

# Anne Collier: Reducing Women To Tears

Comic book images of female vulnerability become symbols of liberated sexual energy at Anton Kern Gallery, New York

BY DIANA HAMILTON



Anne Collier, *Woman Crying (Comic) #3*, 2018, C-Print, 1.3 x 1.7 m. Courtesy: © the artist and Anton Kern Gallery, New York

With her found images of women's tears, Anne Collier's fifth, eponymously-titled exhibition at Anton Kern Gallery seems, at first glance, to focus on how women are seen by others: as emotional, out of control and, yes, seductive. And though the comics, record covers, and therapeutic materials she draws on show women reduced to tears, she reduces them further: instead of defining women by their emotional expression, blown-up images of their expressions' excretion act as a synecdoche for the women. In 'Crying (Comic)' and 'Tears (Comic)' (all works 2018), the isolated, enlarged teardrops no longer suggest mourning or weakness, but instead signal an erotic allegiance between crying and cumming. In 'Tear (Comic) #1', the teardrop carves out a white gash in the surrounding red grid of the comic panel, enlarged enough that the fleshy background starts to look like a torn textile. While Collier has taken these images from comic books that used women's emotions as a psychosexual reference to vulnerability or helplessness, once enlarged, the sexual energy of the teardrop feels freed from that context as it drips across skin.

Recent research on the chemo-signalling function of tears suggests that crying actually offers a certain protection from (at least heterosexual) sex: a 2011 study in *Science*, somewhat incredibly, had male participants smell vials of women's tears while looking at photographs of women's faces; it found that 'merely sniffing . . . odourless tears' reduced self-reported, physiological and hormonal indicators of arousal. While this might seem like an absurd tangent from Collier's in this visual history of crying, works like 'What Are the Effects' (2018) – a poster with six tentative answers ('Physical?' 'Psychological?') – suggest a clinical distance created by this visual proximity to tears, and an interest in the science of weeping.

Hilton Als writes that Collier 'remakes women as they have been photographed by others', suggesting that the project has a broader focus on women's lack of control over their representation. But Collier's conceptual

photography is just as concerned with women's roles on the other side of the camera, and central to this exhibition is a work that inverts this question. Comprising eighty collected amateur photographs 'Women with Cameras (Self Portrait)' shows, every 14 seconds, another example of how a woman saw herself. (In many, the camera's flash in the mirror tellingly obscures the face or body.) Dated from the 1970s to the early 2000s, many of these self-portraits read as though their subject took them to find out what she looked like from a given angle, in a certain outfit; Collier has chosen images that don't appear self-consciously framed.

Moving upstairs, one passes a work that resolves this tension between women's self-image and their representation. 'How Do You Think Others See You?' (2017) centres an open booklet with a woman's hands positioned over it to fill out the quiz, which asks the titular question in order to measure the woman's 'social esteem.' This rubric ironically suggests that Collier's 'Women Crying' series, alongside her other works focusing on external representation, offers another variety of self-portraiture: to show how others see us is also to show how we see ourselves. It's an old idea – John Berger's meta-reflective women. In this photo, though, the pencil hovers over the first question: we don't get to find out how she sees others seeing her.

Anne Collier runs at Anton Kern Gallery, New York until 19 May.