



NATAN DVIR
www.natandvir.com

In his ongoing series *Coming Soon*, Natan Dvir explores the issues of spectatorship and our relationship with advertising by photographing billboards in New York City

Billboard advertising is now such an everyday part of life that we barely notice it. Yet these ads, when isolated from their surroundings in Natan Dvir's images, become strange and alluring. Passersby are dwarfed by looming figures that tower above them, highlighting a seemingly collective subservience to the power of advertising.

The idea for *Coming Soon* came to Dvir, who was born in Israel but moved to New York in 2008, when he first visited the city more than 15 years ago. "When I came out of the subway for the first time in 1997, I was amazed by the

dizzying skyscrapers, vast avenues and numerous billboards. Three weeks after I moved there in 2008, I grabbed my camera and went to photograph Fifth Avenue, which I regarded as the symbol of the 'American Dream'. I noticed the ads had grown in size, covering the facades of buildings. I photographed two pictures in the series [including the Zara billboard above], though I had no idea at the time that this would evolve into a project.

"I found myself photographing similar images over the next couple of years. It was only when I realised that these images are part of my

experience of, and relationship with, New York that I was able to conceptualise the project and work on it in an organised way."

The images were all taken in commercial centres - Fifth Avenue, 34th Street, Herald Square, Times Square and SoHo. Dvir used the billboards as a backdrop "to set the scene", he explains, and looked for specific situations in which he could evoke emotion or thought - to create juxtapositions that would invite the viewer to contemplate what they were seeing. "I'm trying to explore our visual relationship with the branded city centres and



Images © Natan Dvir



the commercial environment we live in - what is the urban landscape morphing into? The images in these ads both reflect and create our culture. Not only that, I wonder how effective the billboards really are."

Reality merges with fiction in a series of images that are not only cinematic but theatrical. Passersby become like actors who are pulled into a stage set, creating a cinematic experience for the viewer, he says. "The billboards are created with an intention of seducing... and they do that, but I'm not sure I see them as appealing. I actually hope to question if they are." *BJP*