

BERNHEIM

BANKS VIOLETTE

Bobby Pickett Plays the Hits

BERNHEIM, Zürich

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Bernheim Gallery is proud to announce *Bobby Pickett Plays the Hits*, a major solo exhibition by Banks Violette and the most significant presentation of the artist's work in Switzerland to date. The exhibition centres on a monumental, site-specific sculptural installation, presented alongside a new body of works on paper. The show arrives at a defining moment in one of contemporary art's most compelling and necessary returns.

Bobby Pickett Plays the Hits unfolds as both monument and elegy. At its structural core is *Untitled (The End)* (2026), a colossal light-work in MDF, aluminum, fluorescent bulbs, and scaffolding, spelling out two words inverted and extending across opposite walls of the space: THE and END. Between them is positioned *Untitled (Discoball)* (2026), a mirrored sphere encrusted with salt and chain, burning with open flame. New works on paper extend the installation's logic into intimate scale, graphite and ink drawings that compress Violette's signature tension between hard-edge geometric abstraction and the degraded iconographies of subcultural violence: scorched wood grain, fluorescent tube diagrams, the negative space of a smashed amplifier stack, the silhouette of a flag reduced to its geometry of dominion. Together, these elements construct a total environment in which beauty and terminal finality become indistinguishable: a stage set for an event that has already happened, or perhaps never will.

Banks Violette belongs to a genealogy of American artists for whom the vernacular of violence, failure, and national pathology has always been the primary medium. That lineage runs directly through Cady Noland, whose beer cans, stockade figures, and Walker frames assemble a forensic portrait of America's structural brutality, and through Steven Parrino, the late painter whose "misshaped" and "bent" monochrome canvases enacted a war on the traditions they inherited, twisting Minimalism's formal rigour into something grievous and gleefully self-destructive. When Parrino was killed in a motorcycle accident on New Year's Eve 2005, after a party at Violette's studio, something irreplaceable was extinguished. *Bobby Pickett Plays the Hits* is in part addressed to that loss. Violette is the legend of a coherent counter-tradition in American art: one that takes Minimalism's formal vocabulary as a point of departure and drives it, through punk, metal, and the iconography of catastrophe, into territory that institutional Minimalism could never occupy. Where Donald Judd's stacks produce serenity, Violette's scaffolded light-works produce dread. Where Dan Flavin's fluorescent tubes suffuse space with spiritual luminosity, Violette's burn with the aesthetics of the accident scene, the arena, the last concert no one will play. His work inherits the structural DNA of Minimal art, the primacy of materials, the occupation of real space in real time, the refusal of illusion, and yet annihilates every comfort that inheritance might offer. His connection to the broader post-punk art historical world runs through Martin Kippenberger, whose late-period self-destruction and comedic nihilism Violette absorbed and reprocessed into something rawer; Mike Kelley's assault on the mythologies of American innocence; and the entire legacy of institutional critique, which Violette enacts not through conceptual distance but through visceral physical presence.

The question that Rachel Wetzler's *Artforum* essay posed — why does this work feel, in 2026, not nostalgic but prescient? — is the central question of this new exhibition. Violette's practice has always been animated by a diagnosis: that American culture is haunted by its own underbelly, that the spaces of subcultural life, the basement venue, the black stage, the burning church, contain truths about national identity that the mainstream culture expels and disavows. This is not work that comments on the present from a safe critical distance. It is work that was formed inside the American experience of damage and has never left it. In a period of resurgent authoritarianism, cultural backlash, and the spectacular collapse of institutional credibility, Violette's burned churches, blown-out stages, and salt-encrusted mirrors, the residue of rituals conducted in the dark, by people the culture preferred not to see, feel less like art history and more like a field report.

Banks Violette (b. 1973, Ithaca, NY, USA) lives and works in Brooklyn, NY, USA. He has recently had solo exhibitions at TICK TACK, Antwerp, Belgium (2025); MoCA CT Museum of Contemporary Art Connecticut, Westport, CT, USA (2024); Von Ammon Co., Washington, DC, USA (2025); Gladstone Gallery, Brussels, Belgium (2024); BPS22, Charleroi, Belgium (2024); Gladstone Gallery, New York, NY, USA (2018); Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich, Switzerland (2018); Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris, France (2011); Museum of Modern Art, Fort Worth, TX, USA (2008); Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Salzburg, Austria (2007); The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY, USA (2005). Violette's work has entered the permanent collections of Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA, USA; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA, USA; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA; The Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; The Saatchi Collection, London, UK; The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY, USA; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY, USA. He trained at the School of the Visual Arts, New York, NY, USA (BFA, 1998), and Columbia University, New York, NY, USA (MFA, 2000).

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