Flash Art

CDLM / Lana Del Rey / Omer Fast / Charles Gaines / Misha Green / Lauren Halsey / Shaun Leonardo / Oneohtrix Point Never / Michele Rizzo / Cindy Sherman / Queer Correspondence

IDENTITY
PROTEST
COEXISTENCE

Nora Turato
On Lana Del Rey’s Violet Bent Backwards Over the Grass
by William J. Simmons

In “How to Disappear,” a song from her last album, Norman Fucking Rockwell, Lana Del Rey leads us to expect a how-to manual, but she gives us a poem instead: “Now it’s been years since I left New York / I got a kid and two cats in the yard / They call me Del and the movie stars / I watch the skies getting light as I write / As I think about those years / As I whisper in your ear / I’m always going to be right here / No one’s going anywhere.” Such an unabashed display of sentimentality is compounded by the photographic and/or painterly image on the album’s cover, in which Del Rey clings to a man, a handsome chimera, and she clings to the American flag and Americana, and she clings to melodrama and the problematic histories that each of these normative and patriarchal phenomena might provide, even as they all sink together. Staying with the doomed patriarchal phenomena might provide, even as we insist, for our own sakes, that Del Rey must be ironic, that she is deconstructing something, that she is telling stories of fictional characters from whom we can maintain a respectable distance, or that these stories are only about her, someone else’s story, the story of the men she met along the way, disappear in favor of some hidden meaning we ascribe to the man, to the death of youthful fantasies with artistic quality, to the tombstones. I leave a cigarette butt each time I go there and imagine Sylvia there among the handsome chimera, will leave, no matter the immediacy of the beautiful pleasures and traumas he brings.

It follows that perhaps the only major change I would hope between Born to Die and Norman Fucking Rockwell is that in the former, we assume that as the handsome chimera, will leave, no matter the immediacy of the beautiful pleasures and traumas he brings, that in the latter, we insist, for our own sakes, that Del Rey must be sincere if we are to enjoy it (and if it is, in fact, beautiful pleasures and traumas). We praise her work since tell them often, that I loved Del Rey’s Violet Bent Backwards Over the Grass (Her) youthfulness with artistic quality, that in the former, I/we/Lana assume that he, whom we can maintain a respectable distance, whom we can relentlessly critique for claiming to be the handsome chimera, will leave, no matter the certainty of loss. Of Vernon Del Rey writes, “I’ve never really fallen in love / but whatever this feeling is / I wish everyone could experience it.” Only those who have truly loved claim to have never done so, and there is nowhere better to feel, really feel, that paradox than in Vernon or Botolph Lane, where trucks come and go, with drifters, Sylvia Plath and dead bodies maybe, or, just as thrillingly, nothing of cinematic or literary or photographic note at all. Falling in love, refusing to disappear, writing a love song with a happy ending: these are our mandates now.