

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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Sturtevant

Press Packet

Hudson, Suzanne. "Sturtevant." *The Brooklyn Rail*, May 2024.

Hatfield, Zack. "Sturtevant." *Artforum* 61, no. 3, November 2022, pp. 185–86.

Heinrich, Will. "What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries Right Now: Sturtevant." *The New York Times*, September 28, 2022.

Diehl, Travis. "Did Sturtevant Invent the Meme?" *Art in America*, December 12, 2019.

Cha, Olivian. "Did Sturtevant Predict Meme Culture?" *Frieze* no. 207, October 18, 2019.

Shore, Robert. "Sturtevant, Warhol Flowers." *Elephant*. February 25, 2018.

Cruz, Cynthia. "Copy Makes Perfect: Sturtevant at MoMA." *Hyperallergic*, February 11, 2015.

Rutland, Beau. "Sturtevant." *Artforum* 53, no. 6, February 2015, pp. 228–29.

Mohebbi, Sohrab. "Sturtevant." *Artforum*, January 25, 2015.

Schjeldahl, Peter. "After Image." *The New Yorker* 90, no. 37, November 24, 2014, p. 24.

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ArtSeen

Sturtevant

By Suzanne Hudson



Installation view: *Sturtevant*, Matthew Marks Gallery, Los Angeles, April 13 - June 15, 2024. © Sturtevant Estate. Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery.

Spread across Matthew Marks's two sites, *Sturtevant* constellates painting, sculpture, drawing, and video work made by the artist between 1965 and 2004, each piece cherry-picked by the gallery. This presentation comes to the city a decade after Sturtevant's major survey, *Sturtevant: Double Trouble*, had traveled to the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles from New York, where it opened at the Museum of Modern Art in 2014, the year of Sturtevant's

ON VIEW

Matthew Marks
April 13–June 15,
2024
Los Angeles

death at age 89. That retrospective, long overdue, was met with a response suggesting the flush of discovery, by turn compensatory and ecstatic. Yet by November 2022, Zach Hatfield could start an insightful review in *Artforum* by arguing for Sturtevant's work as an "affirmative force" despite the plausibility of negation, with the incipit, "I have nothing new to say about Sturtevant. This feels almost fitting, given the artist's own vexed relationship to newness." An acknowledgment of a boom-bust critical cycle predicated on the originality of response that Sturtevant's work paradoxically affirms, the place of language in the vicinity of the art itself seems very much the point.

Beginning in 1965, when she staged what appeared to be a group show of peers that was instead her first solo exhibition, Sturtevant baited response to work that, as Bruce Hainley describes in the introduction of a 2008 *Afterall* interview with the artist, "reveals the total structures working in the interior of art." As has been well documented, Sturtevant used the tools of other artists to make her own renditions that look much the same as those referents: asking Andy Warhol for the silk screen he used to make his "Flowers" series or chancing upon Frank Stella's discontinued paint in a Manhattan hardware store decades after he had abandoned the black enamel. Like with other recent installations, including the one in New York that Hatfield reviewed at Matthew Marks in 2022, here a Warhol-adjacent garden—the multi-panel *Nine Warhol Flowers* (1965/69), with each of the nine



Sturtevant, *Nine Warhol Flowers*, 1965/69. Synthetic polymer silkscreen and acrylic on 9 individual canvases in artist's frame, 66½ × 66½ inches. © Sturtevant Estate. Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery.



Sturtevant, *Johns Target with Four Faces (First Study)*, 1986. Encaustic and collage on canvas, wood, plaster, 34 × 26 1/8 inches. © Sturtevant Estate. Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery.

canvases subdivided into a quadrant of four blooms—anchors a grouping, insisting on reception in a contemporary context that never fails to recall, through repetition, the primacy of its origin as a long-since lost object. *Haring Subway Drawing* (1986), a chalk rendering of a winged mermaid hovering above a water line bobbing with twinned dolphins on black Foamcore, and *Johns Target with Four Faces (First Study)* (1986), an encaustic and collage bull's eye framed with plaster facial casts in those little Johnsian boxes, completes the ensemble alongside it.

In the second building, a shaped canvas covered in aluminum paint, *Stella Luis Miguel Dominguin (First Version)* (1990), got its own room off the entrance. On view when news of Stella's death broke, it assumed a newly memorial tone. Even before, separated from the others, it loomed there, a hardened flag or icon. The structuring presence of absent bodies cannily continues in the larger space. There, the 12 strings of lights comprising *Gonzalez-Torres Untitled (America)* (2004) hangs mid-elegy, portending dimming. The tangle frames the two-channel projection, *The Dark Threat of Absence* (2002), on the far wall. Filling this massive expanse, it is truly epic in scale but also

ethos. Sturtevant's is a performance of infinite regress—of Paul McCarthy's performance of Willem de Kooning in *Painter* (1995)—juxtaposed with appropriated commercial advertising, all of which plays across twinned, stuttering screens. The canny but also random associations stack: the bulbous nose of a costume formally reiterating those dangling bulbs, whose cords serendipitously layered atop footage of spaghetti. Text swims in the darkness. One memorable line in the loop, a perfect encapsulation of debt as homage but also the confounding transactions of capital, asks, "How much money do you owe me?"

Taken together these pieces evidence the material range Sturtevant exploited, even within the controlled format of panel painting hugging the walls. Details matter. Tracing Sturtevant's lines of paint, they betray slight shifts in weight or pressure of application, the span of the artist's reach. *Johns Target with Four Faces (First Study)* in particular poses the limits of what can be exhumed for Sturtevant as well as for us, and what those gaps come to mean. Sturtevant didn't seek out archival material to match Johns's newsprint grounds but built the encaustic up from what was available when she was working (a system that she narrated as deriving predominantly from memory, using a technique that far from obviated errors); no need for the fetish of perfect similitude. Recent scholarship in the humanities has embraced something similar called the reconstructive method, effectively recovering how an artwork was made a form of embodied knowledge. This reverse-engineering might be applied to a painting or a score, with a goal not to produce a mimic but a solidarity of becoming that, because experiential, can never be its equivalent. As for Sturtevant, her project had already posed the tool as an epistemological consort, raising, still, questions about the apposition and ends of process instead of assuming its end as inevitability.

Contributor

Suzanne Hudson

Suzanne Hudson is an art historian and critic. She is Professor of Art History and Fine Arts at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles.

ARTFORUM

Sturtevant

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

I have nothing new to say about Sturtevant. This feels almost fitting, given the artist's own vexed relationship to newness. Her perfectly imperfect "repetitions" of other artists' art, ignored for decades, have in recent years inspired an avalanche of interpretation, much of it superb and none of it able to pierce the rattling mystery of her work's origin and abiding prescience. As if cautioning potential reviewers, the press release for an exhibition at Matthew Marks Gallery—her second solo show in New York since her Museum of Modern Art retrospective in 2014, the year she died, aged eighty-nine—publicized the famous list she wrote of everything her work isn't. Yet, never a mere exercise in negation, her profound gesture registers today as an affirmative force in a world too eager to believe that art is no longer possible, that life is a lie, and that everything that can happen already has.

Warhol Flowers, 1990, greeted visitors to the show, and hearkened back to Sturtevant's very beginnings. In 1964, she asked Andy Warhol for the silk screen he used to make his "Flowers" series, then still fresh; he gamely obliged. Enjoying newfound status as the "mother of appropriation" after years of self-imposed exile, Sturtevant reprised his blossoms, this time eschewing their garish apple greens and hot pinks for more nocturnal hues, much as she traded the Byzantine gold of his Marilyns for a palette of ash. With its dark-violet blooms bobbing against a ground of obsidian grass, *Warhol Flowers* advertises the limitless, rupturing repetitions underpinning the real and the Real. It felt slightly heartbreaking to see those beloved hibiscus petals tipped fully into the abyss that Andy only hinted at. And despite Sturtevant's insistence

on the "power of thought," her work also augurs a time—ours—where feeling is the highest truth.

Sturtevant's "Warhol" glistened across from *Duchamp Man Ray Portrait*, 1967, her version of the wonderful photograph, ca. 1924, depicting the Frenchman's hair soaped into the shape of the winged helmet of Mercury. Duchamp's spirit carried into the main room, which contained renditions of Jasper Johns's 1957 *Gray Numbers* painting, a Keith Haring Mickey Mouse tag, a Robert Gober sculpture, and Sturtevant's 2010 video collaging stock footage from internet libraries and titled, simply, *Simulacra*. These first three works were not only afforded their own wall but were struck by spotlights, as if to dare each of them to sustain their aura/anti-aura. *Gober Partially Buried Sinks*, 1997, repeats a sculpture made ten years prior comprising a pair of identical sinks with two unseeing



Sturtevant, *Warhol Flowers*, 1990, synthetic polymer silk screen and acrylic on canvas, 115¼ × 115¼".

holes-for-eyes—where the faucets should go—half “buried” in a large, brilliant strip of Astroturf spanning the length of the gallery. Gober painstakingly made his Duchampian fountains-*cum*-tombstones by hand during the height of the AIDS crisis, devising them as meta-metaphors for the “impossibility” of cleanliness while also riffing on Robert Smithson’s *Partially Buried Woodshed*, 1970, itself a makeshift monument to the victims of the Kent State massacre, which occurred four months after Smithson created the work on campus. Gober sought to reinvest the vocabularies of Minimalism and the readymade with human pathos, creating objects that dwell in uncertainty between the “uselessness” of art and the reparative power of mourning. In doubling his sinks, Sturtevant doubled and deepened their questions, too, like what is the difference between similarity and difference, how does artifice reveal reality, and what does it mean to use another artist’s uselessness?

It’s been pointed out that Sturtevant’s work—long misconstrued as copies, fakes, mockeries, and appropriations—can rarely be credibly passed off as that of other artists. Surely, the meltingly elegant brushwork of Johns’s *Gray Numbers* is absent from Sturtevant’s *Johns Gray Numbers*, 1991, whose encaustic scarcely covers the newsprint base; *Haring Tag July 15 1981*, 1985, lacks, among other qualities, the illegal frisson of early Haring graffiti. “I am not saying anyone can do it,” she once wrote. She was saying, perhaps, that no one can. Attempting to retrace the deep contextures of thought, feeling, and fate that facilitate the making of recognizable artworks, she ended up with her own unique signature, something not unlike a memory: invisible, expanding, unrepeatable.

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The New York Times

What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries Right Now

By **Travis Diehl, Roberta Smith, Jason Farago and Will Heinrich**

Sept. 28, 2022

CHELSEA

Sturtevant

Through Oct. 22. Matthew Marks, 522 West 22nd Street, Manhattan. 212-243-0200; matthewmarks.com.



Sturtevant's "Haring Tag July 15 1981," from 1985, sumi ink and acrylic on canvas. via Matthew Marks Gallery

Elaine Sturtevant (1924-2014), who worked under the mononym Sturtevant, made copies of other artists' work, but insisted that she wasn't an appropriation artist — and she was right. In this mind-blowing mini-retrospective, which includes a gray "Jasper Johns" number painting, a small "Keith Haring," and two "Robert Gober" sinks buried in dimly lit AstroTurf, authorship is the least of the concerns. It does come up, but only as a subset of the larger question, "What is an idea?"

The "Johns" and "Haring," though both perfectly recognizable, aren't exact. It isn't quite Haring's line, and the surface of the number painting isn't as labored as Johns would have had it. That is, I think — each piece

made me question my own memory of what a "Johns" or a "Haring" was in the first place and what criteria I used for recognizing them. (Johns, Haring and Gober are all mentioned in the pieces' titles, but that only makes it all the more trippy.)

A 2010 video, also by Sturtevant, compiles snippets from two online archives, the BBC Motion Gallery and iStock, to show a running tiger, a human sprinter, an opening flower and other examples of life in motion to the accompaniment of a pulsing computer beat. When the tiger looked into the camera, its body undulating, its face still, I forgot for a moment which was the art work and which was me. *WILL HEINRICH*

Heinrich, Will. "What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries Right Now: Sturtevant." *The New York Times*, September 28, 2022.

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Art in America

DID STURTEVANT INVENT THE MEME?

By *Travis Diehl* December 12, 2019 12:14pm



View of Sturtevant's *The Greening of America*, 2001, single channel video, 3 minutes and 12 seconds; at Freedman Fitzpatrick.

Sturtevant didn't copy, appropriate, or forge; Sturtevant repeated. The artist, who died in 2014, at age eighty-nine, is best known for paintings and sculptures that redo the signature works of other artists, ranging from Marcel Duchamp to Felix Gonzalez-Torres. When she



Sturtevant: *Dark Threat of Absence*, 2002, two-channel video, 14 minutes and 37 seconds; at Freedman Fitzpatrick.

took up video in the new millennium, Sturtevant often repeated the juicy burgers and waving flags of commercial television instead. Freedman Fitzpatrick’s recent exhibition of her rarely seen videos framed the works anachronistically as “memes”—a term whose association with digital imagery had barely begun at the time she made most of the videos.

The designation makes a certain sense, insofar as it highlights the videos’ short length, deceptive simplicity, monotony, and wit. But these works resist the most crucial quality of memes: virality.

The show was arranged as a face-off. Projected on one wall was *The Dark Threat of Absence* (2002), a fifteen-minute, two-channel video reprising Paul McCarthy’s video *Painter* (1995), which mocks the pretensions of Abstract Expressionism. Like McCarthy, Sturtevant struggles with condiments and paint while wearing a wig, smock, and rubber hands. But her version adds repetitions not present in the original, in the form of her grunting as she finger-fucks a jar of red paint or muttering “sex and death, sex and death, sex and death.” The opposite wall and part of a third were gridded with eighteen synchronized monitors playing a sequence of two dozen shorter videos (between forty seconds and five minutes long) assembled from ads and stock footage. When the McCarthy video played, the shorts did not, and vice versa; the gallery was always only half-activated, creating an atmosphere of suspense.

Two thirty-second videos continuously playing on box monitors facing each other on plinths cut some of the tension. Both videos starred a paper hand waving from the cleft of a plastic



f Sturtevant’s exhibition *Memes*, 2019, at Freedman Fitzpatrick.

butt. In one, a tiny voice says, “Hello!” (*HELLO*, 2006); in the other, “Hey, assholes!” (*HEY*, 2006). The exhibition ultimately asked whether Sturtevant’s mediation of the canon permits future variations, too—whether her repetitions can be repeated by others. This pair of screens provided the answer. Sturtevant waved hello to Sturtevant: her work is a closed loop.



Sturtevant: *HELLO*, 2006, single-channel video, 27 seconds; at Freedman Fitzpatrick.

Instead of meme-hood, what emerged from the collection of videos was Sturtevant’s critique of value. The shorter works picked out and repeated ad absurdum the ways in which commercial culture tells us what matters. One particularly mind-melting short, *Shifting Mental Structures Millionaire / Money* (2000), features a montage of several crane shots over the sets of the game show “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire,” followed by a clip, repeated twenty-eight times, of a businessman fanning out stacks of cash as he declares, “Real live money.” Sturtevant’s videos shun the Darwinian-capitalist impulse of click-seeking memes. As she reused materials, she also rebranded them in a way that took them out of normal circulation. Many of these works come with a disclaimer from the artist in the credits: NOT FOR SALE. This is more a statement of principle than of fact. You can buy her art (including editions of these videos), but her art isn’t selling anything.

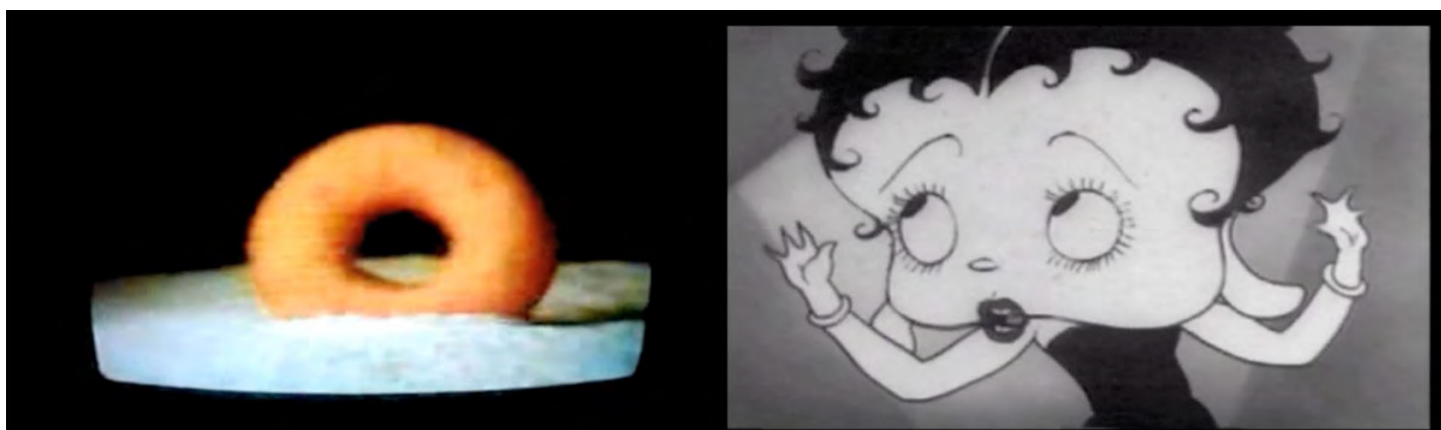
FRIEZE

Did Sturtevant Predict Meme Culture?

The artist's stuttering videos, on view at Freedman Fitzpatrick, challenge conventional notions of artistic authorship and circulation

0

BY OLIVIAN CHA IN REVIEWS | 18 OCT 19



When self-help author and American presidential candidate Marianne Williamson was asked about her performance following the second democratic primary debate, she coolly replied: ‘I’ll tell you later, when I see the memes.’ Today, memes are not only a source of amusement, but a real cultural and political force, often more influential than contemporary art. Despite its title, ‘Sturtevant: MEMES’ does not quite argue for an explicit correlation between the 16 video works on view and the more contemporary phenomenon of internet memes. Officially, Sturtevant never identified any of her video output as such. Yet, these rarely seen works portend a deeply memetic truth about our present media moment: namely, that meaning is never located in the primary transmission of a message, but arrives only after that message has been remediated and recirculated ad infinitum.

Made between 1999 and 2012 – long after evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins coined the term ‘meme’ in 1976, and around the time internet memes were becoming popularized in the early 2000s – Sturtevant’s videos draw from distinctly American sources, featuring what the artist might call the ‘messy mass’ of culture: cartoons, commercials, game shows, reality television and, sometimes, her own footage shot in more intimate studio environs. While her selection and combination of these banal images can be aesthetically profound, they are technically imperfect. Transferred to digital files from bit camcorders and other early technologies, much of the imagery appears pixelated and anachronistically ‘dated’ – the result of several generations of obsolescent media. Besides a pointed disdain for the promise of technological innovation, the consistently lo-fi nature of Sturtevant’s videos also suggests the artist was uninterested in the flawless copy, transfer and dissemination of images as purely original content.

Instead, Sturtevant’s videos stutter. Ranging from 27 seconds to 15 minutes in length, they eschew linear narratives for terse, endlessly looping clips. Presented here, for the most part, on a grid of digital monitors with no discernible breaks delimiting one video from the next, the group of works



Sturtevant, *Cut & Run Productions*, 2006, video still. Courtesy: the estate of Sturtevant and Freedman Fitzpatrick, Los Angeles/Paris



Sturtevant, *Dark Threat of Absence*, 2002, video still. Courtesy: the estate of Sturtevant and Freedman Fitzpatrick, Los Angeles/Paris

reads as a dialectical montage of imagery and sound with no beginning or end. In this particular presentation, Sturtevant's playful use of title screens further disrupts any semblance of sequential clarity while also poking fun at conventions of cultural production. Appearing before, after or throughout a video, these bursts of text sometimes function to convey titles but mostly tell us that the videos are 'not for sale' (they are, in editions of five) and credit 'L. Muzzey' (Sturtevant's daughter and frequent collaborator). Indeed, when the excessive textual overlay starts to become both image and content, we realize that these formal attributions are not meant to credit 'authorship' as much as frame the art-market dictates that sustain it.

Similarly, in works like *Simulacra* (2010) – in which an internet-sourced video of a glaring eagle owl is stamped with a blurred iStock video watermark – we are reminded of the monetary value of images as cultural capital. Sturtevant's flagrant disregard for copyright frames the futility of attempts to control the distribution of images by blighting them with a stamp of ownership. Images (and memes), in their states of infinite reproducibility and networked circulation, have rendered questions of originality and ownership irrelevant.



Sturtevant, *Simulacra*, 2010, video still. Courtesy: the estate of Sturtevant and Freedman Fitzpatrick, Los Angeles/Paris

‘The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author,’ wrote Roland Barthes in his eponymous 1967 essay. This sentiment of erasure resonates with both Williamson and Sturtevant: the former in terms of the relinquishment of individualized meaning to the social body of meme culture and the latter in a more Foucauldian commitment to undermine systems of ownership and value by dismantling the belief that ‘authorship’ is engendered exclusively through acts of originality and singular creation.

‘Sturtevant: MEMES’ continues at Freedman Fitzpatrick, Los Angeles, USA, through 26 October 2019.

*Main image: Sturtevant, *Dumping Down & Dunkin Donut*, 2008, video still. Courtesy: the estate of Sturtevant and Freedman Fitzpatrick, Los Angeles/Paris*

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ELEPHANT

25 Feb 2018

Sturtevant, Warhol Flowers

This week's Contemporary Classic was created by a female artist who liked to "repeat" works by more famous male peers—and in the process threw into question some of the art world's most beloved clichés about the nature of originality and individual genius.
Words by Robert Shore



Sturtevant, Warhol Flowers, 1990. Silkscreen, acrylic on canvas. Collection Thaddaeus Ropac, London/Paris/Salzburg

Shore, Robert. "Sturtevant, Warhol Flowers." *Elephant*. February 25, 2018.

Elaine Sturtevant—or just plain Sturtevant as she was known professionally—gave her first solo exhibition at the Bianchini Gallery in New York in 1965. The show featured carefully handcrafted works that begged to be mistaken variously for the plaster sculptures of George Segal and the stripe paintings of Frank Stella, not to mention silkscreened images that were almost indistinguishable from the breakthrough Flowers series by the then emerging art superstar Andy Warhol. As a reviewer quipped at the time, Sturtevant “must be the first artist in history to have had a one-man show that included everybody but herself”.

The difficulty of telling Sturtevant’s vivid blooms apart from Warhol’s was entirely intentional on the part of both artists: Warhol actually lent Sturtevant his original to execute the images for the show. Over the coming years Sturtevant would make a habit of copying the works of Warhol, who connived at the practice and, to avoid answering cloying questions about his working methods, once quipped: “I don’t know. Ask Elaine.”

Sturtevant’s “repetitions”, as she called them, were designed to disorientate. They were intended to be precise enough to persuade viewers that they were looking at an “authentic” Warhol or Stella, and at the same time sufficiently free and inexact to suggest that another hand might actually be at work—indeed, for the work to be no less unmistakably a Sturtevant. “I create vertigo,” the artist-repeater liked to say. If you visit the Vice Versa show currently at Thaddaeus Ropac in London, you may find yourself growing dizzy among all the Sturtevant-Warhols, Sturtevant-Lichtensteins, Sturtevant-Stellas.

The Ropac Sturtevant show also contains a repetition of a 1925 Man Ray photograph of Adam and Eve featuring a naked Marcel Duchamp. In Sturtevant’s restaging, the artist Robert Rauschenberg takes the role of Adam/Duchamp while, arm outstretched beneath the hovering snake, the bare-breasted Mother of Appropriation herself assumes the part of Eve.

Man Ray's photograph evoking the Bible's great apple scene draws most obviously on Lucas Cranach's Renaissance painting of the Fall, although, in composing the tableau, it's hard to believe that he didn't also have Dürer's Adam and Eve in mind, the one that borrowed from the Apollo Belvedere, itself a Roman copy or pastiche of a Greek original. Sturtevant thus compresses a few millennia of copying—and theology, for that matter—into a simple repetition, to create the last word in unoriginal Original Sin. “Remake, reuse, reassemble, recombine—that’s the way to go,” as Sturtevant herself put it.

“She was ridiculed when she made her debut in 1965, and no one at the time made the links between her work and a critical discussion of surface, product, copyright and autonomy,” noted Fredrik Liew in 2012. “Nor did anyone consider what it could mean that a woman artist was repeating the works of male colleagues.” So was Sturtevant a feminist artist? Was her appropriation of the work of male masters a way of taking something back for the sisterhood? The expression on her face as she attempts to get the apple from Robert Rauschenberg in her Man Ray repeat could certainly be interpreted as suggesting as much.



Installation view, Sturtevant: *Vice Versa* at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, London

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HYPERALLERGIC

Art Reviews

Copy Makes Perfect: Sturtevant at MoMA



by Cynthia Cruz
February 11, 2015



Installation view of 'Sturtevant: Double Trouble' at the Museum of Modern Art (© 2014 The Museum of Modern Art; photo by Thomas Giesel; all works by Sturtevant. © Estate Sturtevant, Paris)

Repetition is displacement, repetition is difference; repetition is pushing the limits of resemblance and limitation — it has some other factors or dynamics. So it's not like saying you repeat. For instance, Andy Warhol repeated, but he did not do repetition ... But repetition has nothing to do with repeating. —Sturtevant

The multiplication of things under an absolutely identical concept has as its consequence the division of the concept into absolutely identical things. —Gilles Deleuze

The Museum of Modern Art's current retrospective of Sturtevant's work, *Double Trouble*, is a study in movement. Along with her many near-replications of other artists' work (including takes on Keith Haring, Andy Warhol, Félix Gonzalez-Torres, and Joseph Beuys) it features her more recent video works. These videos — "Finite Infinite" (2010), a corridor-long projection of a dog running; "Dillinger Running Series" (2000), in which Sturtevant-as-Beuys races along the wall to a pounding beat; and "Pacman" (2012), featuring footage of the eponymous game, with Pac-Man racing after and consuming dots and fruits — each introduce elements of a pervasive theme that relates to racing, consuming, and being consumed. Juxtaposed with her "copy" pieces, these videos shed light on her work: Sturtevant's practice consumes pieces by other artists as she races ahead, making herself invisible behind the work of others in order to avoid being consumed in turn.



Installation view of 'Sturtevant: Double Trouble' at the Museum of Modern Art (© 2014 The Museum of Modern Art; photo by Thomas Griesel; all works by Sturtevant © Estate Sturtevant, Paris)

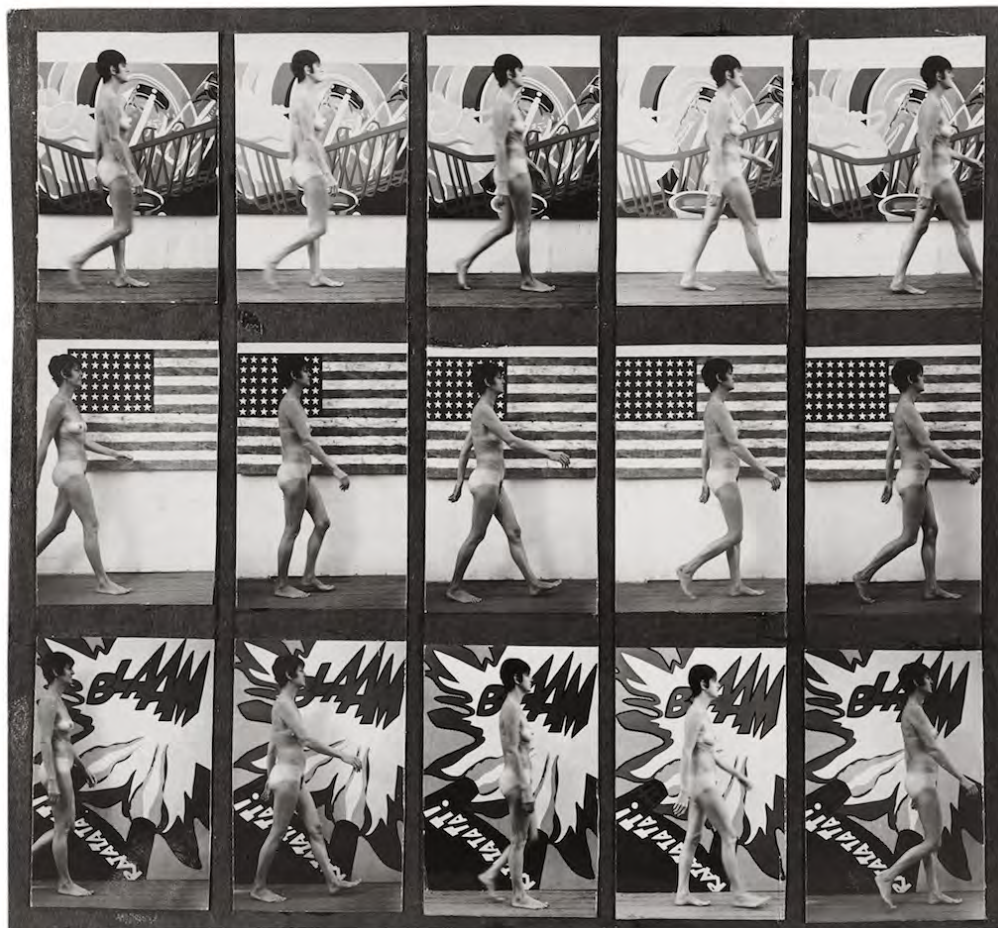
She is, of course, not actually invisible. She exists in the space between the original work and the copy. In this way, she stays ahead of the game. And it is in this space, this trace, that Sturtevant's genius exists. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida describes trace as the difference between two signs. For example, the meaning of woman will always have the shadow of man behind it. The space between is the trace. It is the "mark of the absence of a presence, an always-already absent present."

In an interview with SUNY Purchase art history professors Bruce Hainley and Michael Lobel printed in the MoMA catalogue, Sturtevant says that she read Gilles Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* in its original in French in Ibiza with the assistance of a French-English dictionary. Years later, when the book was translated into English, Sturtevant reread the book, which, as one might imagine, was an entirely different text from the one she read in 1968 when it was first published. Deleuze's central idea is that

when, for example, Marcel Duchamp makes a copy of a urinal, the new copy is the *event*; it is no longer about the (so-called) original copy. This concept infers a sense of movement, the movement from so-called copy to copy, and it is in this movement of copying that Sturtevant's artwork occurs.

Sturtevant's work is often confused for an act of "appropriation" and consequently taken as a gesture of anger directed at the male artists whose work she "appropriates." It is revealing to contrast this with the work of male artists deemed "appropriation artists," like Richard Prince or even Andy Warhol, neither of whom has been construed as angry or even political. As a result, her work is often dismissed as an affront. One example is a review by Vincent Noce in the French newspaper *Libération* of Sturtevant's 2010 exhibition, *The Razzle Dazzle of Thinking*, at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. Noce writes:

A pioneer of the "appropriationist" trend, the artist asserts facsimile as artistic process. She confuses replicating with copying, which are two distinct notions: a replica is realized by the artist him- or herself. In music or literature, such a debate would be unimaginable: a plagiarist who reproduced a score note for note, or a book word for word, and then affixed his or her name to it would be covered in shame. But in the visual arts, legitimacy is acquired through



Sturtevant, "Study for Muybridge Plate #97: Woman Walking" (1966) (Glenstone; photo by Alex Jamison; © Estate Sturtevant, Paris) (click to enlarge)

Cruz, Cynthia. "Copy Makes Perfect: Sturtevant at MoMA." *Hyperallergic*, February 11, 2015.

obscurity of discourse. What is fundamentally at stake is aesthetics. One must see these copies to realize just how ugly they are: crudely made, with mediocre materials, gloomy colors, all the life having run out of them. Parody is a gesture that might have had meaning in the 1960s. But just as spluttering does not make a story, posturing does not make art, and imposture even less.

To confine Sturtevant's work to "appropriation" art is to miss the beauty and the genius of it. At MoMA we are helped by interviews in which she speaks frankly about her impulse and what drives her. Discussing Duchamp, Warhol, and Deleuze, she returns over and over to the theme of repetition. Repetition as the guiding force; appropriation as the means by which to make repetition. Compulsive repetition does several things. For one, it negates: when an image is repeated, the second iteration erases the first. In other words, the second replaces the first — the first is negated. Say the same word over and over and the word will eventually lose meaning. This is what Sturtevant means when she proclaims, in the introduction to the *Double Trouble* catalogue, "I wanted to make an artwork that could disappear." The same can be said for the artist.



Installation view of 'Sturtevant: Double Trouble' at the Museum of Modern Art (© 2014 The Museum of Modern Art; photo by Thomas Griesel; all works by Sturtevant © Estate Sturtevant, Paris)



Installation view of 'Sturtevant: Double Trouble' at the Museum of Modern Art (© 2014 The Museum of Modern Art; photo by Thomas Griesel; all works by Sturtevant © Estate Sturtevant, Paris)

By repeatedly taking on the roles of other artists and making work that replicates their work, Sturtevant vanishes, in essence, into the background. But so do the artists she imitates, whose “originals” are consumed by her “copies.” In interviews, she has stated that she does not want biographical information included in relation to her work. Biographical information overshadows the work, she said, and then people won't look at the work. In order for her work to work, she needs to vanish.

Sturtevant: Double Trouble continues at the Museum of Modern Art (11 West 53rd Street, Manhattan) through February 22.

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

ARTFORUM

Sturtevant

MOMA - THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART



View of "Sturtevant: Double Trouble," 2014–15. From left: *Finite Infinite*, 2010; *Johns Target with Four Faces (study)*, 1986; *Warhol Cow Paper*, 1996. © Estate Sturtevant, Paris.

WHAT BECOMES A LEGEND MOST? For years, the artwork, actions, and life of Sturtevant operated like a trade secret, quietly scrambling preconceived notions of the origin of appropriation. Having been one of the first postwar artists to create paintings and sculptures that other artists had already created, she now appears to be the matriarch of a postmodern brand of screwing around with Serious Things. Like the recently

revived work of pseudonymous artist Vern Blosum, Sturtevant's "deliberate imitations" (as described by Lil Picard in a 1965 review) have increasingly been adopted by those seeking convenient examples of self-reflexivity that predate its twenty-first-century champions. Less than a year after her death at the age of eighty-nine, "Sturtevant: Double Trouble"—the artist's first US museum survey, mounted at the

Museum of Modern Art, New York—punctures the long-standing mythology enshrouding her practice with a fine-toothed comb. Complementing the frisson of the artist's legacy is Bruce Hainley's brilliant and timely *Under the Sign of [Sic]* (2014), a jaw-dropping study of Sturtevant's practice in which no exegetical expense is spared.

Beginning in 1964, Sturtevant started making "other people's work," to quote gallerist Virginia Dwan. By the time Sturtevant made their art again, the mostly male creators were already rather successful in terms of the market, the institution, and the media. She had a solo debut at the Bianchini Gallery the next year, which prompted one critic to decry Sturtevant as "the first artist in history to have held a one-man show that included everybody but herself." The Bianchini exhibition featured walls covered in *Warhol Flowers*—the artist famously plucked a silk screen from the Factory with Andy's consent—and artworks seemingly by Jasper Johns, Jim Dine, Robert Rauschenberg, James Rosenquist, George Segal, Claes Oldenburg, and Öyvind Fahlström. The "making again" of such works demanded skills acquired over months of trial and error in the studio, prompting Warhol's legendary response as to how he produced his work: "I don't know. Ask Elaine." Such effort suggests that the decision to put doubles of supposedly singular artworks into the world was a choice not made inside a vacuum: "I didn't wake up one morning and say, 'oh, wow, lets [*sic*] do that!'" Yet when Sturtevant's doubles surfaced, the system started to hiccup: She claimed Oldenburg wanted to "kill" her; teenagers from a local school attacked her during the installation of her 1967 *The Store of Claes Oldenburg*; and amnesia seemed to strike most of her peers when her name was mentioned—all that one writer could recently recall of Sturtevant, apart from an anecdote about her breasts, was that she was

"someone you were inclined to think of as a mild nuisance."

"Sturtevant: Double Trouble" is a rare cultural occasion. After all this anticipation, it's easy to feel let down by the materiality of her work when confronting it in person for the first time. It's as if Sturtevant essentially dares us to be disappointed. The easy response is—and always has been—to view the work as a pale imitation of something else, ignoring the name (a surname provided to Elaine Francis Horan by a marriage that ended in divorce) proudly displayed on all of Sturtevant's works and exhibitions. In this way, her art is like a decoy—drawing in prey unaware of impending ambush.

Sturtevant once said that "definition is limitation"; this reasonable maxim may also explain why she famously made a laundry list of what her work is not. In most things Sturtevant, there is an undercurrent of refusal, spurred on by decades of critics and viewers misreading her works as direct copies, replicas, parodies, remakes, or fakes. Approved (or rather, tolerated) terms include: *versions of other artworks*, *repetitions*, or, in the case of a painting such as *Warhol Flowers*, 1964–65, a "Warhol."

Organized by Peter Eleey, curator and associate director of exhibitions and programs at MoMA PS1, the exhibition is a focused meditation on the artist's vociferous output, framing Sturtevant as an artist "who adopted style as her medium" to lasso her unruly endeavors. The first two works one encounters, *Beuys La rivoluzione siamo noi* (Beuys We Are the Revolution), 1988, a silk screen of Sturtevant dressed as Joseph Beuys *en militaire*, and the spry yet elegiac video *Finite Infinite*, 2010, set the tone for the exhibition's oscillation between confrontational zeal and a more wistful and open-ended rumination.

Bounding down the long entrance hall, the eager black Lab in *Finite Infinite* challenges the viewer in a race ad infinitum, finishing abruptly at *Johns Target with Four Faces (study)*, a 1986 version of the work Johns made in 1955. It's difficult to imagine a more appropriate opening salvo, drawing us into a space composed of competition, competence, and repetition—though of and for what, exactly?

Entering the main exhibition gallery, one sees *Study for Lichtenstein's Happy Tears*, 1967–68, brimming with aura and the resonance of a well-known Roy Lichtenstein, and nothing more or less. But this is an exception within Sturtevant's oeuvre. At the more complex end of the spectrum are works that seem to be simply bad copies, but on closer inspection are revealed to be not really repetitions at all. *Untitled (Johns)*, 1990, for instance, a barely-there transfer drawing of Johns's characteristic hatch marks, takes no one particular Johns as its inspiration, instead fusing two iconic gestures, enmeshing something recognizably Johnsian with an action of transference that is characteristically Rauschenbergian.

Yet the originality of a Sturtevant is wrapped up in otherness—weirdness, even. A cutout photograph of Johns's own face peers out of *Johns Flag Above White Ground*, 1967–68; Duchamp *Nu descendant un escalier*, 1968, a filmic version of Duchamp's famous pre-readymade painting starring Sturtevant and Deborah Hay, puts Sturtevant in the figurative roles of Pygmalion and Galatea all at once; and *Haring Untitled*, 1987, appears related to Haring's murals in name alone. One may note her off-kilter Warhol palette or her too-thin application of Johnsian encaustic, yet “wrongness” here registers as a shortcut through iconography rather than as plain iconoclasm. Sturtevant notably said, “I do not wish to add another idea of beauty to those that exist already,” though one

could argue that she did exactly that by re-presenting and reenacting compositions and constructs that we once thought we knew. Like an endlessly volatile cycle of feedback, the information encoded in Sturtevant's practice generates profound instability. Her “hand” does not simply address and challenge the previous referent (as, say, Sherrie Levine's appropriation of Walker Evans might be said to do—the binary of Levine-challenging-Evans always there). By contrast, Sturtevant so fully *replaces* the work of Johns or Duchamp or whomever it is she is appropriating that her work ushers us into unknown contingencies, rather than settling into a stable form of critique.

Inside the initial gallery, one finds a generative pairing: Duchamp and Beuys. While Sturtevant and Sturtevant's abound here, including Duchamp- and Beuys-inspired performances as well as “Beuys” sculptures and a grouping of Duchamp *Fresh Widows*, 1992/2012, other bodies also cycle through the gallery. In Duchamp *Relâche*, 1967, a nude Sturtevant holds an invisible apple, sans fig leaf, alongside a faux-bearded Rauschenberg posing as Adam, a role assumed by Duchamp in the Man Ray original. Her related *Picabia's Ballet Relâche*, 1967, even lured Duchamp and his wife Teeny, curious as to whether Sturtevant would go through with the work's promised cancellation (like Picabia, she did).

The final two galleries appear less reliant on juxtaposition and are seemingly indifferent to a group-show aesthetic. *Gonzalez-Torres Untitled (America)*, 2004, acts as a centralized glowing scrim through which one can see recent video works, “Keith Harings,” and Robert Gober wallpaper with its attendant drain—a (cross-promotional?) double of the work on view in Gober's retrospective one floor below. Sturtevant's early work is exemplified by *Ethelred II*, 1961, a large white painting adorned

with a brutally flayed readymade tube of paint, the contents of which are (neatly) strewn across the canvas. Like a bleak recapitulation of Duchamp's *Tu m'*, 1918, and its echoing paint chips, Sturtevant employed the language of then-fashionable painting to illustrate the entire medium as a readymade, the work a stunningly recursive enfolding of Duchampian critique and formal investigation.

There is a sense of urgency and agency in Ealey's elegant installation after decades of Sturtevant and her artwork being neglected, disdained, and dismissed. Very few institutions have acquired her work, and even MoMA has been slow to collect. Rightfully, "Double Trouble," with its smart sight lines and pithy pairings (*Oldenburg Store Object*, *Slip* teasing Duchamp *Coin de chasteté*, both 1967, with an upskirt shot), makes the case for Sturtevant as an artist whose oeuvre is in need of a room of its own. Yet I can't fight the feeling that the exhibition denies the pleasure of getting one's hands just a little dirty.

Many of the most intriguing aspects of Sturtevant's operations have only survived in the form of ephemera. To give a full picture of Sturtevant's operations, as Hainley's and Ealey's texts do so fluidly, correspondence, ephemera, and documentation are needed—thereby cluttering a more auratic approach and possibly going against the artist's wishes. Such strictures seem punitive for a career that left so much disruption in its wake: Reference to certain missing works might have helped this introduction serve as a more fully formed vision of Sturtevant's art. For instance, the recently discovered *Study for Rainer Three Seascapes*, 1967, a revelation, is one of the only three "female" works by the artist (surviving physically through Peter Moore's contact sheet of performance views, first published in these pages, and described in the catalogue). By featuring Sturtevant's body with

its attendant force and fragility, such a work—not simply a reperformance but also undeniably self-expressive—brings her oeuvre out of imperviousness and into the world inhabited by the rest of us.

Yet said world was successfully inhabited and disrupted by artworks that, luckily, do exist in a presentable state. The exhibition seeps out of its own spaces and into the museum's collection galleries, specifically Gallery 5, which is dedicated to Dada. In the spirit of the anarchically minded movement, "Double Trouble" engages and visibly startles visitors who are otherwise in the midst of a leisurely gambol through modernism's well-trodden vistas. The perpetrator, *The Dark Threat of Absence Fragmented and Sliced*, 2003, consists of a series of low-lying monitors featuring "original" and pilfered footage, including a bloody Paul McCarthy-inspired performance and a Madonna concert. Less brazenly, Sturtevant's small-scale Duchamp drawings mingle with works from the historic Katherine S. Dreier Bequest. While the gesture is perhaps less extreme than if, say, the curators had replaced Johns's *Target with Four Faces* with Sturtevant's, placing any unfamiliar artist within these sanctified galleries causes a rift, echoing those authored by Sturtevant fifty years prior. To position Sturtevant among such anachronistic and noncompliant company is fitting; certainly the artist wasn't of her time. It seems unlikely that she is of ours, either.

"Sturtevant: Double Trouble" is on view through February 22 at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. It travels to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, Mar. 21–July 27.

Beau Rutland is assistant curator of contemporary art at the Cleveland Museum of Art.

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

ARTFORUM



Sturtevant, *Duchamp Fresh Widow*, 1992/2012, enamel paint on wood, leather, glass, resin knobs, each 30 5/16 x 20 1/4 x 4 1/8".

NEW YORK

Sturtevant

MOMA - THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 West 53rd Street
November 9, 2014–February 22, 2015

“Double Trouble” makes for a rare experience. Not only is it the first solo institutional presentation of Sturtevant in the United States since a small 1973 show in Syracuse, New York, it also allows one to see the artist’s work at the museum that holds many of the so-

called iconic pieces that she has used as her working material: On one floor you stumble upon Marcel Duchamp’s *Fresh Widow*, 1920, a reduced scale French window, where the name of the artists’ female alter ego Rose Sélavy is inscribed as COPYRIGHT ROSE SELAVY 1920 at the base of the piece, while in another gallery seven of these glasses have been lined up on a black wall (Sturtevant’s *Duchamp Fresh Widow*, 1992/2012). There is wallpaper with human genitalia on one floor (Sturtevant’s *Gober Genital Wallpaper* and *Gober Drain*, 1994/95), which is also on view as part of Robert Gober’s retrospective on the first floor. One encounters “Warhol,” “Felix Gonzalez-Torres,” “Joseph Beuys,” “Stella,” among others, it’s as if all are actors cast in a play staged by Sturtevant.

Long before it was a household term, appropriation was, for Sturtevant, simply another word for a brush creating what she refers to as a “total structure,” which is perhaps the institution of art, its social context, and its politics, as well as the narrative of twentieth-century art that the Museum of Modern Art has actively participated in constructing since the institution’s inception in 1929. This, then, is a show that has been at MoMA for a long time, though it has remained invisible. Sturtevant flipped the Duchampian coin and put a disco ball in front of the readymade gesture. She wanted to make an “artwork that could disappear,” but one that aimed to expose the discourse of art from within.

— Sohrab Mohebbi

Mohebbi, Sohrab. “Sturtevant.” *Artforum*, January 25, 2015.

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523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

THE NEW YORKER

ART NOVEMBER 24, 2014 ISSUE

AFTER IMAGE

The American artist Elaine Sturtevant made her name reprising others' work.

By Peter Schjeldahl

November 14, 2014

“Sturtevant: Double Trouble,” at MOMA, celebrates perhaps the oddest American artist of the last half century. Elaine Sturtevant, who died this year at the age of eighty-nine, in Paris, where she had lived since the early nineties, made a low-profile, pesky career of copying works by others, mostly men: Marcel Duchamp, a specialty, but also Jasper Johns, most of the leading Pop artists, Joseph Beuys, and, eventually, Keith Haring, Paul McCarthy, and Robert Gober. She grew up in Cleveland and earned two degrees in psychology before turning to art and settling in New York, in the fifties. One work in the show—a sparse but visceral abstraction made with cut-open paint tubes, from 1961—hints at real promise before Sturtevant, starting in 1964, submerged in her campaign of “repetitions,” as she termed her copies.

She was a kinky presence on the scene. She got her friend Robert Rauschenberg to pose in



Sturtevant posed with Robert Rauschenberg for her 1967 piece "Duchamp Relâché," now at MOMA. Glenstone. Photo: Charles Duprat (From an Earlier Version by David Hayes). © Estate Sturtevant, Paris

the nude with her, as Adam and Eve, for a photograph replicating one that had featured Duchamp in 1924. Cordially, Andy Warhol gave her a flower silk screen and Roy Lichtenstein a dot stencil to help her feign them; Claes Oldenburg, though, was unamused when, in 1967, she remade his 1961 “Store” installation. Most of the aped artists, and nearly every critic, ignored her. A bit more welcome in Europe, she was among the first Americans to appreciate Beuys, miming his smoky charisma with videos in 1971.

Sturtevant fashioned video works on her own steam late in life. The most fetching spans a long wall with a tracking shot of a dog running. As installed by the show’s curator, Peter Eleey, the pooch seems aimed at a faux Johns “Target” painting. Theatrical throughout, the show’s presentation is a curatorial tour de force. That’s lucky, because the works would be hard put to sustain interest otherwise.

As a painter, Sturtevant was facile but not up to persuasive forgery, had that been her goal. She had a tin eye for color. The discouraging red and citron of her silk-screened Warhol “Cow” wallpaper highlight, by contrast, the wondrous harmony of Andy’s original pink and chartreuse. But she was impressively acute in singling out the best of her contemporaries. Her career amounted to an exercise in hands-on art criticism—a one-person age of manual reproduction—informed by emerging intellectual trends. The show’s wall texts duly cite issues of authorship, appropriation, and so on, counting the beads of the postmodernist rosary.

Was Sturtevant prophetic? Not really, unless you imagine that the likes of Warhol and Beuys were unaware of their own works’ philosophical implications. But no one at the time was a faster study. “I create vertigo,” she boasted. And that she does, in a force field between giddy thought and desultory matter. You will likely be glad to have spent twenty or so minutes in Sturtevant’s company. If you stay longer, it will be to enjoy cogitating along lines that academic criticism since the sixties has carved into frictionless grooves. ♦

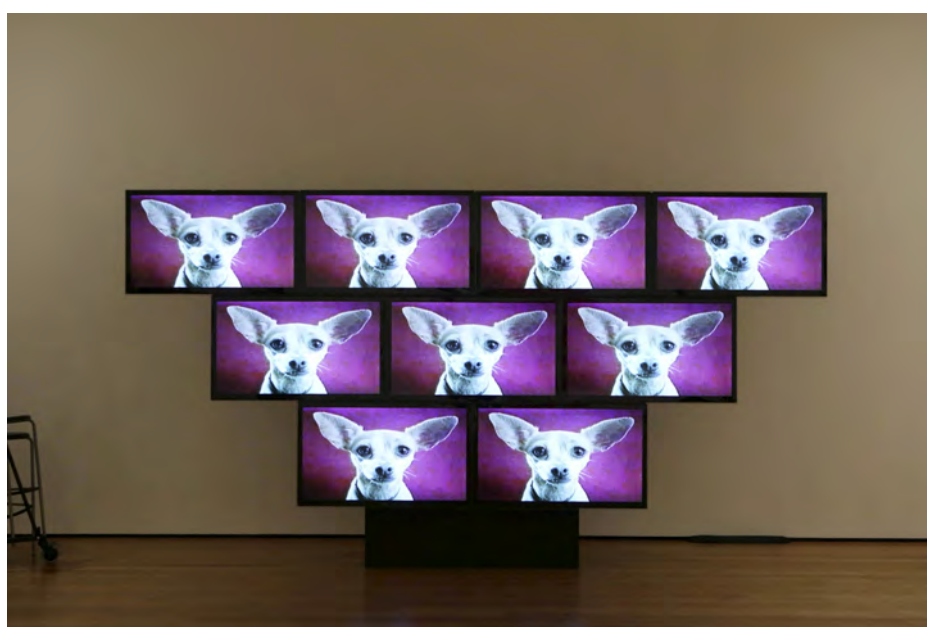
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The New York Times

ART REVIEW

Taking Copycatting to a Higher Level



The installation “Elastic Tango” (2010) combines material culled from television and from Ms. Sturtevant’s videos, and plays on nine stacked monitors to a thudding techno beat. She devoted the better part of a long career, almost up to her death this year at 89, treating art as a kind of theater. Hiroko Masuike/The New York Times

By Holland Cotter

The first thing you see in “Sturtevant: Double Trouble,” the Museum of Modern Art’s taut and feisty retrospective of the American artist Elaine Sturtevant, is work by artists far better known than Ms. Sturtevant herself.

Right at the start is the familiar 1972 photographic portrait of the German Conceptualist Joseph Beuys, in his porkpie hat and flak jacket, striding toward the camera. A bit farther on you’ll find Jasper Johns’s 1955 “Target With Four Faces,” a combination of painting, collage and sculpture and a MoMA treasure. Near it is Eliot Elisofon’s classic 1952 time-lapse photograph of Marcel Duchamp

descending a staircase.

But wait a sec. Back up. The clothes and the pose in the Beuys image are right, but the face is wrong. Treasure or not, the Johns piece is in rough shape, with bits of paper lifting away from the surface. Plus, there's something funny about the four cast plaster heads poking out of compartments on top. The faces look different from the originals, more severe. And you don't need even a second glance to know that whoever's descending the staircase in that photo is not Duchamp.

In the Beuys and Duchamp works here — and maybe in the Johns? — the figures and faces belong to Ms. Sturtevant, who devoted the better part of a long career, almost up to her death this year at 89, to treating art as a kind of theater. In it she temporarily assumed the roles of existing artists and made sometimes very close but always inexact versions of their work, in the process creating a complex identity of her own, in which she was both hidden and revealed.

What was hidden was her past, personal data that she felt distracted attention from her art. Not that the past was dramatic. She was born Elaine Horan in Lakewood, Ohio, near Cleveland, in 1924. (The



"Study for Lichtenstein's Happy Tears" (1967-68). In her art, Ms. Sturtevant temporarily assumed the roles of existing artists and made sometimes very close but always inexact versions of their work, in the process creating a complex identity of her own, in which she was both hidden and revealed. Hiroko Masuike/The New York Times



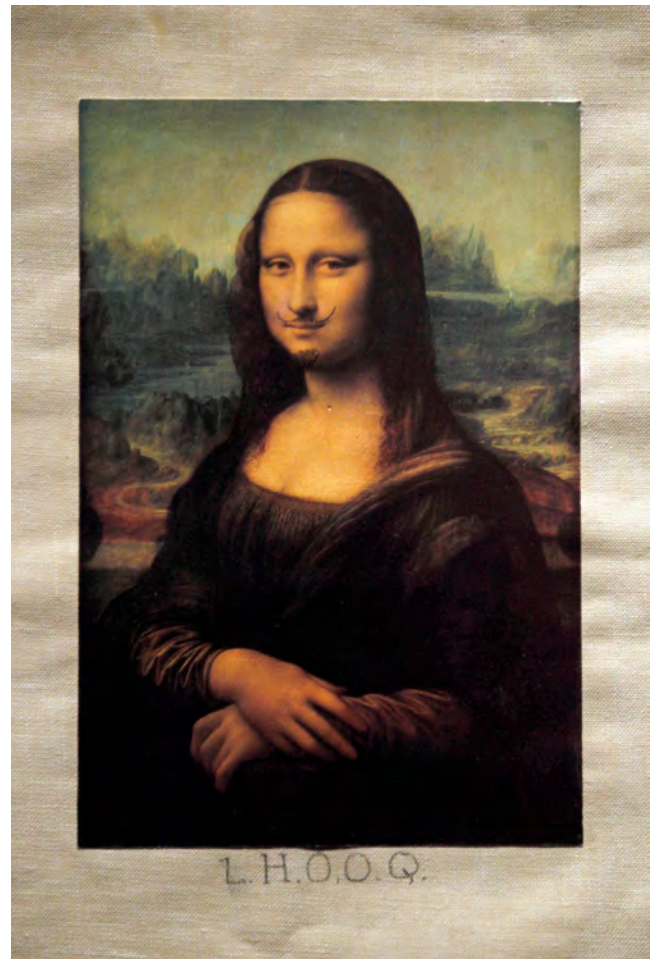
At front from left: “Beuys Fettstuhl I,” “Beuys Fettstuhl” and “Beuys Vor dem Pultstuhl,” (all 1993), and at back: Ms. Sturtevant’s repetitions of Marcel Duchamp’s “Fresh Widow” (1992/2012). From the mid-’60s onward she inserted herself in Duchamp’s family line by taking his work as her raw material. Hiroko Masuike/The New York Times



At left, “Warhol Cow Paper” (1996), and at right, “Finite Infinite” (2010). People accused her of copying, even faking art, but she wasn’t. When she did something very near in appearance to an original she left a distinguishing signature of some kind. Hiroko Masuike/The New York Times



“Study for Muybridge Plate #97: Woman Walking” (1966) on “Serpentine Owl Wallpaper” (2013). More often her work was a variation on a theme: a meditation, not an imitation. Hiroko Masuike/The New York Times



Ms. Sturtevant made her own variation (1969) of Duchamp's 1919 “L.H.O.O.Q.,” with its mustachioed Mona Lisa, and revisited some of his on-camera performances. Hiroko Masuike/The New York Times



At right, “Duchamp, Marcel Duchamp” (1993), in which the artist inserts her own figure in Eliot Elisofon's classic 1952 time-lapse photograph of Duchamp descending a staircase. Hiroko Masuike/The New York Times

precise year has been disputed.) She studied psychology at the University of Iowa and at Teachers College, Columbia University, married an advertising executive named Ira Sturtevant, had two daughters, and got divorced. At that point she dropped her first name, kept his last name as her only name, and started making art.

This was around 1960, when Abstract Expressionism was still the New York house style and young artists were looking for an exit. If AbEx was about painting as a baring of the soul in a symbol-stoked world, what would the opposite be? Not painting at all was one option; Duchamp chose that. Focusing on plain, unromantic subjects was another, picked up from Mr. Johns and Claes Oldenburg. Manic mixing — high, low, paint, trash, sculpture, dance — was the route taken by a dynamo named Robert Rauschenberg.

This was the company Ms. Sturtevant kept, with Andy Warhol soon to join. All of these artists, in one way or other, made art based on pop culture: American flags, comic books, deli food. Ms. Sturtevant made art based on art she found around: theirs. Duchamp, father of creative scavenging, was a role model for all. And from the mid-'60s onward she inserted herself in his family line by taking his work as her raw material. She made her own variation of his 1919 “L.H.O.O.Q.,” with its

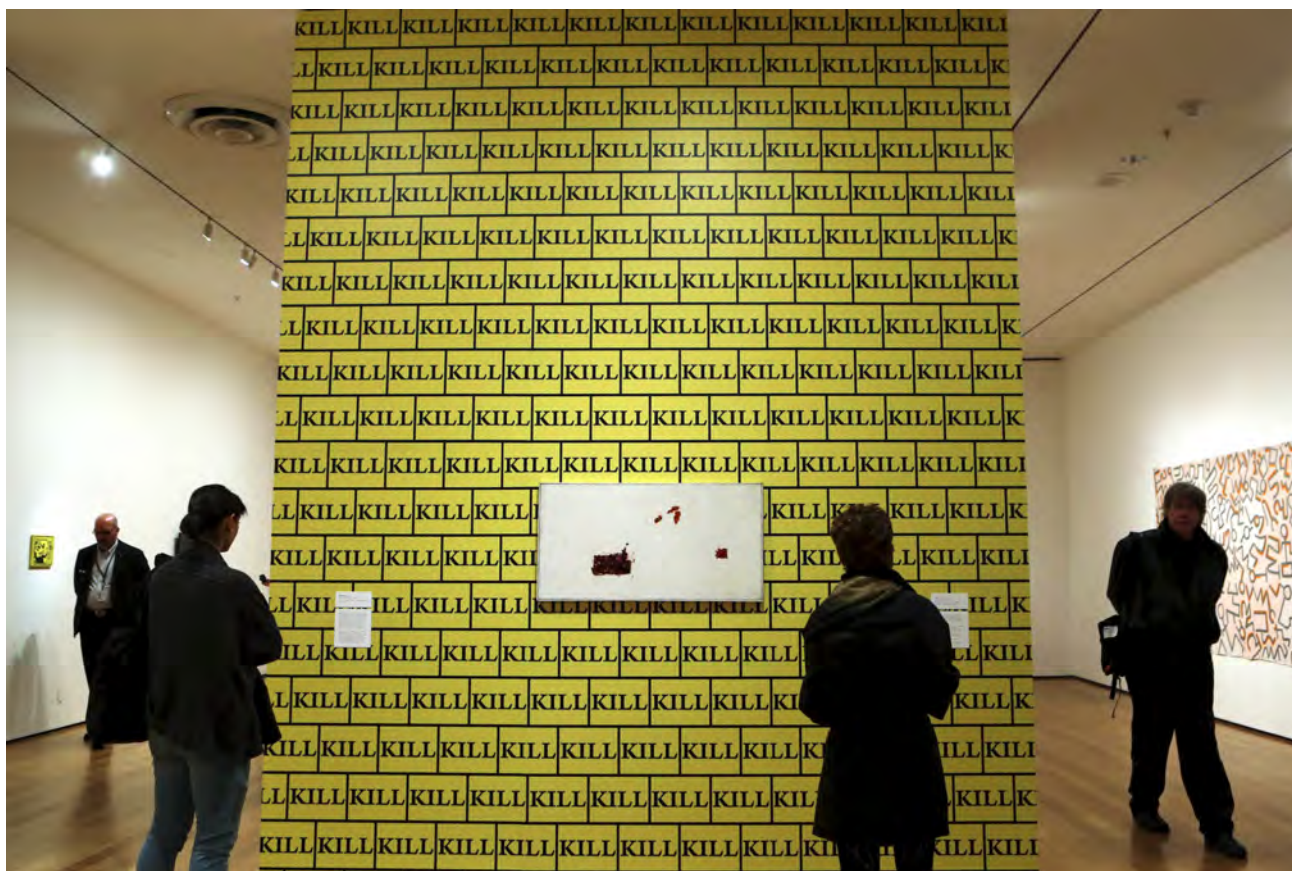


Top, “Oldenburg Store Object, Slip,” and bottom, “Duchamp Coin de chasteté” (both 1967). For Ms. Sturtevant, illusion wasn’t the point; action was, the gesture of shaping something new but different and related from something else. Hiroko Masuike/The New York Times

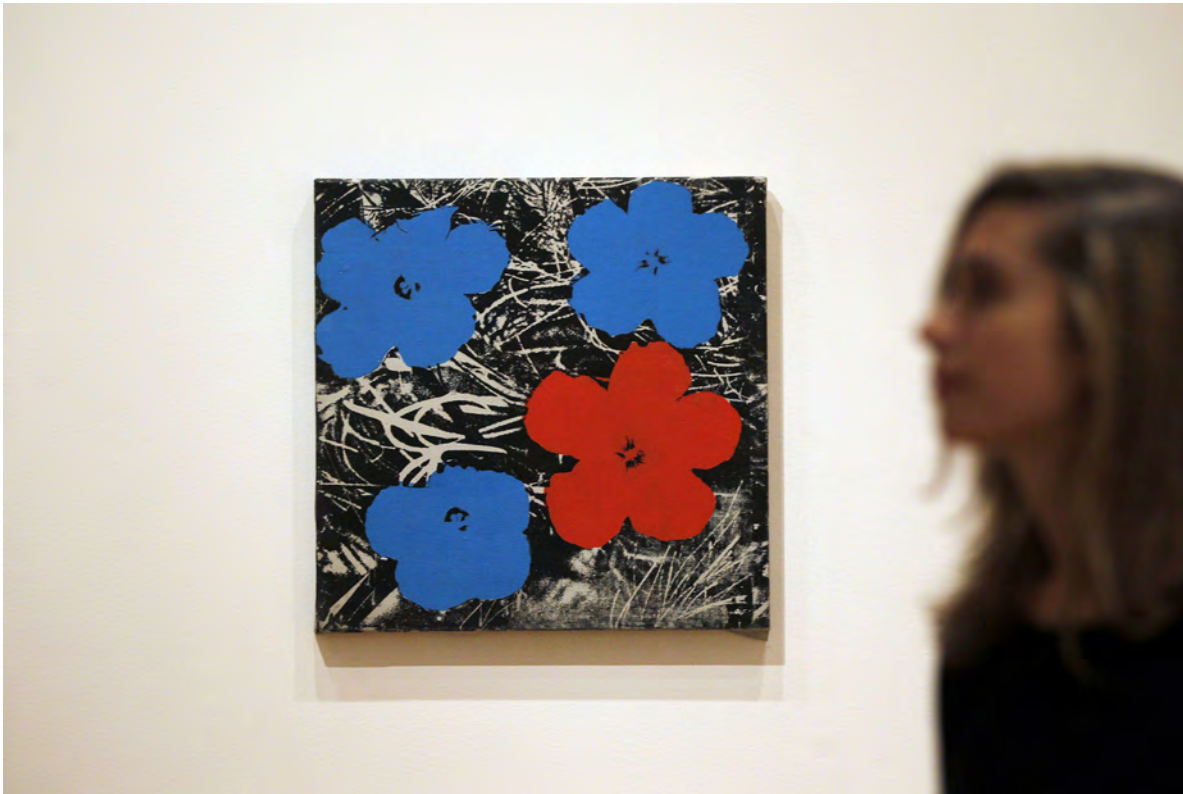
mustachioed Mona Lisa, and revisited some of his on-camera performances. In a 1967 photograph, she and Rauschenberg pose as a nude Adam and Eve, roles originally played by Duchamp and Brogna Perlmutter in a 1924 picture shot by Man Ray.

She began channeling Pop: Warhol, James Rosenquist, Roy Lichtenstein. People accused her of copying, even faking art, but she wasn't. When she did something very near in appearance to an original, she left a distinguishing signature of some kind. More often her work was a variation on a theme: a meditation, not an imitation. Illusion wasn't the point; action was, the gesture of shaping something new but different and related from something else.

And there was the matter of politics. Ms. Sturtevant's work is slippery; her statements about it seem to ensure that she would not, could not be pinned down. (For a sense of her assertive elusiveness, read Bruce Hainley's brilliant, sinuous, interruption-riddled "Under the Sign of [sic]: Sturtevant's Volte-Face" (MIT Press, 2013). Whatever her intentions, her art slices into such value-laden givens as originality and authenticity, used to shore up the convention of the artist-hero. And she makes frequent reference to the political realities of the time. Her 1965 "Johns 0 through 9" is encaustic done on a newspaper page reporting on soaring stocks and the Vietnam War. A wallpaper pattern



A wallpaper pattern Ms. Sturtevant designed in 2003 — the year of the Iraq invasion — consists of the word “Kill” endlessly repeated. She made frequent reference to the political realities of her time. At center, “Ethelred II,” a painting completed in 1961. Hiroko Masuike/The New York Times



“Warhol Flowers” (1964-65). Her career somewhat resembled the practice of traditional Chinese painters, who respect the basic form and style of art they emulate, but infuse them with their own personalities and ideas. Hiroko Masuike/*The New York Times*

she designed in 2003 — the year of the Iraq invasion — consists of the word “Kill” endlessly repeated.

Her most ambitious act of copying came in 1967 with her full-scale evocation of “The Store,” a studio-gallery that Mr. Oldenburg had opened six years earlier in the East Village to sell funky sculptural versions of groceries and cheap clothes. But for Ms. Sturtevant the project was trouble from the start. Just before her version opened, she was attacked by a neighborhood gang. Mr. Oldenburg was furious at her for making what he considered a rip-off of his art. Other accusations of copying came in. She wasn’t selling. In the early 1970s, she stopped exhibiting art for more than 10 years.

When she returned to showing in 1985, New York had changed. Appropriation as a mode of art-making was in vogue, and Ms. Sturtevant benefited from the trend even if she didn’t necessarily share its ideas. The new art was theory-based and dematerializing. Hers was personal and object-intensive, an art of both self-projection and self-erasure through the medium of handmade things. And the air of modesty she brought to it seemed from a distant era. “I am not interested in being a Great Artist,” she had written in 1971. “That’s real medieval thinking.”

Still, she began to be acknowledged, a little, as a postmodern pioneer. She updated her repertory of found-art models. Beuys had served her well in the 1970s before she dropped out, and still did. Now she had new artists to consider: Robert Gober, Félix González-Torres and Keith Haring among them. By this time, the tenacity of purpose and method in her career was undeniable. It somewhat resembled the practice of traditional Chinese painters, who respect the basic form and style of art they emulate, but infuse them with their own personalities and ideas.

Then suddenly, around 2000, Ms. Sturtevant changed course. As if to throw whatever audience she had off the scent, and to grapple with the realities of a digital age that made one-off production seem quaint, she turned her attention in a big way to video. Her major piece, the multichannel “Elastic Tango” from 2010, is in the show, which has been organized by Peter Eleey, the curator and an associate director of exhibitions at MoMA PS1, and Ingrid Langston, curatorial assistant at MoMA.

Combining material culled from television and from Ms. Sturtevant’s videos, and playing on nine stacked monitors to a thudding techno beat, the installation flashes out images of blooming flowers and mushroom clouds, straining jocks and predatory bugs, \$100 bills and American flags, and in one multilayered bit of copycatting, a clip of Ms. Sturtevant playing the role of the California artist Paul McCarthy, playing the role of a goony Willem de Kooning, who hacks his paint-spattered fingers with a cleaver.



“Haring Tag” (1986). Her work of quasi-replication was an exercise in flattery, parody, objectivity and love. Hiroko Masuike/*The New York Times*



“Study for Various Beuys Actions,” (c. 1971). Despite criticism of her style and accusations of ripping off work, the tenacity of purpose and method in Ms. Sturtevant’s career were undeniable. Hiroko Masuike/The New York Times

The video was a hit of the 2011 Venice Biennale, which awarded Ms. Sturtevant the Golden Lion for lifetime achievement. She had, at last, arrived. And she’s still arriving — this week her 1966 “Lichtenstein, Frighten Girl” sold at Christie’s for \$3.4 million — and still raising questions about the value of art, about the hows and whys of producing it, about hierarchical status (hers, everyone’s), and about the degree to which her own work of quasi-replication was an exercise in flattery, parody, objectivity and love.

In a nice move, MoMA has installed a smaller, earlier, but just as raucous version of her Biennale video work, this one called “The Dark Threat of Absence Fragmented and Sliced” (2003), up with art history royalty in permanent collection galleries on the fifth floor. There, placed in the center of a room devoted to Ms. Sturtevant’s old hero Duchamp, the piece shrieks, bangs and howls away, so loud you can imagine the sound reaching the galleries with Beuys on the same floor and those with Rauschenberg and de Kooning downstairs. In short, it draws a lot of attention. And in a museum that has always used myths of originality, authenticity and Greatness to play a game of art historical thrones, Ms. Sturtevant, at least for a while, gets to occupy one of her own.

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523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

ARTFORUM

PASSAGES

STURTEVANT



Sturtevant, *Haring Tag July 15 1981, 1985*, sumi ink and acrylic on cloth, 9 7/8 × 12 7/8".

STURTEVANT WAS NOT HER NAME. It originally belonged to someone else, but she inhabited it and made it her own, inaugurating a kind of vaudeville that she would repeat many times over the fifty years of her career. She often said that she liked the name because of its power, but its camouflage surely also appealed to her. Abandoning any kind of recognizable style, she began in 1964 “utilizing Johns, Duchamp, or Warhol . . . as catalysts to dispose of representation,” dedicating herself to a practice whose force depends upon first being seen as what it is not. This meant that a lot of people missed it altogether, and still do.

“If something is not yet known, then only what it is not can be understood,” Sturtevant wrote in a 1971 letter, pointing beyond the horizon of our recognition and indicating the difficulty of her path toward it. A few years ago, I found myself on a certain Sturtevant Road in New England and noticed

that it was a dead end. NO OUTLET. It was a reminder that Sturtevant seemed to represent a cul-de-sac to many: Her detractors dismissed her as a sideshow plagiarist, while her fans hyperbolically described her as the destroyer of modern art. “Does she send us back,” Bernard Blistène eloquently wondered a decade ago, “to face a void with no landmarks, no date or limits, no beginning nor end?” But that was the thing with Sturtevant: Relentlessly looking ahead rather than back, she was always an end *and* a beginning. The artist’s show at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm in 2012 premiered a new video work based on *Pac-Man*, in which the avatar runs mindlessly around the digital maze until the ghosts catch him. THE END, it then proclaims, and starts up all over again.

Two years before Sturtevant began her innovations, art historian George Kubler referred to “precursors” and “rebels” to describe what he viewed as the two types of innovators in the history of art. “The precursor can have no imitators,” Kubler wrote. She “shapes a new civilization; the rebel defines the edges of a disintegrating one.” That Sturtevant could have been both inimitable precursor and edge-riding rebel is a testament not only to the strange contours of her era but to the unparalleled razzle-dazzle of her thinking, the push and shove of her work, and its sweeping leaps, bumps, and jumps.

Long before the attention she would enjoy during the last decade of her life, Sturtevant was asked if her work would end once it was fully understood—what would happen if the “not yet known” finally became comprehensible? In characteristically zigzagging language, Sturtevant replied, “There never has to be something else. It has to be everything else and not something else. There is no end. The head doesn’t go dead after you understand it. On the contrary, there are many places to go.”

After her memorial in Paris in June, three of us gathered at an apartment there and raised our glasses to a remarkable lady who was everything else and not something else to all of us lucky enough to have known her. We watched the late-afternoon light move across a *Warhol Black Marilyn* from 2004 hanging on the wall. The glossy star moved fabulously in and out of view against the matte darkness of the painting’s background, an evocation of the elegantly conflicted visibility that marked its maker’s career.

I later learned that Sturtevant had planned to surprise those of us at her memorial with a video statement. She reminded me in one of our last conversations that she still had a show to install with me at the Museum of Modern Art in New York this fall, and she was at work on a new video installation about “the demise of the binary system.” Probably thinking that she had plenty of time, she hadn’t gotten around to making her send-off. Or perhaps she saw no need to repeat herself. After all, we have her great little *Haring Tag July 15 1981, 1985*. Mickey Mouse waves to us from inside a television, as if saying, “Hello, voilà, good-bye,” in a permanent repetition. Now, sadly, that will have to suffice.

Peter Eleey is Curator and Associate Director of Exhibitions and Programs at MoMA PS1.

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ARTFORUM

PASSAGES

STURTEVANT



Sturtevant at "Sturtevant: Image over Image," Moderna Museet, Stockholm, March 2012. Photo: Åsa Lundén

BRUCE HAINLEY: The Lady died. When I first heard the news about the sad, too-soon event, all I could think was: What a total drag. Not that the spaceship wasn't going to come for her eventually, but I just couldn't believe she wouldn't stick around to cause double trouble at her exhibition this November at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Anything memorial strikes me as so antithetical to the forward movement of her every act of thinking, her art. We should open up a great Meursault in her honor and really get into it, since fresh, involved dialogue was one of her fortes.

CLAUDE WAMPLER: Meursault-filled glass raised! The spaceship? Is that what happened? Why don't we get Jodie Foster or whomever to make contact and ask them to turn around, bring her back!

Transport her to MoMA for her opening. Now *that* would be a hot entrance. Materialized! (Maybe that's what's going on with Michael Jackson: Those aren't projected holograms but aliens trying to beam him back because he's hosting inappropriate sleepovers with the little aliens.) If Sturtevant was indeed taken by a spaceship and we requested her safe return, I'd like to think she would say, "No, don't turn back. The mental retards are catching up. My work there is done. Time to fuck things up on another planet."

BH: Never one to suffer fools, she made the unnervy cry. After one such incident with a curator, she told me she was going to have T-shirts made, emblazoned with a warning slogan (I always imagined them Katharine Hamnett style): BAD FUCKIN' MEAN. Of course, she could also be incredibly tender—totally generous and committed to a dynamic exchange of ideas with anyone willing to keep up. I can still see her in her apartment near the Marais, comfortably curled on her vivid-blue daybed, ready to tackle any topic.

CW: What I'll really miss is how demanding she was. She had such an intense work ethic or, rather, a *think* ethic, and she expected the same from her audience—and absolutely no less from her friends! Her superconfidence! As if there were no other option. Insecurity is such mindless toil, and she didn't tolerate mindlessness. I told her once about a new series of works that I was considering, titled something like "Taking Credit Where Credit Is Due," in which the promotion for the new Wampler show would lead the audience to a performance/ exhibition/film by a completely different artist. Elaine said, "Claude, that's just lazy." I loved her bluntness.

BH: Ah, the lazy and mindless! People forget—especially because she's now *everyone's* favorite artist, even making it into *W* magazine—that although Sturtevant was showing extensively in Europe soon after her 1986 return to the American scene, between 1993 and 2012 her work was almost completely absent in the US, with a few starry exceptions. You had to remain alert to catch her stealth moves here. When requested by a supposedly "critical" dealer in Manhattan in the early 2000s, I sent a box of Sturtevant materials (catalogues, various reviews and essays, etc.); they were soon returned, with a note informing me that there was "no market" for such work.

CW: The moment I really understood what repetition meant to Sturtevant—how the integrity of the original was actually of utmost importance—was just before the opening of her epic show at the Museum für Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt in 2004, when the go-go boys arrived at the museum to activate *Gonzalez-Torres Untitled (Go-Go Dancing Platform)* [1995]. There were two equally hot young men, if memory serves, one white and one black. They were going to dance in shifts during the opening. As I recall, Elaine was totally disturbed by the recruitment of a black dancer, because she thought [Felix] Gonzalez-Torres never showed the piece with anything but white dancers. It was all wrong.

BH: There were two go-go platforms at the MMK, facing off directly across from each other, which took advantage of the palindromic architecture—hers *and* his. Is it just me, or might Gonzalez-Torres too have preferred Latin dancers? In any case, my memory is that the real problem for Elaine was that the black dancer was too *ripped*.

CW: Oh, it was a texture issue then, not color! During one of those endless evenings at her local Bistrot Beaubourg (basically her kitchen when guests arrived, although she was a superb cook), Trisha Donnelly and I had a historic conversation with Our Lady Elaine about *d-i-c-k-s*. It was uproarious and profound.

BH: I love a blow job—

CW: We know!

BH: Giving, receiving—but I don't wish everything to be set to that tempo, that *durée*. Sturtevant's *Blow Job* [2006], a three-channel video, not 16 mm like Warhol's notorious slo-mo quickie, used that temporality to question it, while also providing, momentarily, a disruptive sound track of a woman's laughter—all, as she wrote, to “emphasize the vast space of pornography: its blatant subjectivity, its use and abuse, its reality and brutality, its beauty and distortions; its ‘funny-fun’ and rabid sadness and sadism.” Sigh. I'm rabidly sad. We're just beginning to get started with her.

CW: I know. Speaking of rabid, I am concerned: Who will be there to rabidly defend the work? Remain alert against the contaminant of small-minded misinterpretation? Sturtevant's art benefited from the relentless performance of her special presence. It is so very satisfying to teach Sturtevant and witness an amoeba of a student fiercely connect with her bold repurposing. Although they intuitively get it and are truly inspired by the recent work, they still welcome the guidance of Elaine's screeching them to attention—

BH: “Cybernetics!” The technological (ontological?) turn switching everything so that, as only the Lady could put it, “the exterior of simulacra has become the entrenched interior of our ‘being.’”

CW: I can't stop thinking about the prescience of that extraordinary, meditative show at Anthony Reynolds Gallery in London in 2006. Hanging across from each other: a *Duchamp Fresh Widow* [1992] and two *Warhol Black Marilyn's* [2004]. The way her *Widow* lit her *Marilyn's* so generously and the way the *Marilyn's* so glamorously rejected that glow, a dialogue that now becomes an essential clue leading to her new location—the exquisite and off-limits territory between light and dark. That must now be the place to be! Such entirely still but powerful confrontation created night music that, yet again, destroyed chronology! How can Elaine now be “late”? That makes me weep. It's just not possible. She will ever be AVANT!

BH: Always and ever AVANT!!!

Bruce Hainley is a contributing editor of Artforum. His study of Sturtevant, Under the Sign of [sic], was published by Semiotext(e) earlier this year.

Claude Wampler is an artist.

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The New York Times

Elaine Sturtevant, Who Borrowed Others' Work Artfully, Is Dead at 89

By Margalit Fox



Elaine Sturtevant in 2004.
Thomas Lohnes/Agence France-
Presse — Getty Images

Elaine Sturtevant, an American Conceptual artist whose work resembled that of Andy Warhol — and Roy Lichtenstein and Robert Rauschenberg and Marcel Duchamp and Jasper Johns and Keith Haring and a spate of other emblematic figures from the annals of contemporary art — died on May 7 in Paris. She was 89.

Her death was announced by her gallery, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, in Paris, where she had made her home since the early 1990s.

Ms. Sturtevant, known professionally simply as Sturtevant, was no forger. She was sometimes called the mother of appropriation art: the movement, which flourished in the 1980s and afterward, that makes new artworks by reproducing old ones. But with characteristic bluntness, she disdained the term, preferring to call her working method “repetition.”

“Manet had an intense dialogue with Velázquez, as did Picasso,” Bruce Hainley, the author of “Under the Sign of [sic],” a study of Ms. Sturtevant’s work published in January, said in an interview on Wednesday. “We don’t think of that as appropriation.”

As a replicator, Ms. Sturtevant was an original. A Sturtevant work is as instantly and uncannily recognizable as a Warhol silk-screen, say, or a Johns flag. But, at the same time, each in its own way is a deliberately inexact likeness of its more famous progenitor.

By holding up her imprecise mirror to a gallery of 20th-century titans, Ms. Sturtevant spent her career exploring ideas of authenticity, iconicity and the making of artistic celebrity; the waxing and waning of the public appetite for styles like Pop and Minimalism; and, ultimately, the nature of the creative process itself.

“In some ways, style is her medium,” Peter Eleey, the curator of a major exhibition of Ms. Sturtevant’s work opening at the Museum of Modern Art in New York this fall, said on Wednesday. “She was the first postmodern artist — before the fact — and also the last.”

The MoMA show, which runs from Nov. 9 through Feb. 22, represents the first significant exhibition



"Haring Tag July 15 1981." Prallen Allsten/Museum of Modern Art

of Ms. Sturtevant's art in the United States in decades. Although her early work, from the mid-1960s, was well received, she came to feel misunderstood by the critics (and by many of the artists whose creations she reimagined) and stopped making art for about a decade.

Lately, Ms. Sturtevant has enjoyed a renaissance, with high-profile exhibitions at the Museum für Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt in 2004, the Moderna Museet in Stockholm in 2012 and the Serpentine Gallery in London last year.

She received a Golden Lion for lifetime achievement from the Venice Biennale in 2011.

In the beginning, Ms. Sturtevant's work was praised for its wit, sly humor and desire to expose viewers to a blizzard of epistemological questions. "I create vertigo," she liked to say.

Her first solo exhibition, at the Bianchini Gallery in New York in 1965, featured, among other pieces, a George Segal-like sculpture, silk-screens à la Warhol's "Flowers" series (an obliging Warhol helped Ms. Sturtevant make them by lending her his original screen) and an ersatz Stella. In that show, and in her subsequent work, Ms. Sturtevant tacitly asked: When is a Warhol not a Warhol? When is it one — and what makes it so?

One answer, her art suggested, lay in the prototypes, which were, per the artistic preoccupations of the day, often copies themselves. (Think of Warhol's soup cans.) If one borrows an image that is itself borrowed, her work suggested, then perhaps neither is truly original.

Another answer lay in the differences between the prototypes and Ms. Sturtevant's renditions. Take the "Segal" sculpture in her first solo show, as Mr. Eley explained:

"It's a man in white plaster that signals to us it's a 'George Segal' sculpture, but it's not based on any real sculpture," he said. "Likewise, in her first solo show in Paris in '66, Lichtenstein's 'Crying Girl' is something that he made as a print. She made it as a painting, and much larger."

Ms. Sturtevant was, in essence, a composer writing variations on predecessors' themes. But while no one ever took Brahms or Rachmaninoff to task for what they did to Paganini's Caprice No. 24 for violin, the rules for visual art, Ms. Sturtevant found, were different — and the consequences severe.

Where Warhol had been sympathetic to her aims (queried about his silk-screening method, he was reported to have said: "I don't know. Ask Elaine"), other artists were less so.

When, in 1967, just blocks from where the original had stood, Ms. Sturtevant opened her version of Claes Oldenburg's "The Store" — a pop-up emporium featuring sculptures of ordinary objects he had erected a few years earlier on the Lower East Side of Manhattan — Mr. Oldenburg was not amused.

"Oldenburg is ready to kill me," Ms. Sturtevant told Time magazine in 1969. "It all makes him dive



"Warhol Black Marilyn," from 2004. Ringier Collection, courtesy Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London

up a wall.”

Over time, critical consensus turned against her, and Ms. Sturtevant withdrew from the New York art scene. She produced little from the mid-1970s to the mid-80s, re-emerging in 1986 with a show at White Columns, the alternative art space in Lower Manhattan.

Though she freely inhabited the artistic skins of others, Ms. Sturtevant took immense pains to obscure the particulars of her own history. Early in her career, she shed her given name like so much distracting baggage; to the end of her life, she countered interviewers’ biographical queries with a two-word response — “Dumb question” — insisting they focus on the work alone.

Elaine Frances Horan was born on Aug. 23, 1924, in Lakewood, Ohio, near Cleveland. She earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology from the University of Iowa, followed by a master’s in the field from Teachers College of Columbia University. In New York, she also studied at the Art Students League.

Ms. Sturtevant's marriage to Ira Sturtevant, a Madison Avenue advertising executive, ended in divorce. Survivors include a daughter, Loren, and two grandchildren. Another daughter, Dea, died about 20 years ago.

In recent years, Ms. Sturtevant worked increasingly in video, producing installations — some incorporating footage shot directly off her television set — that bemoan what she saw as the deracinated human condition in the age of digital reproduction.

If, at bottom, Ms. Sturtevant's art was designed to raise questions about originality, uniqueness and posterity, then there was a telling indication not long ago that it had done its work.

In 2007, an original "Crying Girl" by Lichtenstein — to the extent that one print in an edition of identical prints can be called an original — sold at auction for \$78,400.

In 2011, Ms. Sturtevant's canvas reworking of "Crying Girl" — the only Sturtevant painting of its kind in existence — sold for \$710,500.

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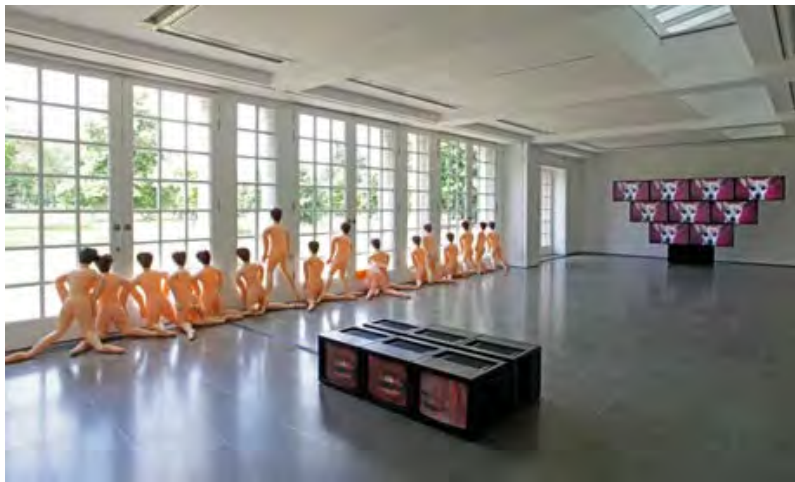
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The Guardian

Art

Elaine Sturtevant: queen of copycats

Since the 1960s, Elaine Sturtevant has been meticulously remaking works by everyone from Andy Warhol to Jasper Johns. Why do they rarely mind? And what's a sex doll army doing in her new show?



■ Boggle-eyed oglers ... Elaine Sturtevant's Sex Dolls, 2012, on left Photograph: Jerry Hardman-Jones

Adrian Searle

Mon 1 Jul 2013 13.21 EDT

A crowd of naked people watch as you walk past the Serpentine Gallery. They ogle you through the windows, boggle-eyed and open-mouthed. They're inflatable sex dolls, all but two of them male, with cartoonish printed chest hair and blank bulges between their legs. According to Elaine Sturtevant, you can't get female ones any more. Her two are scrunched down and wilting, leaking silently beside the pumped-up men. You do wonder who, aside from Sturtevant, buys these things and what squeaky, weightless pleasures are to be had with them. Please do not write in.

Searle, Adrian. "Elaine Sturtevant: Queen of Copycats." *The Guardian*, July 1, 2013.

Now in her 80s, Sturtevant has been dealing with simulacra throughout her career. Most famously, or infamously, she has been remaking the works of other artists since the 1960s. She has copied Andy Warhol's flowers and Marilyns, and even his "unwatchable" eight-hour black-and-white film of the Empire State Building. She has remade works by Marcel Duchamp, Joseph Beuys, Jasper Johns and a host of other artists, mostly male.

Her meticulous versions are neither forgeries nor fakes. Nor are they homages, the Paris-based American artist insists, much less parodies. Although Sturtevant never asks permission, Warhol did give her his silk screens, so she could redo his flowers. When asked what his work meant, he is said to have quipped: "Ask Elaine Sturtevant." Warhol himself derived his flower images from images he found in *Modern Photography* magazine. Nothing comes from nothing.

She has replicated Frank Stella's early stripe paintings, and adopted the role of Paul McCarthy's mad abstract expressionist in his 1995 video performance *Painter*. In the latter, Sturtevant's version is near indistinguishable from the original. She becomes McCarthy's *Painter*, just as McCarthy himself became a grotesque and scatological version of Willem de Kooning in his hilarious video. Clips from Sturtevant's remake play on multi-screen videos in this Serpentine show, called *Leaps, Jumps and Bumps*. On a loop, a phallic rubber finger, drooling pigment, is shown dipping in and out of a can of paint, to the endless mantra: "Sex and death, sex and death, sex and death ..."

Elsewhere, still images of the artist dressed as Joseph Beuys sweep around the gallery walls; the projector is on a turntable. The work references Beuys's 1974 film in which the German artist, dressed as John Dillinger, re-enacts the death of the mobster, shot as he left a Chicago cinema in 1934. So Sturtevant redoes Beuys redoing Dillinger. In another video, filling a long wall, a dog is running. It bounds across the wall, from one end to another, and keeps doing it all day long.

But the first thing you see inside the Serpentine is a remake of the late Félix González-Torres's *Untitled (America)*, in which lightbulbs dangling from the ceiling form a glowing nest on the floor. The Cuban-born American died from Aids in 1996, and it was a Sturtevant version of this work that appeared in his Serpentine retrospective in 2000. I doubt he would have minded. I also imagine Duchamp would have laughed at Sturtevant's six identical versions of his 1920 miniature set of French windows, even though they are signed and copyrighted by Duchamp's fictive alter ego, Rose Sélavy. Others, such as the New York dealer Leo Castelli, have been less sanguine. Castelli apparently bought several Sturtevant versions of work by artists he represented – and destroyed them.

All reality is now virtual reality, says Sturtevant. We are hollowed-out husks of what once we were. She thinks the planet now is very empty, which I guess is where the sex dolls come in. As well as vid-

eos of works by her, there are shots of owls, sportsmen, 1930s cartoon sex symbol Betty Boop – and even Liberace’s shoes. There’s Butt-Head’s ugly mouth, from the Beavis and Butt-Head cartoon, and here’s Sturtevant’s own mouth, seen through a slit in a piece of sacking. In *Trilogy of Transgression*, Minnie Mouse waves on one screen, while tiny crucifixes threaded on a piece of string are pulled, gently, from an inflatable anus on another. How did they get there?

Sturtevant’s most recent work is less about repeating other people’s art, or even her own, than it is about the constant repetitiousness of experience in the post-internet age. If Sturtevant hadn’t done what she did, someone else would have. Someone, somewhere, is doubtless repeating Sturtevant now. The cycle is endless.

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ARTFORUM

PRINT MARCH 2012

FIRST POSITION: THE EARLY PERFORMANCE WORK OF STURTEVANT



Sturtevant, *Study for Yvonne Rainier's "Three Seascapes"*, 1967. Performance view, 222 Bowery, New York, May 16, 1967. Photo: Peter Moore/VAGA.

WE CAN'T GET ENOUGH. We love to rediscover **STURTEVANT**, to relive her relentlessly recombinant logic. We love the way her work multiplies, whether as hyperspeed sexed-up video clip or scandalously wholesale copy or the readymade we never really knew. And we've probably reinterpreted the legendary Paris-based artist as many times as she has reinterpreted the work of others. But over the past several years, Sturtevant has seemed to outstrip even the manic proliferation suggested by her reproductions of Warhol Marilys and factory-line sex dolls. Her recent videos and theatrical environments

unleash a terrifyingly decadent spawn of images and information. This is a system about to explode its limits, to consume itself—perhaps the apotheosis of what the artist deems “our pervasive cybernetic mode.” The fantastic screen-orifices in Sturtevant’s *Trilogy of Transgression*, 2004, and *Blow Job*, 2006, find new echoes in the amusement-park tunnel that swallows visitors in *House of Horrors*, 2010, and in the anthropophagic graphics of *Pac-Man* (working title), an animation piece currently in progress. The latter will debut—along with other new works and a refabrication of her *Duchamp Fresh Widow*, 1992—

at the artist's survey show opening at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm this month.

The heightened speed and force of Sturtevant's recent work are actually reminiscent of her little-known, earlier embrace of performance in the 1960s. So on the eve of her latest retrospective, *Artforum* asked contributing editor **BRUCE HAINLEY**, Sturtevant's frequent interlocutor, to unearth the artist's long-obscured engagements with live action, choreography, and Happenings. What follows is a tale of missed encounters, epistolary exchanges, kinetic reenactments, dances of dances. But such a recursive loop is not only historical. It gives us that strange Sturtevant thrill, again.

CUE RAINER.

Elaine—Have gone to Calif. Don't despair. Keep working. You know the dance. In 2 days I shall send you complete details of the continuity plus program info. Sometimes one has to run away from everything. Yvonne.

Cue thinking about Sturtevant dancing.

What does it mean to "know the dance"? What dance? What is a fact? How does something come to be a fact? Sometimes facts run away from everything.

"COMPLETE DETAILS of the continuity plus program info."

Complete details fascinate. Of course they do.

But at the get-go it seemed that complete details about Sturtevant dancing had run or danced away: Other than within the distracting static of rumor, there appeared to be only a single reference in the printed record to Sturtevant's dancing—a lone *châîné* of substantiation, accomplished in no small part by the editorial machinations of Genesis P-Orridge.

(Yes, Genesis P-Orridge.)

In the first edition of the encyclopedic reference work *Contemporary Artists*, published in 1977 and edited by P-Orridge and Colin Naylor, Jane Bell noted: "For Sturtevant has from the beginning of her career [*sic*] as an artist made work by other artists—paintings, sculptures, films, dances and performances that have been exhibited before [*sic*], by such people as Claes Oldenburg, Man Ray, Duchamp, Eadward [*sic*] Muybridge, Yvonne Rainer, Roy Lichtenstein and others."

Sturtevant's Rainer rested in the historical record, but without complete details or program info—no title, no date, no specifics of any sort—and without continuity: There is no Sturtevant entry in any subsequent edition of the book.

As far as can be determined, the artist has never publicly revealed any specifics whatsoever about the dance Rainer knew she knew, but the postmark of the postcard Rainer mailed to "Elaine" provides a date ("May 4, 1967") around which to begin to choreograph a search for more information about a Sturtevant dance that, Rainer's note makes clear, was being rehearsed for a performance soon to happen—and in front of an audience. Thus the jitters-calming "Don't despair. Keep working" from a highly trained professional dancer to someone who wasn't.



Sturtevant, *Study for Yvonne Rainer's "Three Seascapes"*, 1967. Performance view, 222 Bowery, New York, May 16, 1967. Photo: Peter Moore/VAGA.

Rainer never recalled what Sturtevant performed in 1967, but about the communiqué itself, she remarked:

Very odd, that postcard. The date tells me exactly when and why I went off to CA but the rest of it is a mystery. I dimly remember that Elaine had asked to learn something of mine, but what it was and if she ever did it? ??? Have you asked her? I hope she's alive and well.

“You know the dance.” What dance?

I didn't know her well. She was an anomaly to me: fashionable upper East Sider, part of Rauschenberg's entourage (as I was for awhile), and her art that consisted of reconstructing other people's work. Ahead of her time, obviously, now with all these “re-makes” around. I once went to a dinner party in her townhouse. I remember what I wore and I remember she often wore a slim white quilted rancoat, Courreges-like [sic]. I also visited her Oldenburg “store” on the lower east side. Didn't take her too seriously at the time.

Sorry I can't be of more help.

There is nothing about Rainer's statement that doesn't prepossess. Not the least of the provocations is the rendezvous of ellipses and question marks, which might as well be stand-ins for things otherwise occluded but accumulating, almost somnambulistically, in the very odd penumbra cast by Rainer's “help”: punctuated placeholders for points questionably suspended, not only about the events of Sturtevant and Rainer, circa 1967, dancing a dance (what dance?) to completely different ends, but also about how certain information remains private even in the bright light thrown by Rainer on “exactly” when and why she went off to California.

Sturtevant's response to queries about her dancing: “What's interesting about the Yvonne Rainer piece is why I did it—not that I did it.” Any follow-up was stymied by her insistence: “No, I think that's—I think that's enough.”

All of which, as an answer, could be seen as frustrating.

Not enough.

With her statement, Rainer provides a matrix for how matters from long ago get remembered (“dimly”); for how much can remain a “mystery” (everything

someone might want to know), even for those involved; and for how it all has something to do with not being taken “too seriously.”

And if someone who or something that's not been previously taken seriously starts to be taken seriously, what causes that to happen, and who decides when?

Anomalies, town houses, being ahead of one's time (“obviously”), and possessing no small degree of chic would seem to inhibit being taken “too seriously.”

As would an art of schismatizing.

With what Rainer refers to as a “reconstructing,” Sturtevant disrupts both the uses and misuses of history, while inducing something akin to amnesiac effects.

“**PART OF RAUSCHENBERG'S** entourage (as I was for awhile.)”

By 1967, Sturtevant, in addition to solo shows at Bianchini Gallery in New York and Galerie J in Paris, had participated in Oldenburg's Washes; in “9 Evenings: Theatre & Engineering”; in Gene Swenson's “The *Other* Tradition” and “Art in the Mirror”; and in the group show to benefit E.A.T. at Leo Castelli—basically, in most events of any importance in the Big Apple's mind-fucking heyday.

At the climax of a panel signaling “the new interest in the '60s in combining mediums that had, heretofore, been clearly demarcated” broadcast on WBAI in New York in late 1966, Larry Rivers mused about what an “interesting experiment” it would be to “take someone else's work and do a version of it.” Vouching for an interest in such experiments, Rauschenberg jumped in: “You mean like Elaine Sturtevant?” Rivers replied, “No,” and didn't elaborate, but as another person within the tidal pull of Rauschenberg's entourage clarified: “Elaine was . . . around quite a bit—at Max's et al.”

Contacting those artists who moved in, between, or around whatever might be construed as “part of Rauschenberg's entourage” and the Judson Dance Theater not only would be a way to flesh out networks of the New York art scene, circa 1967, and the productively promiscuous reach of Rauschenberg's influence but also would be a way to start figuring out what Sturtevant was doing with Rainer (what she did, why she did it).

Contact Robert Whitman, Simone Forti, Deborah Hay, Ann Wilson, John Giorno, Dorothea Rockburne, Robert Morris, various widows and widowers, miscellaneous slyboots, even, among others, Rauschenberg himself.

Some will never reply. Some will eventually reply, but not helpfully. “In response to your email I must say that I hardly remember an iota about Elaine.”

A few of those who hardly remember an iota appeared on many dance and music programs with the artist or “met” her “for drinks” at her home, etc.

And of those who hardly remember an iota but appeared on the programs of various Happenings or hobnobbed over cocktails, etc., with Sturtevant, there was even an individual, let her remain nameless forevermore, who performed with the artist in one of her films and claimed, “I hve [sic] no memory about that film. Are you sure it is me?”

That’s history.

It’s also a plan for how to succeed in show business.

THEN, OF COURSE, there’s Steve Paxton.

A quicksilver exception to the mostly amnesiac status quo.

No wallflower in relation to the hubbub of what it might have meant to be “part of Rauschenberg’s entourage,” the dancer-choreographer rallied answers to questions prompted by nagging archival curiosities and outtakes: Paxton encased in blank plaster for the “Segal” (as in George) component of Sturtevant’s *7th Avenue Garment Rack with Warhol Flowers*, 1965 (“Yes I recall it, in her studio. I have no idea why she asked me”); Paxton (in a photo posed by Ugo Mulas) watching TV with Christopher Rauschenberg while Sturtevant and Rauschenberg talk in the background (“It is clearly RR’s studio at 809 Broadway”); Paxton in the control room for Rauschenberg’s *Open Score*, 1966 (“I was the video mixer in the balcony. It was easy, a matter of learning a few switches. . . . Around this calm cloud, all hell was breaking loose. Engineers were working triple shifts, artists trying to create works around commissioned technology which sometimes didn’t work as expected. I don’t recall Elaine at all in this situation, though I expect she was there”); Paxton putting Sturtevant to work as a cast member of his *Physical Things*, 1966; Paxton at her *The Store of Claes Oldenburg*, 1967 (“Yes. I assisted her”); Paxton slated for the role of Another Man in Sturtevant’s *Picabia’s Ballet Relâche*, 1967, canceled.

He had an interesting mind, joie de vivre, and a pretty body that could move and moved like no other, and there he was moving through what would too soon hibernate in aporia:



Robert Rauschenberg and Sturtevant (rear), Christopher Rauschenberg (in chair), and Steve Paxton (on floor), Robert Rauschenberg’s studio, New York, 1965. Photo: Ugo Mulas.

Elaine commissioned works from several of us. I recall her working with Yvonne Rainer.

I think you are right, The Mind Is a Muscle is far too ambitious for Elaine to have done. On the other hand, so is Trio A. She had no physical training, and the dancer’s memory for movement is a result of training. It may seem obvious, but Rainer’s 62 solo Three Seascapes is a likely candidate. Ask if there was a white veil or overcoat involved.

Despite Paxton’s generosity and his suggestion that the Rainer in question might have been *Three Seascapes*, no corroborating materials or witnesses emerged

to prove that that was the case.

BUT IF IT WERE SOMETHING like *Three Seascapes* that Sturtevant danced, what kind of thing was that?

Rainer described the dance in 1974:

Three Seascapes: *Solo in three parts: 1) Running around the periphery of the space in a black overcoat during the last movement of Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto. 2) Traveling with slow-motion undulations on an upstage-to-downstage diagonal during La Monte Young's Poem for Tables, Chairs, Benches. 3) Screaming fit downstage right in a pile of white gauze and black overcoat.*

Accounts of the dance's debut in 1962, at the Maidman Playhouse, weren't so neutral. One reviewer, not wishing to appear ungroovily out of step with any countercultural potential of the choreographer's experiments, called Rainer's work "far out" and "off beat."

And then there was Jill Johnston.

Jill fucking Johnston.

On the beat, doing her job, brilliantly, tweakily.

After admitting how "repetition could be a deadly bore" and demonstrating (courtesy of a quotation from *Lectures in America*) how and why Rainer "comes close to what Gertrude Stein was doing in her writing," Johnston got down to it:

In "Three Seascapes" Miss Rainer makes three incidents employing the same method even more stringently. First she dog trots all over the stage, and sometimes lies down and gets up, wearing a black coat, to a luscious and amplified movement from the Rachmaninoff Second Piano Concerto. Two, she progresses ONCE across the stage, like a slow-motion spastic, if you can believe it, to the accompaniment of a number of tables and chairs moaning, scraping across the floor in the lobby ("Poem for Tables and Chairs," by Lamont [sic] Young). And three, she puts her black coat over a long piece of white gauze, lies down under both, and has a beautiful fit of screaming in a flying mess of coat and gauze.

Johnston would give *Three Seascapes* pride of place throughout the 1960s when considering Rainer's work. In her lively essay "Rainer" (which served as

the program note for two evenings of dance Rainer would perform at the Avery Theater of the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford in March 1965), Johnston, after emphasizing the importance of repetition, again via Stein's writing, zeroes in on what the dance was starting to mean, since, whatever its immediate jolts of pleasure, the new rarely strikes on its meanings in a similarly immediate enlightening flash, eureka-like, but, instead, arrives more slowly, thought rumbling like thunder in the distance.

In one of the three sections she wore a winter coat and kept running around the stage and sometimes she would lie down, then get up and start running again. The accompaniment was the most romantic movement of Rachmaninoff's 2nd Piano Concerto. I thought it was a spoof on romance, or Rachmaninoff, or the whole past idea of romantic music wedded to romantic dancing. But she says no, her idea was to shift the focus from the intricacy and intensity of the dance (with the music as background, in traditional practice) to the dance as the simplest thing she could think of to do, so that all the emotion and complexity and virtuosity would be in the music.

Johnston concludes her essay with special attention to the scream:

The screaming . . . belonged to a whole gamut of what a critic called "irresponsible noises" that she began to incorporate as expressive elements in her dances. Barking, grunting, mumbling, stammering, wailing.

A sonic rupture echoing the moaning and scraping across the floor of a number of tables and chairs, which La Monte Young's *Poem* already provided. Not unlike questions of the serious and the not, "irresponsible" and responsible noises operated dialectically alongside the kind of movements and moving Rainer brought into action. If the Rachmaninoff accompaniment in the second part of *Three Seascapes* shifted where "all the emotion and complexity and virtuosity would be," the sounds and noises (some a literalization of Satie's *musique d'ameublement*), by stark contrast, allowed expressivity or its divestiture center stage, for delight as well as confusion.

Returning to *Three Seascapes* at different junctures of Rainer's early career, Johnston attempts to trace how Rainer's choreography became identified as her own by attending to her stripping of movement down to "the simplest thing she could think of to do"—the choreographer perhaps not quite yet manifestly



Claes Oldenburg, *Washes*, 1965. Performance view, First New York Theater Rally, Al Roon's Health Club, New York, May 1965 (Sturtevant, center, in white). Photo: Robert McElroy/VAGA.

saying no to emotion, no to intricacy, no to intensity (as she later infamously would) but rather formulating “unlicensed” modalities of emotion, intricacy, and intensity; situating gesture at the edge of expressivity, articulation; unleashing vocality as sheer force, while exposing the body as body.

Using years of training, skill, and motor memory—mastery?—not for virtuoso spectacles but, instead, for some sort of Prospero-like renunciation, Rainer was not the only artist thinking about these desubjectivizing or neutralizing aims: the tension between the virtuosic and the everyday, rallied by the potential of what could only be performed by an exchange between trained and untrained bodies; the range of motions and emotions when nondancers appear onstage in a dance. Many of the goings-on of the Judson Dance Theater and those involved in “Rauschenberg’s entourage” tested limits of the various conventions of the performative and its part in taking apart the supposed unity of the self.

Over her years of watching Paxton’s choreography transform, Johnston also noticed how the “performing bodies” of his troupe were no longer “like Paxton’s, like the ‘trained’ ideal type body.” Engaging the Whitmanesque possibilities of what gets brought on stage in his *Satisfyin’ Lover*, 1967, Johnston continued:

And here they all were . . . thirty-two any old wonderful people . . . walking one after the other across the gymnasium in their any old clothes. The fat, the skinny, the medium, the slouched and slumped, the straight and tall, the bowlegged and knock-kneed, the awkward, the elegant, the coarse, the delicate, the pregnant, the virginal, the you name it, by implication every postural possibility in the postural spectrum, that’s you and me in all our ordinary everyday who cares postural splendor. Like the famous ordinary people who are certain they will see and be seen whether they fall down or keep walking in a forest with or without other famous ordinary people there is a way of looking at things which renders them performance.

Anyone participating in “Rauschenberg’s entourage” had to be open to the implications of that ordinary everyday who cares postural spectrum, the grace to be born and live as variously as possible, as well as what it would mean to make it all invisible or neutral.

ERASE AND REWIND.

Even without knowing, definitively, what Sturtevant danced, consider why she might have rendezvoused with Rainer at all, since Sturtevant was always already dancing, as Nietzsche said everyone must—always already thinking not across the art of the 1960s but into the structures that make such art, such thinking,

possible. She was manifesting instead of writing manifestos.

Rather than construe her repetition via *performance* as distinct from or merely in relation to what she accomplishes via objects and images, confront the possibility that with *all* of her repetitions, Sturtevant was always *enacting*, manifesting, dynamically working through the implications of the aesthetic act. Creating a concept that traces the catalytic force of the aesthetic, its action, she not only dealt with the problem of how any given permutation, promise, proxy, or pirouette can be claimed as “art,” thereby breaking herself out of the lockdown of stylistic isms, but also *mobilized* art as a mind-blowing, space-time-shifting pursuit. Oh, yes, there *is* a way of “looking at things” that renders them performative and then some. At Bianchini Gallery in 1965, she exposed the

intention of such actions—their implicit velocity and kinesis—with her *7th Avenue Garment Rack with Warhol Flowers*, its plaster “Segal” cast from Paxton’s body, wheeling a rack on which hung works “by” Arman, Stella, Oldenburg, Rosenquist, and Johns, among others: Rather than any readymades, a rack of off-the-rack aesthetics moved, via Seventh Avenue, so as to “push and impel thinking, to engender polemics, to ‘resist’ and to give visible action to dialectics.” Consider her art as a meditation on the onslaught of *speed*, its ambition not to reify successive (artistic as well as critical) styles but to confront what of being or becoming is outmoded when immediacy is no longer instantaneous or present enough: with ever more brutal acceleration, from the working stiff holding his own against the almost cybernetically circuited field of Sturtevant’s *Warhol Flowers* to the artist herself in her *Study for Muybridge Plate #97 Woman Walking*,

1966, a photographic sequence in which, nude, she strides past what appear to be iconic works of Rosenquist, Johns, and Lichtenstein but are really all Sturtevants; from premiering her Rainer dance to opening up *The Store of Claes Oldenburg* and then tackling Beuys actions; from the go-go boy go-going for her *Gonzalez-Torres Untitled (Go-Go Dancing Platform)*, 1995, to her making a clean getaway in her *Dillinger Running* works of 2000. By the time she’s tracking a sprinter from stock footage for a rousing sequence in her recent video barrage *Elastic Tango*, 2010, the artist should not really still have to be explaining her face-off with, among other matters, the fate of “man” buffeted by the hyperspeed of an existence already lapping him.

To spur these events, Sturtevant goes into action, deploying media contra medium-specificity, and through repetition—jump-cutting to a more pertinent scene—hacking the loop of the “same” to leak the extremity of difference. Repetition, durational as it is differential, catalyzed as a movement—of power and force. Emphatically and early on, the artist demonstrated



Sturtevant (right) at her *The Store of Claes Oldenburg*, 623 East Ninth Street, New York, 1967. Photo: Virginia Dwan.

that leap to concept with her *Relâche*, for which she staged a “cancellation” of a performance as the performance—a repetition of Picabia and Satie’s notorious eponymous 1924 “ballet,” which on the night of its announced opening kept the theater shut tight. Having enjoyed the resulting brouhaha from the relative calm of a nearby bar with Picabia and Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp himself (who appeared in René Clair’s *Entr’acte*, the cinematic component of the crucially multimedia revolt that bisected the theatrical goings-on) attended Sturtevant’s 1967 performance by approaching and then strolling away from the poster pasted on the venue’s door (STURTEVANT’S RELÂCHE) while keeping his taxi waiting. As Johnston wrote of the serious fun the artist was producing: “It was a total success. A cancellation can’t go wrong.” Although for too long hidden in a critico-historical fissure—whether due to “discourses” still dutiful to certain symbolic notions of seriousness, career, style, and self (to everything, that is, that rushes cognition into recognition, in the sense of both recognizability and accolade, rather than, as Sturtevant would have it, jamming that entire cognitive itinerary) or to something more anxious and unconscious—the fission of the Sturt-event and its aftershocks weren’t lost on Duchamp. The latter was, after all, no arriviste to thinking madly about territories opened up by cancellation: cancellation not as negation but as perpetual splitting and ricochet, everything released back into the flux of becoming. The sly old *respirateur* sent Sturtevant a note not long after her 1967 “theatrical,” acknowledging that when he returned to Manhattan the following October “maybe . . . you will be announcing ‘Relâche 1968.’”

FOR STURTEVANT to make a work by Rainer a) jettisons the notion that her “sources” were “Pop” or that what she was up to was to out-Pop Pop; b) forecloses efforts to characterize her pursuits as simply a reaction against the art market; c) affirms the importance of her contribution to the liberation of aesthetics from conventional medium identity; d) questions what it means to be serious or ambitious and asks who and what garners attention, and by what means; e) renders, physically, the fact that, as Rainer stated, “dance is hard to see,” by performing its unseeability, the concepts shadowing its existence; f) puts her body on the line, center stage.

Given those “givens,” what might pictures of anything that Sturtevant danced be expected to show?

The artist caught in various moments of a short circuit

of movement (onrush, harlequinade, prostration) braved for unverifiable intent. No captions.

Which is just what scans of pictures of Sturtevant dancing, when obtained from the artist, really did show—everything and almost nothing, taciturn documents whose Rainer-related purview was suggested by costumes and poses but barely, vaguely. No details, no continuity.

The artist mum. (Which could be seen as frustrating, although if she had relented, finally relinquishing “why” she did it or naming “what” exactly it was she did, would anyone have dogged the matter?)

But then the original prints, flipped over in the archive, revealed a photographer’s stamp: Peter Moore’s.

There was also a date: May 16, 1967.

VAGA, the Visual Artists and Galleries Association, represents Moore’s estate, which is executed by the photographer’s widow, Barbara Moore. She soon provided fugitive (and greatly anticipated) specifics.

By the time of his death, in 1993, Peter Moore had taken more than half a million photographs of performances by the sprawling Judson-Fluxus-Conceptual-Happenings-Rauschenberg circle. That vast archive: It harbored material information about Sturtevant’s otherwise elusive performances, printed matter (programs from the various Fall and Spring Gallery Concert series) and photographic documentation (contact sheets, prints).

As art historian Carrie Lambert-Beatty has pointed out, it is not an overstatement to say that, like much of the extant knowledge of New York’s 1960’s avant-garde as a whole, much of the extant knowledge of Rainer’s art has been preserved in “the view through the lens” of Moore’s camera. And it is also not an overstatement to claim that without the diligent eye of this “remarkably dedicated documentarian”—and without Moore and his wife’s archiving of the more than half a million photographs along with ephemera that provides dates, names, contextual details, corroborating evidence, as close as can be gotten to the “complete details of the continuity plus program info”—not much would be known about Sturtevant’s Rainer at all.

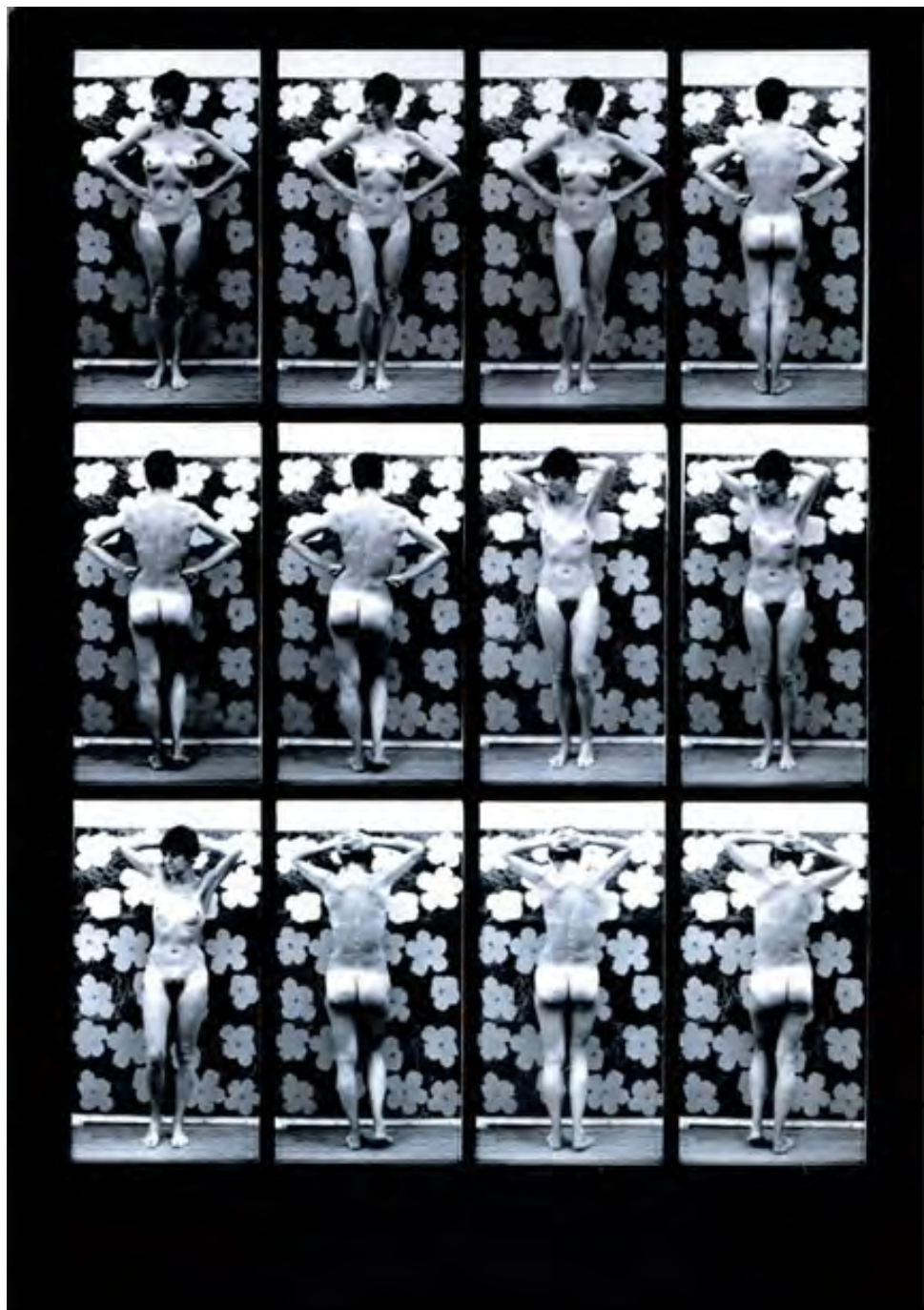
Unlike many other artists, Sturtevant, throughout the 1960s and ’70s, only rarely relied on language, whether

explanatory texts, manifestos, public statements, or interviews. Appearing as the work of others, her art, passing as status quo and seemingly responsive to its pater, undoes all that surety, the artist achieving such deranging criticality through the repetition of what she simultaneously cancels: The cut becomes . . . is . . . is already . . . the suture; the future yesterday; the dancer the dance.

THE CONTACT SHEET for Peter Moore’s view of Sturtevant’s *Study for Yvonne Rainer’s “Three Seascapes”* consists of thirteen opportunities to approximate the reality of what her body looked like dancing—some inherent drama of the event conveyed in his pacing of what “attitudes” best framed the performance of her thinking. Six shots follow Sturtevant through the different paces of Part I, to which the lush last movement of the Rachmaninoff Second Piano Concerto provided counterpoint. She (1) rushes into the performance space through a door, stage left, chin up, her body draped in a large dark overcoat. Moore captures her (2) arrested, upstage, about to (3) change course, running or dog-trotting the periphery in the opposite direction from which she started—only to (4) reverse course yet again. She

drops, prostrate, (5) her body slightly curled, on the wooden floor of the stage, whose “apron” is marked by a chalky kind of line, effectively making the loftlike venue resemble a makeshift squash court. The sequence of the first part of *Study for Yvonne Rainer’s “Three Seascapes”* seemingly loops (6) to find the artist in almost the same position as she was in the first shot—staring ahead, striding forward, hands in coat pockets, as if motion were her element, having in the meantime utterly scrambled, once-over twice, where all the emotion and complexity and virtuosity really ever are. Part II: Sporting a lightly colored

unitard and footless tights, Sturtevant (7), upstage left, assumes a position, fingertips placed lightly on each side of her head, limbs in awkward, elbow-out, wing formation; stripped down to basics, holding this odd, under-arrest position, she (8) sways her right hip out to begin her weird peregrination from the corner (stacks of stuff pushed against a wall in ramshackle storage), (9, 10) undulating, if that’s the term, diagonally across the performance zone toward the open doorway (11), downstage right, all to the music of tables and chairs scraping in the recording of La Monte Young’s composition. While the artist may not



Sturtevant, *Muybridge Plate #136*, 1966, black-and-white photographs, overall 23 5/8 x 15 3/4".

have been trained as a dancer, her body, toned and agile, cuts a fit figure, possibly from years of tennis and swimming; with the juts of her hips, lithe arms inverted, raised akimbo, she makes her way, Gwen Verdon meets the Velvet Underground, gleaned the *écarté* ghosted in the movement. Throughout, although Sturtevant's gaze seems focused intensely elsewhere, a sense of athletic accomplishment permeates the sequence, her body's gravity and energy focused by the strange intention that gives her *Study* its power.

When Rainer reflected on her own *Three Seascapes* for a retrospective exhibition about the Judson Dance Theater in October 1981, she paid particular attention to her body in the second part:

“Goofy glamour” Steve Paxton once used to describe my act. This [photograph by Al Giese] is the second section of a three-part solo, a diagonal passage nearing its end, during which I slow-motion from one corner of Judson Gym to the other like a goofy, sexy, crippled, possessed, audience-be-damned, nothing-to-lose, shameless, female critter.

It's difficult to discern, in Moore's stills of Sturtevant's phrasing of the diagonal passage, any goofy, critter wantonness (which doesn't necessarily mean it wasn't performed), but perhaps not so difficult to glimpse a nothing-to-lose abandonment to something, whether to the “shameless” or “sexy” or to the bravado of

her endeavor, whatever it is glimmering as part of the elsewhere otherness of her gaze, ignoring—damning—the audience.

Finally, Part III: A single frame (12) captures the artist on her stomach, roughly center stage, screaming, white gauze and overcoat beneath her, head slightly raised, feet pointed down, caterwauling dervish breaking up.

The final document of the performance (13) arrests the havoc: The dance completed, Sturtevant, again center stage, stands, maelstrom of coat and gauze abandoned in front of her, taking her bow, unbowed. The audience that can be seen through Moore's lens proves tightly packed, close enough to the action to have caught any look, breath, and gesture of whatever just happened.

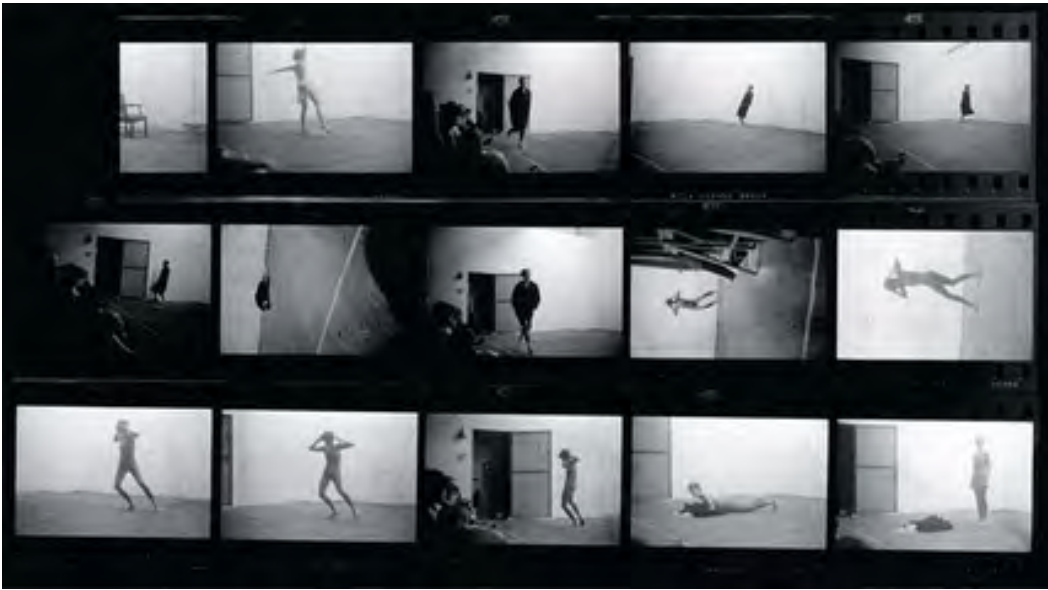
Jill Johnston appears to have been the only writer who tried to confront whatever had just happened.

Given her streetwise knowledge of the contemporary countercultural area, especially of dance, especially Rainer's, she was able to position Sturtevant's pursuit as few others could have. After setting the scene (“Spring Gallery Concert of music and dance . . . given May 14–16 at a loft on the Bowery [the YMCA building, 222 Bowery] by two composers and three choreographers”), she observes:

Elaine Sturtevant assumes a unique position of making her work the work of other artists. Having simulated the techniques and images of some well-known Pop artists, she here undertook a dance project in the form of a “Study for Yvonne Rainer’s Three Seascapes.” Her tempo and serious deadpan of the first section—running around in an overcoat and occasionally lying down (to Rachmaninoff) seemed just right. She wisely abbreviated the screaming of the third section and the middle section, originally a difficult, intentionally awkward slow motion walk across stage, with undulating pelvis and plastic irregularities of hands moving at the head, became a rather painfully awkward version of



Sturtevant, *Picabia's Ballet Relâche*, 1967. Performance view, School of Visual Arts, New York, November 20, 1967. Photo: Peter Moore/VAGA.



Contact sheet showing Sturtevant's *Study for Yvonne Rainer's "Three Seascapes"*, 1967, 222 Bowery, New York, May 16, 1967. Photos: Peter Moore/VAGA.

awkwardness as executed by a non-dancer. Which is okay I think (why not?) and simply puts the movement into another (awkward) dimension.

No condescension in Johnston's approach to Sturtevant's project: The artist is one of "three choreographers"—Trisha Brown and Deborah Hay were the others—presenting work. Attuned to the artist's "unique position" as well as to her various affective results—"serious deadpan," "awkwardness"—the critic pinpoints aspects that too frequently vanish from any wrangling with Sturtevant's elusive, challenging actions. To dwell on certain alterations—the abbreviation of the third section, the doubled awkwardness of the second—in Sturtevant's performance would be to get lost in the shoals of surface discrepancy rather than to Esther Williams through the strong currents of the artist's thinking. With the *Study*, Sturtevant demonstrates, yet again, the catalytic motility fueling all her pursuits; she also emphasizes that, whatever the difference in mode or material, her game is more demanding. "People who look at art see it as detail, a painting or a group of paintings by a specific artist," Sturtevant once explained. "They rarely see art as part of a total phenomenon. They don't use horizontal thinking." With her X-ray vision, she spied invisible consequences, not only in making her work the work of other artists or in the specific works of the artists whose work she made but also of the infrastructure supporting it all. She took the artists whose work she made at their word and took the percepts of their art as insight for incitement, a call to action; such

horizontal thinking led her beyond a limit the artists themselves never quite trespassed. (For example, in terms of Lichtenstein: She throws the gasoline of his words ["The closer my work is to the original the more threatening and critical the content"] on what's already burning in his paintings [say, *Image Duplicator*, 1963], some of the result of her aesthetic conflagration looking relentlessly like Lichtensteins themselves.)

Sturtevant knew the "content" of her work was no longer anyone else's or any kind of "duplicate." All of which points to the importance of Johnston's discerning the "awkwardness" in Sturtevant's dance, a discernment that becomes abundantly clear when that quality is put in relation to the expanding horizon of dance, which the critic would soon do. To provide a gloss on the choreographic significance of *awkwardness*, she enlisted no less than one of dance's masters. "I like the quote in Calvin Tompkins's [sic] *New Yorker* profile [of Merce Cunningham]: 'I think dance only comes alive when it gets awkward again,' implying that between being awkward there's a period of submission and conformity to professional training demands." It is exactly this "alive"-ness—discombobulating "submission and conformity" to professionally sanctioned modes of proceeding—that Sturtevant mainlined. Johnston's formulation of Sturtevant's procedural method ("making her work the work of other artists") remains useful, and with her conclusion that the artist puts not only Rainer but also movement itself "into another (awkward) dimension," she adumbrates the total structure with

and within which Sturtevant operated, folding space-time, shattering dimensionality, like some rogue Bene Gesserit.

“It was terrifying to do, but that was because of what I was hoping to achieve by doing it, not because I was afraid of the audience’s or other artists’ reaction,” Sturtevant confessed, having been asked (in reference to responses to her work, hostile and otherwise, in the mid- to late 1960s), “Were you afraid?” Averting any clarification about what, exactly, she was hoping to achieve by doing what she did, the artist raises only one possible affective consequence (terror) of doing it—which leaves several questions waiting in the wings. Among them: By dancing her *Study for Yvonne Rainer’s “Three Seascapes”*, what did Sturtevant hope to achieve?

CUE RAINER

Elaine—Have gone to Calif. Don’t despair. Keep working. You know the dance. In 2 days I shall send you complete details of the continuity plus program info. Sometimes one has to run away from everything. Yvonne.

In the postcard, sent not even two weeks before Sturtevant undertook the dance, it is hard to interpret Rainer’s final quasi-epigrammatic ministrations, however much it seems to encourage a focus not on the emotive but on the performative (“Don’t despair. Keep working. You know the dance”). Wavering between acknowledgment and advice, the fugitive statement dodges straightforward address: It isn’t clear that the indefinite pronoun (“one”) doesn’t refer to Rainer herself, writing from California. A certain declarative gravity adheres in the sentence that could be taken to clarify matters important to both Rainer’s and Sturtevant’s repertoires, despite the radically different ways the artists put those repertoires into action.

Sometimes one has to run away from everything, to get to where one wants to be.

When Rainer did, infamously, say no to “many facts in the theatre today” (“NO to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make-believe . . .”), she did so in the same issue of the *Tulane Drama Review* in which Sturtevant (as “Elaine”) made her splash in the script of Oldenburg’s *Washes*—an exploit giving no clue that she was already interrogating, via her double negatives, many of the things to which

Rainer was saying no: thwarting any privileging of the visible over the invisible, abandoning imposed teleologies, jettisoning any unifying stylization, turning the rendezvous of the question marks and ellipses of “individual” and “identity” into a dance of divestiture and renunciation, providing contrafaction. Sturtevant brought forth the seemingly already known or recognizable to get at structural unknowns and at what she identified, in one of her earliest published statements, as art’s “interior . . . silent power.” Her pursuits puzzled or frustrated many. Some didn’t take her too seriously; others took her hijinks to be stealth maneuvers, a running away from or abnegation of self-knowledge and inwardness. For example, Patty Mucha, Claes Oldenburg’s earliest collaborator and first wife, when asked about Sturtevant’s work, responded: “Of course, perhaps it was her way to camouflage herself. I mean, who is Elaine Sturtevant? She has spent her adult life creating diversions rather than exploring—exposing—her real self . . . (my homespun country analysis . . . blah blah).” Whoever Sturtevant was, she was pursuing, rather than any diversions, the proleptic materialization of what, roughing up Michel Foucault, might be called “effective” aesthetics. In fact, much of Foucault’s thinking, circa 1970, syncopates philosophically what Sturtevant preemptively enacted, danced:

History becomes “effective” to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being—as it divides our emotions, dramatizes our instincts, multiplies our body and sets it against itself. “Effective” history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature, and it will not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millennial ending. It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting.

However dramatic, sanctioned, or even acute Foucault’s intoxicating dose of “discontinuity” is for grappling with all that is implied by Sturtevant’s double negatives (when gauged by Rainer’s serialization of *no*), he was not the first to offer a model by which to apprehend Sturtevant’s illicit movements, removals, and discontinuities. Such theoretical disruption to notions of the self’s coherence had occurred, resonantly and more locally, in something like a flashback from the magical musical shrooms of John Cage. The various negations and interrogations within the work of Sturtevant as well as Rainer, not to mention the knowledge made for cutting in Foucault,

all correspond to what Cage perceived, infamously, when he confronted Rauschenberg's "notorious" White Paintings, first shown late in 1953, at the Stable Gallery, and as he explained in a proxy artist's statement offered to viewers that began: "To whom / No subject / No image / No taste . . ." The well-known litany continued, fourteen refusals ending with "(no and)." With the aside of his parenthetical denouement, Cage denies while simultaneously invoking continuity, creating a list of things connected by negation rather than by conjunction. His easygoing, Emersonian ticking off of everything that creates a clean slate

still makes time for how turned on he is by the desubjectivization as well as by the numerous other contraventions happening in the *nuît blanche* Rauschenberg organized; it is an apprehension of the nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

The force of the *no* in Rainer's dances and dancing was seen by most critical observers to be displayed in her choreographic condition as "neutral doer" and in her gesture of the "averted gaze," in that attempt, as Annette Michelson circumscribed it, "to short-circuit the projection of Self toward audience, to eliminate the conditions of a narcissistic gratification. Its consequence for the spectator is a problem, or a question." Rather than dwell on that "short-circuit," so Rauschenbergian, let Michelson continue in her efforts to come to terms with the problem or question she saw Rainer posing:

For if the dancer is she/he who performs the task in/of dancing, the spectator, confronting that "neutral doer," that utter submersion of self in that business at hand which is the performance, must ask himself—and the literalness of the question gives us the measure of its freshness and its urgency—"How can we know the dancer from the dance?"

Michelson takes Rainer's answer to be: "You cannot, nor should you seek to know the difference."

BY MAKING the most apparent aspect of her work the work of Rainer, Sturtevant doubles the question's urgency. How does one see Sturtevant's dance and dancing when the action "looks like" Rainer's *Three Seascapes*? As the first words of her work's title, *Study for*, suggest, Sturtevant reroutes notions of the preliminary and/or preparatory, the *avant* embedded in the concept of the study and in the name by which her works are signed. Rather than position herself as a student, an understudy to the known, she makes the study the double of the (seemingly) singular work, setting it against itself so that it becomes unknown,



Sturtevant, *Study for Yvonne Rainer's "Three Seascapes"*, 1967. Performance view, 222 Bowery, New York, May 16, 1967. Photo: Peter Moore/VAGA.

and so that in its becoming unknown anyone must ask, What can a body do to know repetition from difference?

Rainer, no matter how intensely neutral a “neutral doer,” is seen to perform whatever comes to be Rainer.

Sturtevant, conversely, performs a study of what any presentation comes to be, regardless of its gestures toward the “neutral” or “averted,” choreographing not a way to seek or know the difference between the dancer and the dance—but a way to sense how difference itself operates and arrives. With the astonishing pragmatism of her conceptual procedures, Sturtevant performs difference’s operations with and on the body—the body!—which would seem to only be one. Astonishing because the artist is giving “visible action to dialectics,” testing, empirically, in the zone of art, things and concepts for which there were just beginning to be names and theories (none of them “appropriation”). Gilles Deleuze would soon publish *Différence et Repetition*, his book of philosophy that was “in part a very particular species of detective novel, in part a kind of science fiction.” He prefaced his treatise by announcing that “a commentary should act as a veritable double and bear the maximal modification appropriate to a double. (One imagines a *philosophically* bearded Hegel, a *philosophically* clean-shaven Marx, in the same way as a moustached Mona Lisa.)” He thought a commentary should

“represent a kind of slow motion, a congelation or immobilisation.” The philosopher never names Duchamp, despite his tonsorial genuflections; instead he invokes Pierre Menard to abbreviate his theory that “the most exact, the most strict repetition has as its correlate the maximum of difference.”

Gumshoeing. Science fiction.

Troubling veritable doubling, Sturtevant is most Sturtevant when she appears to be, seemingly, doing Rainer. Perhaps even more paradoxically, Rainer is most Rainer when Sturtevant is doing her—which doesn’t mean that any details she could have provided, no matter how complete, could ever have resulted in what Sturtevant danced. Which was a dance of Sturtevant. It’s when what one “is” is taken away that the many things, the many becomings, rallied as a “self” can be. All this difference, as Deleuze detected, is not “external to the repetition: it is an integral part of it, the constituent part, the depth without which nothing would repeat on the surface.” Johnston perceived and identified it, the integral part of it, as “awkwardness,” that state in which everything—danced in the flux of now, “self”-contested—*comes alive*.

“Things occur that I did not intend. If I knew exactly what I was doing there would be no point in doing it. What keeps any body of work fascinating is

what develops by doing it.” Sturtevant was addressing what happens in her work—the distance of her procedures from any kind of “re-aestheticizing.”

The artist knew just how volatile her repetitions could be. After the hostilities surrounding *The Store of Claes Oldenburg* (the artist was physically attacked by locals the day before she opened it; Oldenburg was ready to “kill” her for doing his own Store so totally, and just around the corner from the address where his had been), she stated that her intention was to “engender polemics.” And there is a visceral rhetorical force felt in the retort Sturtevant delivered to those



Sturtevant, *Blow Job*, 2006, still from a three-channel color video, 1 minute 30 seconds.

misconstruing the consequence of her pursuit: “There is a difference between probing originality and saying it is the death of originality. You’d have to be a mental retard to claim the death of originality.”

While paying “belated tribute to some artists”—Allan Kaprow, Al Hansen, Anna Halprin, and Carolee Schneemann, among others—“who’ve consistently strained artistic credibility (whatever that is) in dumping their mud pies on the last clean shirt,” Johnston would recall “Rainer’s brilliant hemorrhage of screaming in *Three Seascapes* (a choreographer was born).” Finally figuring out the screaming, she hears particular embodiments of the feminine: menstruation and obstetrics (“a choreographer was born”). At the time she wrote her belated tribute, it is screaming that Johnston (more than likely) would have most recently heard Sturtevant, not Rainer, release. Don’t run away from the fact of this vocal rupture, this state of excess, however crucially untethered or disturbed by Sturtevant’s *Study* (for which she “wisely abbreviated” the scream)—but try not to mishear it. Engendering polemics doesn’t preclude aggressiveness or evade the consequences of gender—even if the artist’s project is not limited or reducible to such conditions. Rather than questions of femininity or feminism per se, Sturtevant opens a dossier on the polemics of engendering, its fraught relation to being, becoming, identity, and selfhood. Unlike what Johnston determines as Rainer’s determining hemorrhage, the screaming in the final part of Sturtevant’s *Study* is pitched indeterminately: Does it resonate as battle cry or groan of frustration, cry for help or cri de coeur?

Polemics were heated during the year Sturtevant undertook her *Study*, and it would be convenient to let contextual circumstances assuage the problems of what might have been heard when she screamed. But however convenient, it mistakes the force of Sturtevant’s intention to hear it as feedback to or protest against the Vietnam War or as an echoing response to Sturtevant’s beating the day before the opening of *The Store of Claes Oldenburg*, which happened a little more than a week prior to receiving, via postcard, Rainer’s instructions not to despair but to “keep working.”

Instead, see that in slow motion, across the course of a year, 1967, and against the double negatives of the *Relâches*, Sturtevant cleaves the everything of *The Store of Claes Oldenburg*, her virgule consisting of the *Study for Yvonne Rainer’s “Three Seascapes”*—

but the climax of her *Study*, unlike Rainer’s own *Three Seascapes*, was not centered by the diagonal undulations of a “sexy, crippled, possessed, audience-be-damned, nothing-to-lose, shameless, female critter”; not centered either by the “self” or the “feminine” or something as effective and awkward as a woman doing *female impersonation*. Rather, her dance disturbed because nothing about gender, about any “female critter,” was being reified, but liberated into its unknowable, simultaneous multiplicity.

SOME THINGS remain beyond any articulation, but sometimes you have to scream just to be heard. While the dance solo of *Study for Yvonne Rainer’s “Three Seascapes”* might have made a new multiple mode of “self” visible, dancing for all to see, it was only another movement in Sturtevant’s ongoing drive “to articulate visibilities: to make thought visible,” whirling all of it on “the question of invisibility” and “a way of using the mind,” as the artist wrote in a letter to Virginia Dwan. Ignoring parallels of style or sensibility like those on which many critics insisted, Sturtevant, instead, by repetition, danced a dance: paradoxically, performing something weirdly vitally her own, fresh-footed; availing repetition for nothing repetitive; abandoning the known for a tango with all that’s not.

Deleuze would be the first to Labanotate what she performed:

A single and same voice for the whole thousand-voiced multiple, a single and same Ocean for all the drops, a single clamour of Being for all beings: on condition that each being, each drop and each voice has reached the state of excess—in other words, the difference which displaces and disguises them and, in turning upon its mobile cusp, causes them to return.

Knowing the dance allowed her to put it all out to sea.

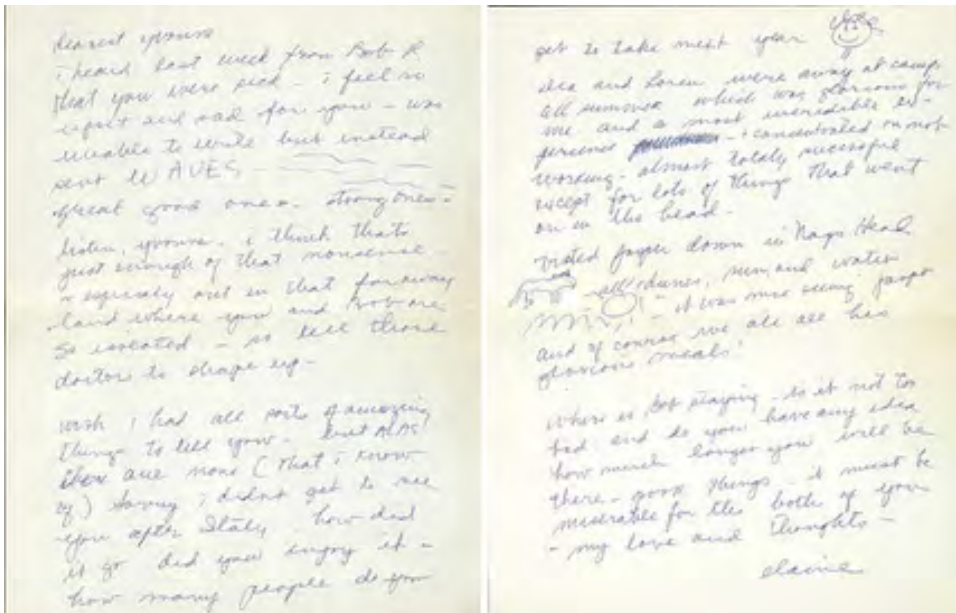
CUE STURTEVANT.

Dearest Yvonne

I heard last week from Bob R. that you were sick—I feel so upset and sad for you—was unable to write but instead sent WAVES ≈ ≈ ≈ ≈ ≈

Great good ones—strong ones—

Listen, Yvonne, I think that’s just enough of that nonsense—especially out in that faraway land where



Letter from Sturtevant to Yvonne Rainer, 1967.

you and Bob are so isolated—so tell those doctors to shape up—

Wish I had all sorts of amazing things to tell you—but ALAS there are none (that I know of) Sorry I didn't get to see you after Italy—how did it go did you enjoy it—how many people do you get to take next year [smiley face]

Dea and Loren were away at camp all summer which was glorious for me—and a most incredible experience—I concentrated on not working—almost totally successful except for lots of things that went on in the head.

Visited Jasper down in Nags Head [drawing of horse or unicorn]—all dunes, sun and water [drawing of sun and water]—it was nice seeing Jasper and of course we ate all his glorious meals!

Where is Bob staying—is it not too bad—and do you have any idea how much longer you will be there—poor things—it must be miserable for the both of you

—my love and thoughts—

Elaine

Bruce Hainley is a contributing editor of Artforum. His book on Sturtevant, *Under the Sign of [sic]*, is forthcoming from Semiotext(e).

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

ARTFORUM

INTERVIEWS

STURTEVANT

Sturtevant talks about her exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville

February 26, 2010



Left: Sturtevant, *House of Horrors* (detail), 2010, mixed media, dimensions variable. Installation view. Right: View of "Sturtevant," 2010. Clockwise: *Finite Infinite*, 2010; *Duchamp Ciné*, 1989; *Gonzalez-Torres Untitled (America)*, 2004. Photos: Pierre Antoine.

The renowned Paris-based American artist Sturtevant has been defying—and fulfilling—expectations for over forty years; the best known of her works push the limits of the copy and the counterfeit through repetition. “The Razzle Dazzle of Thinking,” her exhibition at the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville in Paris, is on view until April 25.

THERE ARE TWO SECTIONS TO THIS SHOW. One is called “Wild to Wild” and contains works from the 1970s to the present, including *Duchamp 1200 Coal Bags* [1972], *Gonzalez-Torres Untitled (America)* [2004], *Vertical Monad* [2008], and *Finite Infinite* [2010]. *Finite Infinite* is projected on a 141-foot curved wall. The other part of the show, which is also a new work, is the *House of Horrors*. It is in complete opposition to “Wild to Wild.”

The house is a classical carnival design, a ghost train. It was fabricated by JES Studio in France. The entrance has gray stones with skeletons and other scary things. When you enter it’s all dark, and you hear screaming, banging, and flying bats. You’ll be scared, and that’s fun.

The carts in the work come from an original house of horror. They are very beautiful, incredible. JES Studio made the automated pieces like the Frankenstein who rises up from his gurney to the sound of great organ music, a dead head that moans and groans, a skeleton that jumps out almost into your cart, and, of course, the wonderful Divine with her doggy in the window. The studio knew other studios that then did the makeup, clothes, sound, lights, and engineering.

O’Neill-Butler, Lauren, and Sturtevant. “Interviews: Sturtevant.” *Artforum*, February 26, 2010.

When you go into the museum, you turn and there are very beautiful steps that lead up to the famous Dufy Room, which I concealed with another new work, *Elastic Tango*, a nine-monitor video. It's intrusive, big, and visual. The monitors are shaped in an inverted pyramid and the videos are devised as a three-act play in a very formal sense: presentation of problem, escalation of conflict, and then resolution without narrative. The resolution is, obviously, simulacrum.

The dynamic force is the razzle-dazzle of thinking.

That's what I did, and that's what it does.

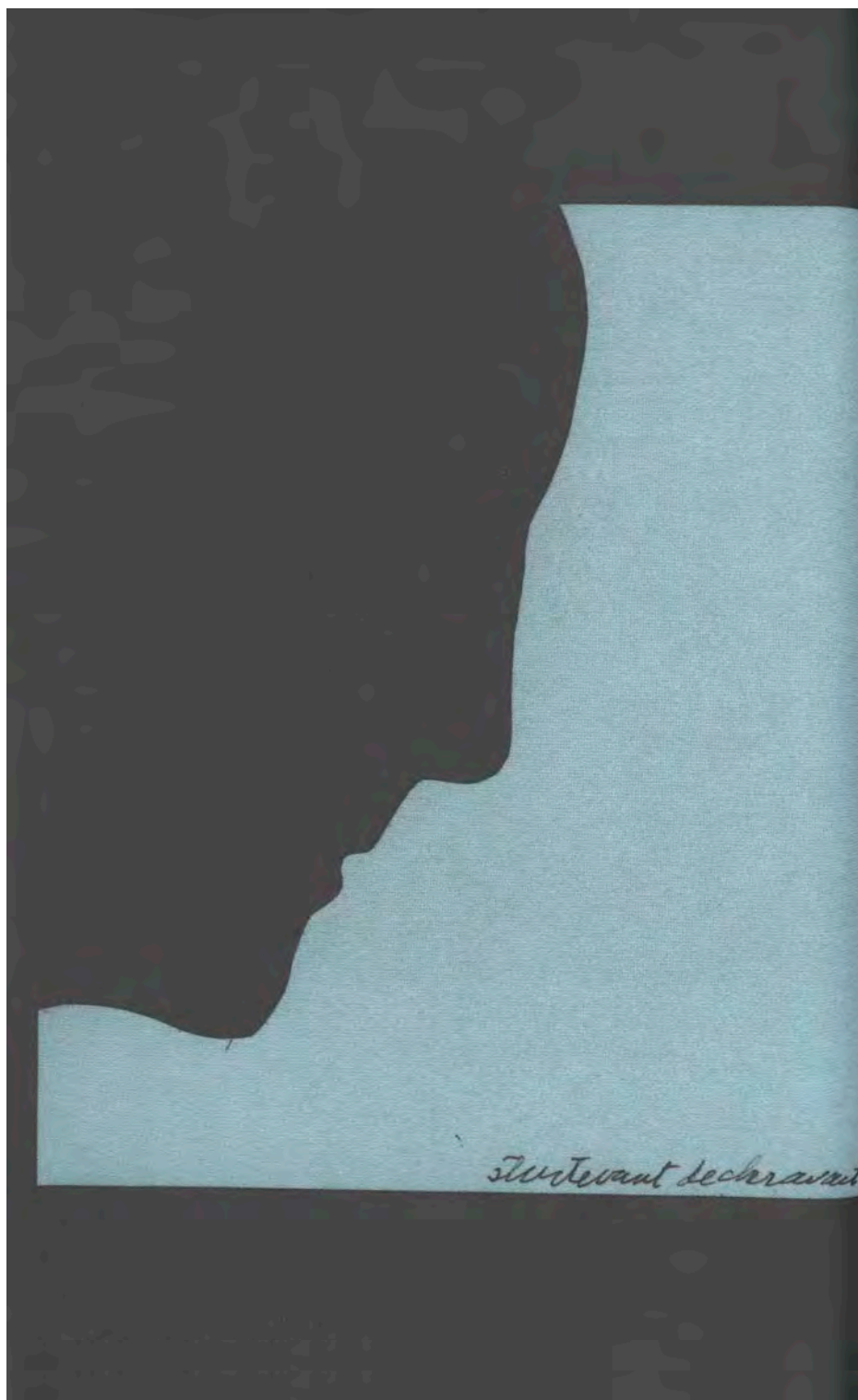
Voilà!

— *As told to Lauren O'Neill-Butler*

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Afterall



Bowring, Belinda. "Sturtevant: On Art and Its Time." *Afterall* 18, Summer 2008, pp. 82–91.

Comebacks are the pastime of fading starlets, nipped, tucked, puffed to perfection and wheeled out in front of a no-longer adoring public in order to win them over once more. They are notoriously hard to pull off, and the cost of failing to invest the old and overly familiar with a lost novelty is high. For that reason, a comeback is usually a one-off, and since success rules out the need for repeat performances, it is not the most likely of activities in which to specialise, excel or even make the means of a career. However, the notion of a comeback can be used to think through Sturtevant's ongoing practice of carefully remaking iconic artworks by an all-male line-up of art stars, including Marcel Duchamp, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Frank Stella and Andy Warhol, which she began in the 1960s – often before these figures gained broader recognition.¹ Taking her 1986 'comeback' exhibition as my point of departure, I will extend the logic of this show so that the tactic of the comeback can be tracked throughout her career, with the aim of demonstrating that a practice that depends on the pre-existing is not necessarily a retrospective exercise but, as in Sturtevant's case, can also be an action oriented to the future.

Sturtevant's famous comeback took place in 1986 at White Columns, New York – her first solo show since her 1974 exhibition at Onnasch Gallery (also in New York) of remakes of works by Joseph Beuys, after which she ceased producing and exhibiting art. In what has become an undeniable allusion to Marcel Duchamp's exchange of art for chess, she has stated that during those years she had dedicated her time to 'writing, thinking, playing tennis and carrying on'.² However, in the manner of her earlier work, this co-option of Duchamp's gesture of removal and return is not a picture-perfect copy of his heroic homecoming; Sturtevant rejected the opportunity to present a masterpiece in the manner of *Étant donnés* (1946–66), and instead offered an almost po-faced presentation of the very same work she was producing prior to the hiatus in her practice: the exhibition included *Duchamp Fountain* (1973), *Lichtenstein But It's Hopeless* (1969), *Warhol Marilyn Diptych* (1972) and *Warhol Gold Marilyn* (1973), all made throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s.³

Although visitors to White Columns were not met by a body of work cosmetically enhanced for that decade of image and excess, Sturtevant's reemergence in the 1980s was regarded as somehow 'timely'. Work that once seemed out of step all of a sudden appeared at the same pace as art made according to what had become mainstream principles. After transposing these works from the 1960s to the 1980s and casting them against a backdrop of appropriation and simulation, Sturtevant's insistence on remaking the work of others did not seem so perverse. The press release that accompanied the exhibition attests to her 'of the moment' appeal: 'Elaine Sturtevant may have

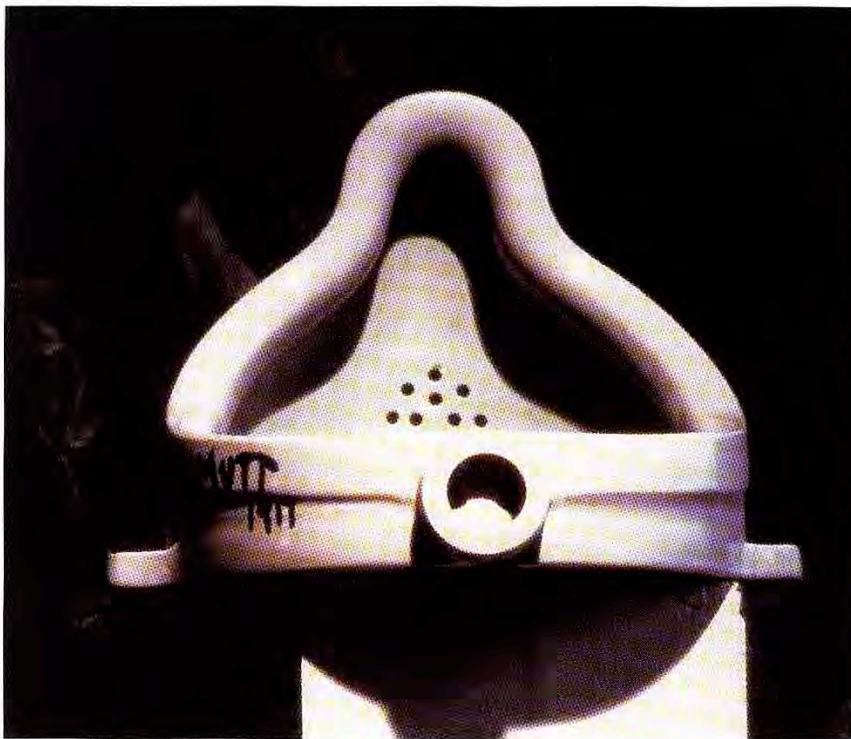
1 Many critics have sought to distinguish the Sturtevant versions from the original source of inspiration by describing how her copies are not exactly the same as their models. See, for example, Donald Kuspit, 'Repeating the Unrepeatable: Elaine Sturtevant's Absolution of Art', in *Elaine Sturtevant* (exh. cat.), Chicago: Rhona Hoffman Gallery, 1990, pp.2–6.

2 'Sturtevant talks to Bruce Hainley', *Artforum*, March 2003, pp.246–47.

3 Although some artists, such as Andy Warhol, were vaguely supportive, hostility increased towards her work, particularly after the remake of Claes Oldenburg's *Store* (1961–62) in April 1967, a few streets away from his original outlet. The work was met with fierce animosity from Oldenburg himself, who had previously supported her practice. See Bruce Hainley, 'Erase and Rewind', *frieze*, June–August 2000, pp.82–87.

been the first postmodernist intruder on the American scene [...] her ideas seem of particular historical importance.⁴ Indeed, her co-option of the role of the commentator as her own, in which she has always already consumed the object under scrutiny, hinders any attempt to account for the object itself.⁵ In her 1966 exhibition at Galerie J in Paris, the gallery door remained locked for the duration of the exhibition, inside of which her *Wesselmann Great American Nude* (1966) was propped up against a wall and *Lichtenstein Crying Girl* (1966) was upended rather than hung in a conventional manner. Yet despite literally distancing the viewer from these works, her practice was not an exercise in alienation, for these works were not seen anew; rather, the commentary she provided spoke back as a dissenting voice.

Indeed, a comeback is also the ultimate retort, and, in a textbook example of *l'esprit de l'escalier*, Sturtevant's response to the criticism that led to her withdrawal from the art world came to her only latterly. While generally a time-lag thwarts the opportunity to deliver a killer comeback, it worked in Sturtevant's favour. 'Fortunately the appropriationists were hanging out at the time, which gave me a whole new space for potent dialogue. This was very crucial, as it allowed entry into the work by negative definition – a valid, powerful position.'⁶ Despite her acknowledgement of this about-turn in thinking, her words suggest that her practice cannot be abridged in the convenient tag of precursor, as her work calls into question the very structures that such chronological



Duchamp Fountain, 1917, ready-made turned upside down (urinal), white porcelain, acrylic paint, 32.3 × 40.5 × 45.6cm

designations depend upon. It is often noted that, rather than reaching back into the annals of art history for her source material, she remakes work at the point of its production, pointing towards the years of half-light in the life cycle of an artwork (however, these observations do not account for the recurrence, time-lag and delay that she puts in motion). Claes Oldenburg's *Store* (1961–62), for example, was reproduced six years after Oldenburg's installation. Sturtevant's practice finds work that is actually lying in wait, between its first flush of youth and its ascension to art-historical elder. But by intervening in that moment of indeterminacy she voices a scepticism towards any conventional historical framing.

4 Quote from the press release published to accompany the exhibition at White Columns, New York, 1986.

5 See Antony Hudek, *Invisible Painting: Pictorial Mimesis at Work, New York 1976–1986* (unpublished doctoral thesis), London: Courtauld Institute of Art, 2005, p.144.

6 'Sturtevant talks to Bruce Hainley', *op. cit.*, p.246.



Cover of *Sturtevant: Drawings 1988–1965*,
New York: Bess Cutler
Gallery, 1988

WANTED



\$2,000 REWARD

For information leading to the arrest of George W. Welch, alias Bull, alias Pickens, etcetry, etcetry. Operated Bucket Shop in New York under name HOOKE, LYON and CINQUER Height about 5 feet 7 inches. Weight about 120 pounds. Complexion medium, eyes same. Known also under name RROSE SÉLAVY or **STURTEVANT**

*Duchamp, Wanted,
1969, corrected
readymade, 32 x 24.8cm*

Not only did simulation return attention to Sturtevant's practice in the 1980s, it also had the less desirable effect of restricting discussions of her work to simulation's own terms. However, mobilising the concept of a comeback opens an alternative narrative in the strategy of remakes, freeing Sturtevant's work from its associations with appropriation – and, by extension, from a reading of it as criticism of amnesiac methodologies that sever items from their origin. Jean Baudrillard diagnosed the tendency to depend upon historical examples as a 'retro scenario' in which 'all history is resurrected in bulk' and where 'a controlling idea no longer selects, only nostalgia endlessly accumulates';⁷ Sturtevant's practice provides a counterpart to this indiscriminate rehabilitation. The artworks she remakes are always iconic for their time or style, as she herself has stated:

*In order for the work to function you had to recognise the work immediately [...] You had to know who that particular artist was. So of course you'd take these painters who had very strong images, and they'd function for me.*⁸

The bottle-blonde comic-book heroine of *Lichtenstein But It's Hopeless* is unmistakably Roy Lichtenstein's, yet the fit of despair into which she has thrown herself, the portentous tear welling in her eye and the primary colours delineated with a fat black outline are not – they are the stock-in-trade of popular culture and Pop art alike. By using a work that is not only familiar to the viewer but which also trades in the imagery of commercial culture, she can rest assured that its content has always already been consumed. Rather than investing these forms with new meanings, associations and inferences, Sturtevant opts to push the viewer's focus beyond that of representation. Accordingly, the work does not provoke in the way an 'original' might. The slow curl of excitement that obscurity tends to bring about is not offered, but neither is it done away with; instead, that tug of intrigue is located elsewhere, someplace almost beyond reach. Sturtevant describes this process as 'the immediacy of an apparent content being denied'.⁹ Not being the Lichtenstein that it appears to be, *Lichtenstein But It's Hopeless* counteracts that 'apparent content' so that the spectator's attention is not held by the internal relations or surface of the object but by its conceptual identity, and pushes the viewer to examine where meaning can reside (if not in representation).

Instead, she shifts the focus of her viewers' attention to the contexts of the works, both geographical and temporal. Whilst her return cannot be seen apart from 1980s New York, her logic of production is chronologically promiscuous. By effecting a temporal shift, coming by way of going back, she employs the past in the service of the future. The predominance of Pop as Sturtevant's point of departure directs us to work that speaks definitively and succinctly of 'the 1960s'. Yet she proposes that the work is neither reducible to nor best understood in terms of those historical and cultural relations. Although appearing the same as its prototype, *Warhol Gold Marilyn* (1973) effortlessly shrugs off the previously indelible marks of its era; the violent shocks of pink, blue and yellow almost float free from the inferences they previously held and in so doing almost obliterate the likeness of the iconic film star, so that the fate of this work is newly up for grabs.¹⁰ The glossy ground of gold accentuates the surface of the work, reducing the Marilyn portrait at the centre to a series of colours that are ripe for consumption yet acid, bitter but ultimately irresistible. She makes the work come back in such a way that it speaks of an entirely different duration to the one suggested by the commercialism for which both Marilyn Monroe's image and Andy Warhol's technique act as shorthand today. Sturtevant's work demonstrates that capitalism brings about a specific notion of time, one that reduces it to a synchronised system that allows for

7 Jean Baudrillard, 'History: A Retro Scenario', *Simulacra and Simulation*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994, p.44.

8 Dan Cameron, 'A Salon History of Appropriation with Leo Castelli and Elaine Sturtevant', *Flash Art*, Nov–Dec 1988, pp.76–77.

9 Quoted in Bernard Blistène, 'Label Elaine', in Udo Kittelmann and Mario Kramer (eds.), *Sturtevant: The Brutal Truth*, Frankfurt a.M. and Ostfildern-Ruit: Museum für Moderne Kunst and Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2004, p.37.

10 Sturtevant produced three *Warhol Gold Marilyn*s in 1973. Two of them are monochrome round canvases (cat. numbers 176 and 184). The one discussed here is a portrait-shaped canvas with Marilyn's portrait at the centre in blue, pink and yellow, with a gold background (cat. number 188). See Lena Maculan (ed.), *Sturtevant: Catalogue Raisonné 1964–2004*, Frankfurt a.M. and Ostfildern-Ruit: Museum für Moderne Kunst and Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2004, pp.87, 89 and 90.

an efficient, mechanised, working world. Yet the instantaneous efficiency of capitalism, which divides life into the homogenised units of minutes, hours and days, is simultaneously rendered inadequate by her *Marilyn*, as it resists the immediacy of consumption that such a system involves. Sturtevant takes Warhol's *Gold Marilyn Monroe* (1962), a work that is definitively 'of its time', and demonstrates how its persistence attests to an entirely different temporality that literally runs rings around both the conceit of historical trajectory and the homogenisation of time itself. It burns through its history as if it couldn't be left in the 1960s, and simultaneously retains a currency that can never be spent. By remaking a work from the year of Monroe's suicide ten years after and then re-showing it again in 1986, Sturtevant conjures a time that is not composed of regular units but that reflects the vagaries of history. The recurrence of *Warhol Gold Marilyn* in different decades brings together disparate moments, and the consequent fluctuations of memory and perception flood the work until it can no longer be reduced to any particular date – and until the viewer is able to intuit alternative organisations of time.

One sense of time that Sturtevant does not dispense with is that of memory – her own. She uses catalogues only to check the size and scale of work, and declares that her working process is one of 'summoning with sufficient intensity the memory of

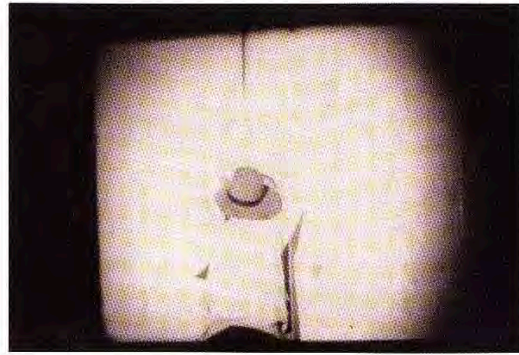


images viewed in order to be able to recreate and invent them'.¹¹ This might suggest that Sturtevant's glance is always a backward one – the front cover of a 1988 exhibition of drawings at Bess Cutler Gallery, for example, features the always convivial *Lichtenstein Laughing Cat* (1988) emblazoned with the dates of Sturtevant's career reversed: 1988–1965.¹² Yet retrospection has a finality that, in Sturtevant's world at least, is always off-limits: 'Nobody wants a retrospective; once you've had a retrospective you're done.'¹³ Sturtevant is anything but done – she finds use in fabric others would find exhausted, blank and wrung dry of any potential. If her objects speak in terms of a return it is to goad us to revisit the prospects the works conjured at their point of conception. *Duchamp Fountain* has the look but not the feel of its more famous counterpart, as it manages to

11 Quoted in B. Blistène, 'Label Elaine', *op. cit.*, p.37.

12 *Sturtevant: Drawings 1988–1965*, New York: Bess Cutler Gallery, 1988.

13 Sturtevant speaking on the panel discussion 'Custodians of Culture – The Museum: Institutions of Market or Measure?', Frieze Art Fair, London, 12 October 2007.



*Study for Various
Beuys Films, 1971,*
black-and-white film,
Betacam SP, 30min

Warhol Gold Marilyn,
1973, synthetic polymer
silkscreen and acrylic
on canvas, 211 × 145cm

evade the reams of writing on the readymade that intervene between us and Duchamp's object. *Duchamp Fountain* refuses to fit into the opportune hole to which it has been assigned; it awkwardly bulges beyond those confines, forcing us to notice what has been shaved off by the generalising effects of history. Sturtevant reverses the tactic that Duchamp introduced by holding hostage not an everyday object but an artwork, and in so doing she scrutinises the particularity of the art object itself. She cannot re-present the original object, but rather her remaking is a means of investigating how and why these particular artworks have taken hold of our consciousness so firmly. In *Difference and Repetition* (1968), Gilles Deleuze writes that memory is not simply about the past, but about a past that is caught up in the present, intertwined with and orientating the now in a way that is not immediately apparent. Sturtevant has made this project her own by attempting to mine one from the other – the present from the past – by excavating the art object from the web of historical associations that have come to stand in for and before itself. Yet she does not share in Deleuze's all-encompassing enthusiasm for such an enterprise, and instead proposes it as subject to scrutiny. If she renders Duchamp's urinal – the object that speaks most eloquently of art in the twentieth century – up for interpretation once more, this is not to disavow the object's status, as the producer's name is included in the title and acts as an unabashed reminder of its position in art history. Rather, it is to return us to the point of its conception so that we can question whether the trajectory embarked upon by the readymade is the only one that it inaugurated when it

was introduced into art history. Deleuze's description of the synthesis of time as 'the past and the future [that] do not designate instants distinct from a supposed present instant, but rather the dimensions of the present itself in so far as it is a contraction of instants' is entirely dismantled.¹⁴ Instead, the viewer is compelled to re-enter the work and reassess the impact that it made, so that the comeback that Sturtevant stages is not one of Warhol, Marilyn, 'the 1960s' or her own career, but that of every initial encounter with the object and, more importantly, the power contained in that moment.

In this way, the comeback frames a retrospective way of working as neither reactionary nor in thrall to fictions of origin. A comeback is not just a return to the moment of conception but an action that looks to retrieve the power and potential that was encapsulated by that moment. To consider exhibitions by Sturtevant as 'The Best of the Twentieth Century Part I' would mean to imagine her practice as a mere exercise in preservation. Such an approach would fail to acknowledge the way Sturtevant's operation is always orientated towards difference, or, more accurately, the potential for difference. In *Untimely Meditations* (1876), Friedrich Nietzsche draws a distinction between uses and abuses of history on the understanding that we abuse history when we repeat the past in order to remain the same and guarantee continuity. Sturtevant's methodology never comes close to such an abuse; for her it is not a question of amassing material to establish the security of a stable sense of the past. She rejects an archival approach to history in which the more material is added the more secure we are in the knowledge of the past and the better we can build on it. The works she remakes do not consolidate or repeat their time but differ markedly from anything produced previously so that, in order to be understood within the time when they are remade, they force a rethinking of the nature of time itself. To remake *Gonzalez-Torres Untitled (Go-Go Dancing Platform)* (1995) is to remake the creative potential that gave origin to Gonzalez-Torres's piece, reliving the potentialities that once constituted the work. Sturtevant evokes Felix Gonzalez-Torres before his institutional acceptance – that is, Gonzalez-Torres at his most radical and political – and, because of that, her work proves to have a power that creates or alters the direction of time in order to shake off the lassitude of the present. This comeback is not just an example of what Sigmund Freud calls deferred action (*Nachträglichkeit*), for these works have not been repressed by a collective psyche in shock (indeed they are thoroughly ingrained in the our idea of art history). Rather, Sturtevant shares in the disdain that Nietzsche reserved for those who 'no longer let the consequences of an action, but its origin, decide with regard to its worth'.¹⁵ Yet her interest is not in the consequences that have already been played out but those that are yet to be forged, the alternative narratives and durations that her objects bring about. Works can thus no longer be consumed in the same way; presentness of perception and representation is 'thrown out' and the process of engagement literally slowed down. She does not prompt us to search our unconscious for what is already known (although maybe forgotten), but instead ensures that previously trained responses and habits are no longer of service, reanimating the psyche to undertake new thinking rather than delving back into its murky recesses.

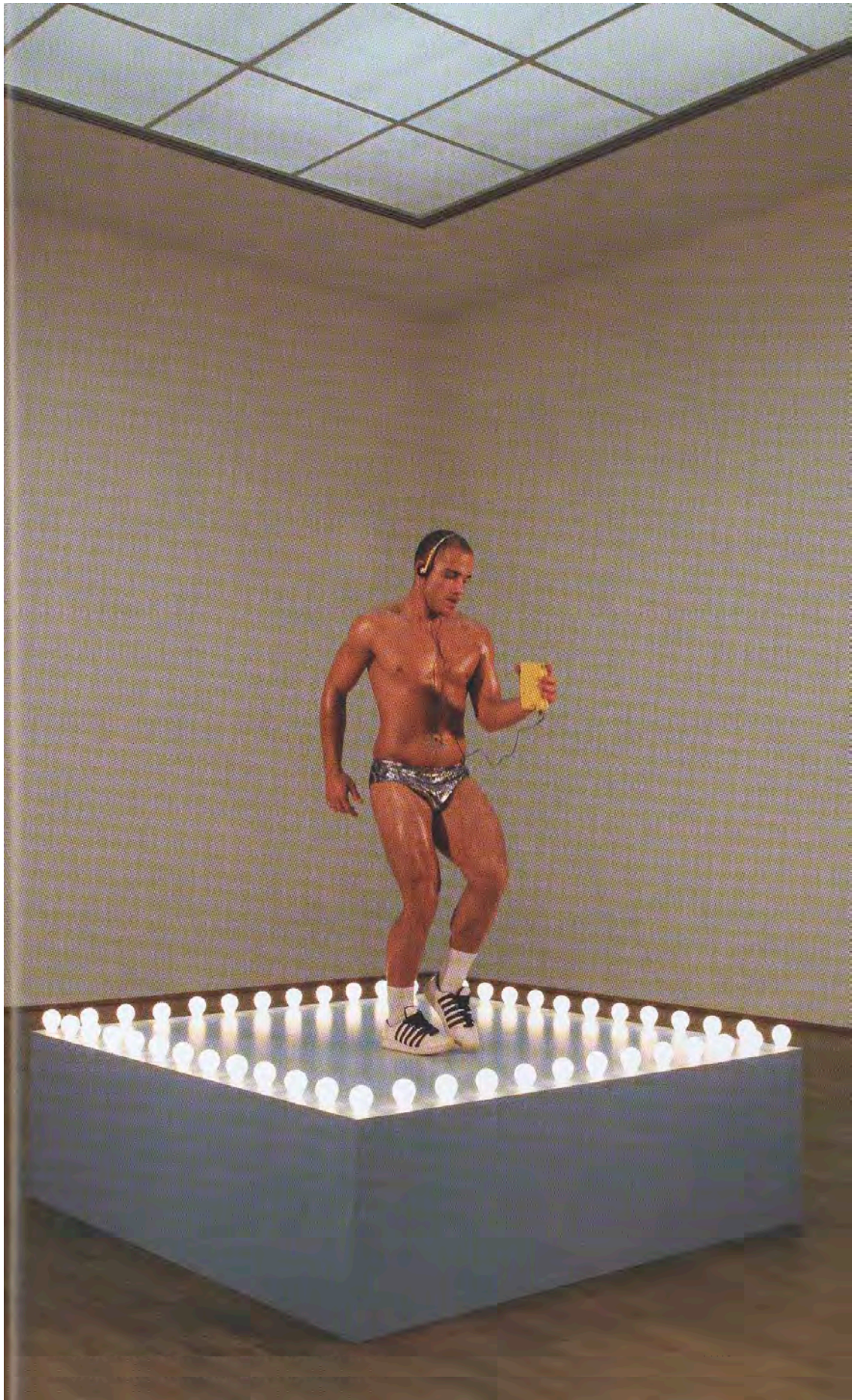
Sturtevant is not that fading starlet who looks to erase the signs of experience; she is the half-time coach who reminds her team of viewers of the deficit in their thinking, challenging them to make a comeback. This time-out slows down the perception of the object so that this delay becomes co-extensive with the time-lag that has taken place in the understanding and appreciation of her practice. The game she plays, however, is not Duchamp's chess – for chess, as Deleuze and Félix Guattari have noted, is 'coded'. The artworks she co-opts (those 'you had to know') can be compared to chess pieces, as 'they have an internal nature and intrinsic properties from which their movements, situations and confrontations derive' – and it is this resemblance that she casts into doubt.¹⁶ What she shows is that it is only in their delayed state that art objects come back to be endowed with relative powers that depend not on the place they occupy or the time when they occur but the time and place that they work to create and the viewers create for them.

Gonzalez-Torres Untitled (Go-Go Dancing Platform), 1995, wood, light-bulbs, acrylic paint, wire and go-go dancer in silver lamé bikini and Walkman, 54.5 × 183 × 183cm

14 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (trans. Paul Patton), London and New York: Continuum, 2004, p.91.

15 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (trans. Helen Zimmern), New York: Dover Publications, 1997, p.24.

16 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (trans. Brian Massumi), London and New York: Continuum, 2003, p.353.



Bowring, Belinda. "Sturtevant: On Art and Its Time." *Afterall* 18, Summer 2008, pp. 82–91.

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523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

Afterall



Hainley, Bruce, and Sturtevant. "Sturtevant in Conversation with Bruce Hainley." *Afterall* 18, Summer 2008, pp. 92–98.

Warhol Black Marilyn,
2004, synthetic polymer
silkscreen and acrylic
on canvas, 40 × 35cm

Sturtevant in Conversation with Bruce Hainley¹

Not eccentric to but working as a centrifugal force amongst the artists who made the American art world of the 1960s and 70s so dynamic, Sturtevant, in addition to landmark solo interventions, participated in important performances by Claes Oldenburg and Robert Rauschenberg, and exhibited her work in key group shows including Gene Swenson's 'The Other Tradition' at the ICA in Philadelphia (1966); the Dwan Gallery's 'Language II' (1967); and the Leo Castelli Gallery's benefit show for E.A.T. (1969). In the 1970s Sturtevant made repetitions of works by Walter De Maria and Michael Heizer; her *Study for Various Beuys Films* (1971) was shot by Robert Fiore, whose involvement was crucial to the completion (and sonic evolution) of Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* film (1970). When she returned to the art world in the mid-1980s, most notably with what was billed (somewhat paradoxically, since Sturtevant has always had little truck with retro-spection) as a 'career retrospective ... curated by Douglas Davis and Eugene Schwartz', she continued to present a radical challenge to the historical-categorical separation of different movements of art (Pop, Conceptual, Land art, institutional critique) while showing art's economic, contextual and social complications.

Sturtevant reveals the total structures working in the interior of art; in other words, her work concerns the inappropriable.

Bruce Hainley:

For your first solo show in England, 'Cold Fear', you put into catalytic tension two *Warhol Black Marylins* (both from 2004), facing off across from your *Duchamp Fresh Widow* (1992).² The works were lit so everything else in the room fell into utter darkness. Coming into the gallery, everyone was almost blinded by the effect. Your 1973 show at the Everson Museum also placed *Warhol Marylins* (1965–73) counter to several of your Duchamps (with Beuys works as a third meaning or component).³

How would you suggest people begin to think about these two exhibitions in relation to one another? In terms of *same* and *difference*? In terms of *reversal* and *power*? The two shows, separated by thirty years, both accomplish something radical, but is it more helpful to think about continuity or rupture? How does recurrence get rewired?

Sturtevant:

The high-tension wire of 'Cold Fear' was created by displacement and the confrontation of space as an object.

This is to articulate visibilities: to make thought visible.

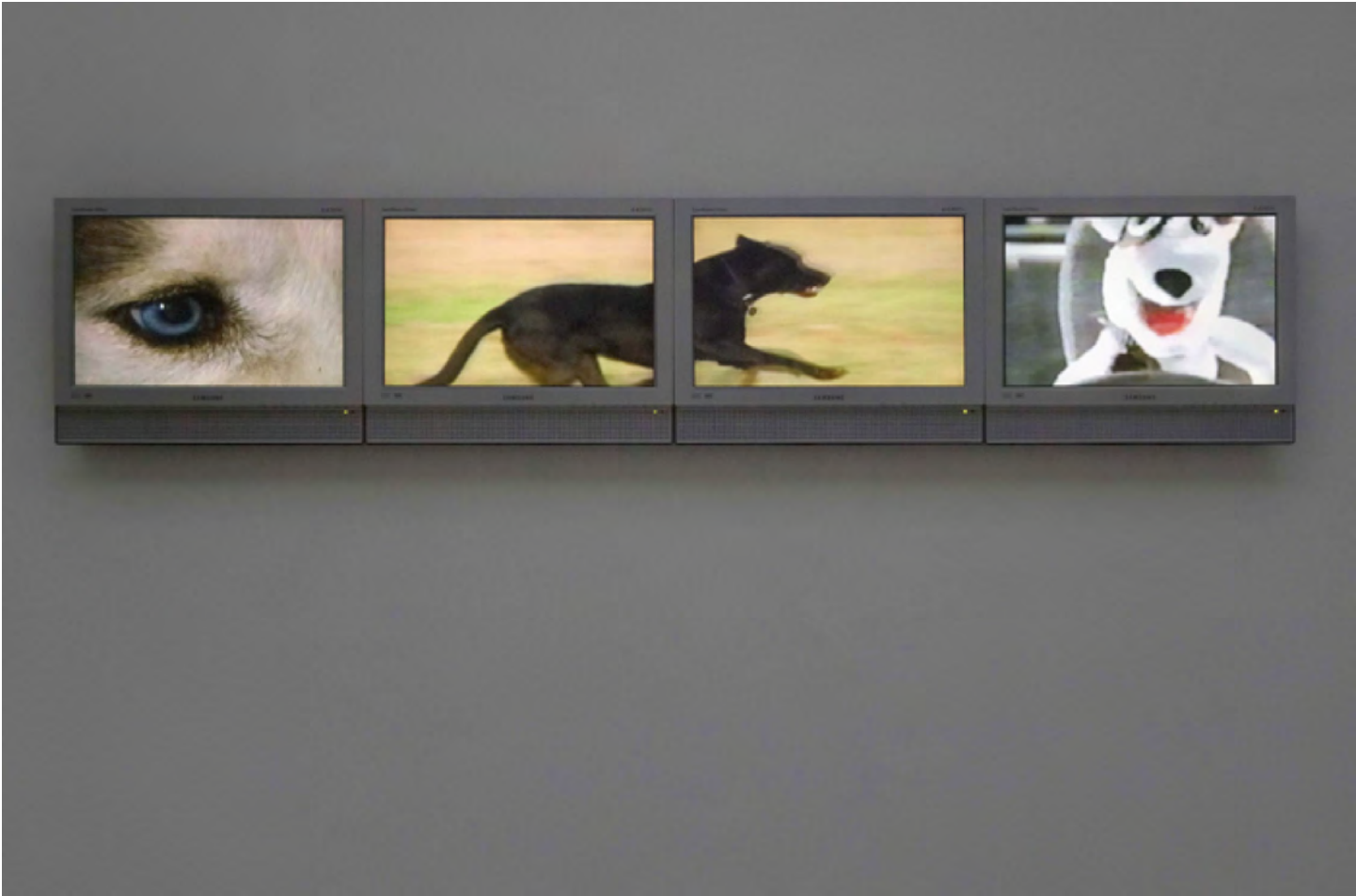
The Everson Museum had four rooms – *Duchamp 1200 Coal Bags* (1973); Beuys fat/felt sculptures (1971–73); *Warhol Marylins*; and the last room containing the films *Duchamp Nu Descendant un Escalier* (1967/68), *Study for Various Beuys Films*,

overleaf
Infinite Exhaustion,
2007, video installation,
4 monitors, Betacam
SP PAL

¹ This interview resumes a previous conversation between Sturtevant and Hainley, which was published in *Artforum* in March 2003, pp.246–47.

² At Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London, 2006.

³ 'Sturtevant. Studies for Warhol's Marylins, Beuys's Actions and Objects, Duchamps's, etc. Including Film', Everson Museum, Syracuse, NY, 1973.



Hainley, Bruce, and Sturtevant. "Sturtevant in Conversation with Bruce Hainley." *Afterall* 18, Summer 2008, pp. 92–98.

Warhol Empire (1972): it is pushing disparity and repetition to force the radical ejection of representation.

This is to trigger thought.

Both exhibitions are the rupture of continuity, leaps and dark crevices – with the running thread of conceptual movement forward.

The difference of underlying structure stems from the reversal of hierarchies that cybernetics has forced into potent and dangerous modes of being. ‘Cold Fear’ is image over image. The Everson show is concept over object.

Note: The current speed of our digital world has shifted the object to its own representation; to the vast violent absence of image as object.

BH: Some parts of your answers are speeding right past me, so let me rewind – not to erase but to clarify!

Rupturing continuity marks a key Sturtevant mode.

‘Raw Power’ was your most recent show at Thaddaeus Ropac in Paris.⁴ There was a work in the show that many people would recognise as having a relation – perhaps even continuity?! – with what ‘Sturtevant’ means for most: *Gober Partially Buried Sinks* (1997). Your Gobers remain more ominous and funereal (venerable?) than Gober’s. But there were other works – *Hate Kill Falsity* (2006), which summoned Abu Ghraib, and *Infinite Exhaustion* (2007), which showed a dog endlessly racing across four monitors – that many might not see as ‘Sturtevant’s’: seemingly, the repetition unleashed from a stabilised artistic referent (‘Gober’) operates on another level and/or in another way. I can begin to comprehend ‘Cold Fear’ as image over image more easily than ‘Raw Power’. Could you talk about the relation between those two shows and how your work jettisons the referent?

Oh, also, is the best catechism for cybernetics Paul Virilio, or walking into the Apple Store to ogle the new MacBook Air? I notice that Rome has an Apple retail outlet before Paris. Strange, *n’est-ce pas?*

S: Implicit in conceptual thinking is development of thinking. Thus we go: from objects to grabbing the dynamics of movement in film; from jetting representation to strangling cybernetics’ tight hold on our mode of being; from object to shifting mental structures; from hate as specific to the hard-core game of hate killing; from truth glued to concealed falsity.

Infinite Exhaustion is time-movement and image-movement to reveal our digital world of excess, limitation, transgression and exhaustion. As for continuity, it is dismal identity and the demon of Same.

BH: ‘Dismal identity’: this leads me to ask another kind of question. You have, from the start of your career, resisted biography. Sturtevant’s air force deploys only stealth jets from an undisclosed location. Your resistance to the biographical throws light upon how often biographical information structures how art is considered, written about, sold or even stands in for the ‘object’. People have come to expect this kind of information – as if a picture of the artist were more important than a reproduction of his or her work. Of course, as finite beings, we are all accidentally delivered into the moment of our birth, so history impinges upon us. Could you say something about your stance? And does your resistance have anything to do with your move into writing? It is only after your infamous return, after more than a decade’s hiatus, with the show at White Columns that you start doing interviews and writing not only about your work but also about others’ (i.e. Duchamp, Paul McCarthy, etc.).

⁴ ‘Raw Power’, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris, 2007.

S: Not really. Also not really about other artists.

BH: So you would say your essays, rather than being about other artists, are about ... art? The contemporary situation? Man's plight?

S: Think we have some confusion here.
I don't write about other artists.
Never wrote about other artists.
Initial writing was not about 'art' but rather the understructure of art: the silent power of art.
And pushing to create vast new space for thinking.
Never is the writing about specifics.
Rather the disentangling of cyberimpositions.
And the infinite dimensions of shifting mental structures.

BH: How do you see your work being used by other artists? So much of your project unravels artistic teleologies, questions the 'development' of a signature style, challenges ideologies of 'influence', decentres subjectivity. And yet, you demonstrate (deploy?) the artwork as a possibility of and for thinking. It's difficult not to consider that you provide an X-ray image of the system of art. For example, it was as if Roy Lichtenstein was addressing you, when he asked, in the form of a painting: 'What? Why did you ask that? What do you know about my image duplicator?'⁵ You showed him and others what you knew, and then some. But how do you think someone thinking about art – who wishes 'to be' an artist – should use your work?

S: Definitely the work should not be 'used' but rather for confronting the force of the thinking that brings it to a higher level.
Image duplicators, etc. are the power of our thrust to surface and absence, obsessively firing up disastrous interior resemblance.

BH: Would you say something about 'America America'?⁶ How did you know Jeannine de Goldschmidt, who ran Galerie J? How did the show come about? Did you design invitation cards or a poster for the show? The work was all made in France, correct?

S: ... [laughing] This is so no way.

BH: Well, I ask about 'America America' because it would be a powerful title to use right now, although because of completely different reasons. When I first saw the huge banners for your MMK show with the image of your *Johns Double Flag* (1966) and the exhibition's title, 'The Brutal Truth', I thought of the Americanness of those double flags, the dark regression of America under the current administration, and I momentarily read 'The Brutal Truth' as if it was a translation of 'America America'.⁷ How do you think about your work and your thinking in relation to America and Americanness? I remember hearing you correct someone when he referred to you as an 'expatriate', saying it wasn't so despite the fact that you reside in Paris.

S: What a switch. Hip-hopping from abstract to information and explanation is disrupting.
Anyhow, thus, and, because: the premise is that knowledge is not for understanding but for cutting.
Voilà.

overleaf
Duchamp Fresh
Window, 1992, enamel
paint on wood, leather,
glass, brass knobs,
79 × 53 × 13cm

5 Roy Lichtenstein, *Image Duplicator*, 1963.
6 'America America', Galerie J, Paris, 1966.
7 'The Brutal Truth', Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt a.M., 2004.



Hainley, Bruce, and Sturtevant. "Sturtevant in Conversation with Bruce Hainley." *Afterall* 18, Summer 2008, pp. 92–98.

ARTFORUM

'80s THEN

STURTEVANT talks to BRUCE HAINLEY



BRUCE HAINLEY: Before we launch into the '80s, a little back story. When you mounted your landmark exhibition at White Columns, in New York, in 1986, on the heels of your being in Bob Nickas's 1985 show "Production Re: Production," it had been over a decade since your last shows—"Studies for Warhols' Marilyns Beuys' Actions and Objects Duchamps' Etc. Including Film," at the Everson Museum of Art, in 1973, and your Joseph Beuys show the following year. Were you making art during that period?

STURTEVANT: Totally, totally out of the art world from 1974 until 1985 or so. I was writing, thinking, playing tennis, and carrying on. My art, with its burden of being devised by conceptual thinking, was not banging against my head but in silent red alert.

BH: Well, something sounded with the White Columns show! It's hard for me to wrap my head around how thrilling it must have been,

after so long an absence, to encounter your *Warhol Gold Marilyn* [1973] and *Warhol Marilyn Diptych* [1972], your *Lichtenstein But It's Hopeless* [1969] and *Duchamp Fontaine* [1973], and one of your huge Beuys copper-fat-and-felt pieces. How did you decide what to put into that show? How exactly did it come about?

S: That great White Columns show. It happened with the devotion and commitment of Eugene Schwartz, as curator, and the churning openness of Bill Arning, the director. Together we produced a show of high intensity and polemics that jolted and bounced in all directions. Fortunately the appropriationists were hanging out at the time, which gave me a whole new space for potential dialogue. This was very crucial, as it allowed entry into the work by negative definition—a valid, powerful position. Then again, the appropriationists made me a precursor, although refusing to be jammed into that category immediately put me back in hot water. The dynamic difference was that Sherrie Levine, leading the pack, brilliantly used the copy as a political strategy, whereas the force of my work lies in the premise that thought is power. What is currently compelling is our pervasive cybernetic mode, which plunks copyright into mythology, makes origins a romantic notion, and pushes creativity outside the self. Remake, reuse, reassemble, recombine—that's the way to go.

BH: The notorious impresario and curator Christian Leigh was another big supporter of your work. Could you say a little about him?

S: Dear, dear Christian, with his keen and intense face—so clever, so fast, so funny, so bad. He played

Opposite page: Sturtevant with Stella Bethlehem's Hospital, 1968. Photo: Peter Muscato. This page, right: Sturtevant, Study for Stella Getty Tomb, 1968, enamel on canvas, 26 x 32". Bottom: Sturtevant with Eugene Schwartz at White Columns, New York, 1966.

out fantasies in the murky art world that would have played out better on the dramatic stage. He was a supertalented guy, with critical panache, who made twisted turns that sucked him up—and that was that. As for where he is now: Maybe he's a master samurai in Tokyo.

BH: You participated in one of his most extravagant exhibitions, "The Silent Baroque," at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Salzburg, in 1989. How do you think that show, coming at the end of the 1980s, summed up the decade, the good and the bad?

S: The silence in "The Silent Baroque" was not very silent, but the baroque was very baroque. It was an event, a performance, a challenge to spectators—elaborate and much elaborated, all exceeding the frame. It anticipated the turn of the object to description, of concept to narrative, and of subject to content, which has the perverse, simultaneous double trouble of being ahead and being behind.

BH: One of my favorite pieces of yours from the '80s is your plan to repeat Michael Heizer's *Double Negative* [1969–70]. Could you comment on that idea—why Heizer, and why that work? It seems so amazing, so weirdly fitting, that although you got to the point of surveying land out west, the project was never realized. To double *Double Negative*, both negating and non-realizing it, seems one of your most radical gestures.



S: Ah, yes, *Double Negative*. But I did that piece in the '70s, not the '80s. I was probing a repetition that conceals a terrifying paradox: To fold Heizer's piece back on itself, or to fold it forward, is to negate its being, or to bring its being to a higher power. But then financial impediments created a work of art that was more radical than radical—the intent of radical movement.

BH: For some, especially those too young to have lived through the '80s, there's such a glow to the decade—its Day-Glo and neon hues, its slickness and gloss and easy gain. But whatever its glamour, there was something truly amok there, though probably no more amok than now.

S: Well, the big blast of the '80s was the beginning of a not interesting place. Discourse was rhetoric; everyone was fraught with the feeling of money and the loss of parameters. Meaninglessness was posited as the meaning. New was no longer new. The times contained this loud rumble of fraudulent mentality: galleries cheating artists, artists giving paintings to critics and curators in exchange for reviews and shows, and other such dubious actions. But there was dancing at the Mudd Club, hearing raucous, often bad bands at CBGB's, snorting in the toilet, shouting over music and dinner—the chic of wine, Pac-Man, money, stars, and hype. It was a kind of buzz that was exciting but not good—heralding the '90s task of permitting cybernetics a full swipe at art.

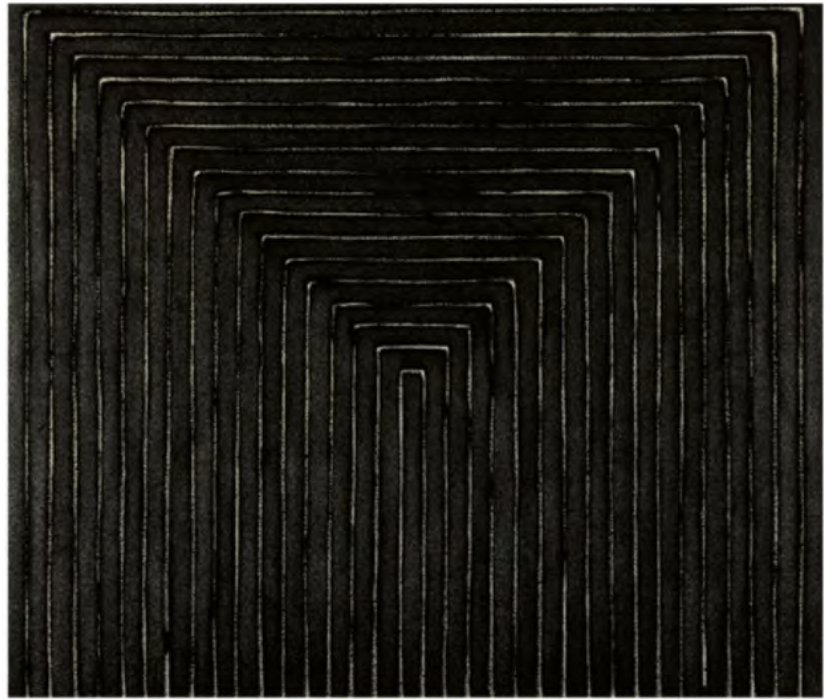
BH: There among the folderol of it all was Warhol. I know you've about had it with *Andy Andy Andy*—have you seen the postage stamp?—but Warhol's one of the few figures who makes a great Nietzschean return in your work in almost every decade. You had encounters with him both before and after he was shot. Could you talk about Warhol in the '80s, as a person and as an artist?

S: As you say, *Andy Andy Andy*. Not everything has been said about him, but everything has been said. Whatever. However. I actually saw more of Andy in the high-tension time of the Factory. Later I had some great encounters of a close kind with this vulnerable and distant-but-there man who desired so much. We met at dinners, openings, parties, clubs. And that was better—once you know Andy, there is not much more to know but a lot more to see.

Once, at his "piss paintings" opening [1986], Andy, his entourage, and a bevy of admirers were standing around outside the gallery. As

I approached, Andy, with his nervous slow-draw smile, asked if I was going to do his “piss paintings” and made some remark about how easy they were to do. S: “Gosh, Andy, definitely would, but I don’t have the right equipment.” AW: “Well Bianca did some. She was really great.” S: “Wow, Andy, I didn’t know Bianca had a dick.” Everyone burst out laughing, but Warhol blushed bright red.

But who is the here-and-now Warhol? All his greatness is being grabbed and tossed away by his being shoved into the rhetoric of copy. He was not making copies, and definitely not repetitions, but rather he was repeating—a crucial difference. Although to repeat is the “same,” the work of Warhol holds



FORTUNATELY THE APPROPRIATIONISTS WERE HANGING OUT. THEY MADE ME A PRECURSOR, ALTHOUGH REFUSING TO BE JAMMED INTO THAT CATEGORY IMMEDIATELY PUT ME BACK IN HOT WATER.

the contradiction that the powerful dynamics lie not in the interior but in a galvanized surface, and it is this surface that pushes the work. And there lies his radical brilliance.

BH: You had a stunning show of black Stellas in Chicago [Rhona Hoffman Gallery] in 1990. For a moment I’d like to figure that show as closing the doors on the ’80s. It also happens to have been one of your last solo shows in the States. Any comment? Would you ever show those works together again? I’ve always wanted to place them—perversely?—with your *Warhol Silver Clouds* [1987]: a powerful opposition.

S: The black Stellas: Not all of them worked, but some of them did, and maybe now all of them do. Always at stake is pushing the silent power of art to create a hovering force and energy that leave the spectator rocking and reeling.

BH: The ’60s. The ’80s. The first decade of the twenty-first century. You started showing when Clement Greenberg still held so much sway; the ’80s would seem to have been his nadir, the years when his reputation bottomed out. And now he’s back—with the constant discussions of “beauty,” he’s never been more in the air. Did you ever have time for Clem, ever

have any personal encounters with him? I ask this in part because some might think of your work as uninterested in formal concerns, as anti-Greenbergian, yet I think one of its real, uh, beauties is the rigor of its form of thinking. Which is to say that I would play the devil’s advocate and say you are a powerful formalist and that your formal investigation is thought as power.

S: Thought as power: the infinite and the finite. Re: beauty—how can you talk about Kant and Hegel, even via Greenberg, when there is no structure to hang it on? No way. And talking about beauty—for those of you who are into cosmetics, remember that thinking ruins the face. □

Los Angeles-based contributing editor Bruce Hainley teaches in the graduate fine arts program at Art Center College of Design in Pasadena.

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

Flash Art

A Salon History of Appropriation by Dan Cameron



Johns 0 through 9 (1965) Courtesy of the Estate of Sturtevant, Paris; and Collection de Bruin Heijn. Photography by Peter Cox

Leo Castelli: Let's pinpoint not my vague awareness of your existence or the fact that we had common friends of great caliber, but when, precisely, was the moment when I really saw your work and when I got interested in what you were doing. Now appropriation, as they call it, is very fashionable. At that time it wasn't. Let's see how I was struck by the fact that here was somebody who was doing, or re-doing in her own way, the work of important people like Johns, Rauschenberg, Warhol, Lichtenstein...

Elaine Sturtevant: ...Stella...

LC: ...Oldenburg, and why?

Dan Cameron: *That's something that interests me too.*

LC: Why did she do it? How did this idea occur to her? At the time it was an incredibly original idea. It was quite amazing, although now you are used to it. At the time when she appeared we were also used to the fact that artists like Marcel Duchamp, for instance, did very extravagant things. I think that some of this spirit was communicated, God knows how, to our friend who sits here, and that she then proceeded to try to do paintings by Johns, or others. I think it was as faithfully as you could do it?

ES: Yes, as close as I could. As exact as possible.

LC: So that, if you didn't know, if you looked at them as close as possible, that this was a work by Oldenburg or Jasper Johns or Andy Warhol.

ES: Yes.



Study for Rosenquist's Spaghetti & Grass (1965-66). Courtesy of the Estate of Sturtevant, Paris. Photography by Adam Reich.

DC: *The scale was identical.*

LC: Now, one thing that struck me there was that she succeeded better in doing the things that were more difficult. You couldn't quite get the spirit of Lichtenstein as you did with the much more difficult spirit of Johns.

ES: Well, you have the question now of imposing energy into something which is so readily transformed. You see now, Lichtenstein is so structured and so graphic in terms of re-doing it. To impose that energy into it is more difficult than when you are working with a more difficult technique.

LC: So anyway, I remember this very clearly, and I wanted on this occasion to state this fact after so many years. So what else can you say? I own a work of yours which is constantly under my eyes. It is the fried egg of Oldenburg's.

ES: In the frying pan. I think maybe that was the first time you actually encountered a whole body of my work, when I did *The Store* with Claes Oldenburg. You came down, and you bought something. You chose the egg and the frying pan.

LC: I saw that there was a difference between yours and his.

ES: There is indeed.

LC: I recognized it. So anyway, you did what you did and you tried to reproduce the thing as best as you could.

ES: Not as best as I could because that implies something different — as closely as I could without copying it. When you copy something it becomes something else.

DC: *I think Duchamp is a good place to start because Duchamp used the example of the Cubists in Paris partly as inspiration, but then his work was a reaction against that. Now, I think of your work as being inspired by the Pop generation, but in a way you were also trying to make further statements...*

ES: I think that's very accurate. There were many factors: Duchamp was of course experiencing tremendous popularity at that time. There were many younger artists who were in great admiration of his work, whereas previously, Duchamp was a background figure, I'm talking in the broader sense...

DC: *One of the many Cubists...*

ES: Yes, and I think that certainly his concern with trying to redefine what we consider art was a very big factor in terms of my own work. But there is also the factor of if you go back before the



Sturtevant (right) at The Store of Claes Oldenburg, 623 East Ninth Street, New York (1967). Courtesy of Dwan Gallery Archives. Photography by Virginia Dwan.

Pop artists, you have the abstract expressionists, who were obsessed with the idea of creating a new imagery, and it was really an obsession to create something new. And then when you had the Pop artists, and they came up with incredibly startling, forthright, dynamic imagery, it was a further step in that direction, but it was still concerned with imagery. That seemed to me rather flat, because it's limiting if you are only involved with creating an image.

DC: *I can think of one artist, Gretchen Bender, who appropriates artists of this moment. In that way, she's somewhat similar to what you are doing.*

ES: Well that came about because in order for the work to function, you had to recognize the work immediately. This is why I would use the same size, the same scale, the same materials, because with the initial viewing of that work, you had to know it was a Johns by Sturtevant. There could be no confusion in your mind that maybe it was someone else, or a de Kooning. You had to know who that particular artist was. So of course you'd take these fantastic painters who had very strong images, and they'd function for me.

LC: There is one point that I want to make here. Weren't you anxious when you were doing this about how your subject would react? Weren't you afraid that they would be very, very angry, even mad at you?

ES: That certainly was a factor. It was kind of terrifying work to do.

LC: I can imagine that.

ES: My first Warhol was a flower, and Andy was aware of my work and gave me the silkscreens, so that was already known. Johns or Rauschenberg, who did not know what I was doing — I kind of operated on the premise that you knew what you were doing, and you knew you were right, and you understood what you were doing, so that it would be eventually comprehended by them. Although, you got various reactions. Dan and I were talking about Claes Oldenburg who was one of my biggest supporters and who theoretically understood the work. Then I did his Store, and he became enraged.



Study for Lichtenstein's Happy Tears (1967-68). Courtesy of the Estate of Sturtevant, Paris. Photography by Christie's Images Limited.

DC: *Because it was different when it was his own work. He felt that attachment.*

ES: But you know, when you have a theoretical and intellectual understanding of something, it's interesting how powerful the emotions can be. He just totally wiped out the idea because the reaction was that strong. In most cases the artists understood intuitively what I was doing and felt strongly that it was right.

LC: But anyway — to come back to the beginning — you did something that was very new and very original. Nobody had done it before, but now it is being done in various ways. Some artists come to mind that perhaps do the thing that you didn't do. They just copy their subjects. Somebody called Bidlo — when you are in front of a Pollock done by Bidlo, you really are fooled, you think it's a Pollock. That's something a bit different. Is it copying? He does it so well, it goes beyond copying.

ES: Yes, that's a possibility.

LC: Then another one who did something quite amazing, also incredibly well, that went beyond the original artist's work, though not because of Pollock in this artist's case, is Philip Taaffe, when he did those paintings of Bridget Riley. What he did was obviously inspired by her work, but I should say that Bridget Riley never did paintings that looked as good as his.

DC: *Exactly, they looked the same but they felt completely different.*

ES: That sometimes happens to me. People will say that a work looks better than the original. Then I say, that's totally wrong, its not supposed to be better. Believe me, that's way off the mark.

LC: Well I don't think Philip Taaffe wanted to do paintings that were better than Bridget Riley. He just thought that he had found something that was an interesting approach to doing not exactly trompe l'oeil — the great master of this was Vasarely.

DC: *Are you still working with contemporary figures?*

ES: I never like to talk about what I am currently doing. There are many reasons, but mainly I feel that if you talk about it, you take away a lot of the energy.

DC: *I do want to get on to the idea that appropriation is perhaps in many ways an extension of Pop. A lot of appropriation artists actually had their beginnings in conceptual art, but they acknowledge that Pop was their biggest influence. I know both Mike Bidlo and Sherrie Levine have talked about Warhol and the immense influence his work had on them. I think that what you are doing, and what you were doing in the 1960s, has something to do with Pop.*

ES: Definitely.

DC: *Can you talk about that relationship?*

ES: I think it has to do with the concern for imagery. And that enormous feeling that you had to somehow manipulate a painting, or in terms of Stella, to manipulate what a canvas was, what shape a canvas could be. Those are all the steps to changing our idea of what is beautiful and what is art. With the stronger artists, like Lichtenstein, Warhol or Rosenquist, who were so bold and so clear, it was immediately visually consumed. You didn't have to ponder, you didn't have to talk about painting techniques. It was just there and it could be consumed almost immediately. But it did have the same involvement with the object or with the content of the imagery. I found that a little dull. I don't mean dull in the sense of boring, I mean there had to be a wider place to go than either the concern with manipulating the stretcher or changing the concept or the idea of what was beautiful. It seemed to me to be limiting. There are a hundred million ways you can do that.

DC: *You were describing how Pop seemed concerned with the image and you were going to connect it to your interest in the image.*

ES: Prior to Pop art the abstract expressionists were obsessed with imagery. Then you had Pop art, which came through with this fantastic, bold, immediately visible imagery. Then you had people like Stella who were taking canvases and putting them in different forms. I wanted to paint in ways that involved different images and issues.

DC: Those issues being?

ES: Those issues being in terms of the total structure of painting as we know it. For instance, if you are only involved with imagery, this means that the structure of aesthetics is totally stagnant. That is impossible in view of the fact that there are all those theoretical sources which have developed tremendously, so aesthetics themselves had to be changing too. To find a way to use an object that would not present itself as an object, that would at the same time talk about the structure of aesthetics as the idea — that was what I was going for.

Elaine Sturtevant (1924–2014) was an American artist.

Leo Castelli (1907–1999) was an Italian-American art dealer.

Dan Cameron is an art writer and curator. He is Chief Curator at the Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach (CA). He is a regular contributor to Flash Art International.