

ARTFORUM

John Boskovich Laurie Rubin Gallery

By Lois E. Nesbitt
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In most of his works, John Boskovich groups disparate images in various media—photographs, silkscreens, found paintings, and prints—and sets them against large, solid-color backgrounds. He often places literary quotations, drawn from modern poetry, beneath or beside these images. *Portrait of the Artist and his Mother*, 1988, features an image of a bell, a photograph of a seated matron, a found painting of cherubs and lilies, a photograph of the artist superimposed on an aerial view of the moon, and a picture of a gloved hand wielding a pair of scissors, all underscored by a line from Rainer Maria Rilke's "Das Marien Leben" (Life of the Virgin Mary). In some pieces, the quotations suggest themes or supply explanations for the visual groupings; elsewhere, the images convey the message of the composition. Visual and literary elements work together in the best pieces: *Self-Portrait*, 1988, juxtaposes photographs of a restless insomniac, a reproduction of an Andy Warhol "Marilyn," and lines from T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* on the torments of desire. Usually the connections are more oblique. In *Untitled*, 1988, a reproduction of Giorgio de Chirico's painting of a glove (itself inexplicably entitled *Song of Love*) is paired with a medieval sonnet translated by Ezra Pound, another "song of love."

These heterogeneous images belie Boskovich's preoccupation with himself, for most of the works are self-portraits. Although the majority were executed within the past year, they reflect upon various aspects and visions of the self—a mixture testifying to a multiplicity of selves. The views tend to revolve around two main poles: Boskovich depicts himself alternately as a saint/martyr (appearing as John the Baptist and "St. John Bosco") or as a monster (using images drawn from horror movies). Sometimes the two overlap: an image of a monster emerging from a murky pond is accompanied by a quotation from e. e. cummings about an encounter with a Christ "made of nothing except loneliness."

The Focus of Boskovich's introspection is desire, seen as the root of all suffering. Both saintly love and sexual passion are experienced with the consciousness of the inevitable return of loneliness. Boskovich memorializes this anguish in terms both sorrowful and comic. He sometimes adopts the High Modernist pose of artist as martyr—as the creator whose gift of love the world scorns. Yet such precious stances are tempered by a playful irony that verges on self-mockery. In one piece, an angel (actually Boskovich in pajamas) looks suspiciously like the Flying Nun; in another, the artist dons a rabbit suit. Such humor is both defensive and distancing, as is Boskovich's penchant for using literary quotation and recycled



John Boskovich, *Self-Portrait*, 1987-88, silver gelatin print with gouache, 43 1/2 x 47 1/2

imagery to speak for him. Boskovich's works are best viewed together, so that their common themes and recurring images begin to echo one another, overcoming the obtuse logic of certain individual compositions. As a group, they demonstrate the ways in which Boskovich reworks his fertile materials, and the artist's particular ability to translate visual into verbal and back again.