

ARTFORUM

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

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Adam McEwen

NICOLE KLAGSBRUN GALLERY

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One of the weirder aspects of newspaper journalism is the phenomenon of composing obituaries for famous and important people who are still alive. Age, of course, is a factor in determining who gets written up in advance of their demise, but so is lifestyle: The music critic Neil Strauss reported being assigned an obit for Courtney Love. For his first New York solo show, British artist Adam McEwen borrows the concept of the posthumous sum-up penned before the fact, treating his famous subjects—among them Jeff Koons, Nicole Kidman, Malcolm McLaren, Bill Clinton, and Macaulay Culkin—as if they were already dead. McEwen's texts, presented as poster-sized mock facsimiles of newspaper pages, are expertly written—which isn't surprising, since he used to be an obituary writer himself. They serve both as ruminations on the way our deeds define us and as proof that text-heavy art can be as fun as perusing *People* magazine. Other works—such as a minimal installation that juxtaposes a mirror, a blown-up detail of a Michael Jackson album cover, and an inverted photo of the lynched Mussolini and his mistress hanging upside down from scaffolding—are similarly mordant in their explorations of history, fame, and death. But the obituaries are the stars of this show, updated *vanitas* symbols for our celebrity-saturated age.

—Martha Schwendener