of clothing illustrates the fluidity of identity, and how cultural forces and commodified objects are often instrumental in shaping of the self.

This is explored in installation of the paintings, whereupon Douglas displayed multiple paintings in close proximity, almost touching, expending all of the available wall space in the main gallery, not unlike a hall of mirrors. While the quantity and seriality of the presentation is indebted to Andy Warhol's large-scale installations, the work functions as a mediation on the unrelenting growth of image distribution and the dehumanizing nature of digital culture, reflecting upon the need for individuals to constantly seek validation from others, even though it objectifies the individual and ultimately deprives them of their inherent freedom. ■

words by Matt Williams







AN AMERICAN WHO LIVES AND WORKS IN FRANKFURT, ELIZA DOUGLAS (B. 1984, NEW YORK) IS CURRENTLY SHOWING AT GALERIE BUCHHOLZ, NEW YORK, IN A TWO-PERSON EXHIBITION WITH GERMAN ARTIST ANNE IMHOF. IMAGES COURTESY OF THE ARTIST; AIR DE PARIS, PARIS; AND OVERDUIN & CO, LOS ANGELES. PHOTO CREDIT: NADINE FRACZKOWSKI.