



PRESS RELEASE

THE FALL OF FRANCES STARK

22th September 2007 - 12th January 2008

Opening on Friday 21th September from 6 pm

open from Monday to Saturday from 2-6 pm, except public holidays

Guided tour > Saturday 10th November 2007 > 3 pm at the Frac - free entry



Catalogue > *Frances Stark : Collected Works*

152 pages, 22 x 28, ill. coul

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The Burgundy Regional Contemporary Art Collection [FRAC Bourgogne] is playing host, for the very first time in France, to a solo retrospective of the West Coast-born American artist, **Frances Stark** (born in Los Angeles in 1967). Titled *The Fall of Frances Stark*, this exhibition describes her approach, between 1993 and today, and brings together some fifty works either belonging to the artist or coming from different collections, public and private alike. Frances Stark's work includes paintings, collages and videos, combined with bits of writings and letters. The artist thinks and rethinks about the artistic process in her writings, questioning the concept and praxis of repetition, reproduction, and accumulation. So in her obsessive and fragile collages, language is forever taking on different malleable forms, producing an unusual oeuvre somewhere between poetry, visual arts and references to her own life.

Through her activities as both artist and writer, in which she invests herself equally, Frances Stark strives to create close links between art and literature. The springboard for this show (presented successively at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, and then at Culturgest in Lisbon) is, incidentally, the publication of a book about her visual works, titled *Collected Works*, complementing the book *Collected Writings 1993-2003* published four years back.

Collected Works has been devised in tandem with the preparation of the exhibition. Frances Stark experiments in this dual project with the difference between reading a text on a wall or in a book, and the difference between touching and seeing a visual work in a book. Far from being a classic monographic catalogue, this book is far more a line of thinking about methods of mediating an artist's work, by way of photographic reproduction, critical writings and any other forms of

commentary. The artist tries to solve the paradox of having to come up with a product based on works that are well nigh impossible to reproduce. The material nature of paper and typography, and the importance of details and the meaning of words mean that it is very difficult to provide access to them in a publication. In this sense, this book is a fully-fledged artistic proposition, made from existing works, in a profusion of reflections, observations, statements and questions, where art and life intersect, as do reality and make-believe, and individual and world.

This book perfectly defines Frances Stark's approach, developing as she does a real written oeuvre, fictional texts and articles about art, while at the same time making visual works. Many artists have written at different periods of their careers, but it is rare to find an artist exploring in such a committed way these two arenas of creation. The intersecting forms between art and writing are very numerous in art history, and Frances Stark is well acquainted with them, at times making reference to them, as she also does to concrete poetry and conceptual art, for example. Underwritten by far-reaching reflection and knowledge of literature and theory, she presents a very delicate oeuvre, awash in lightness and moderation, where thinking and emotion are closely linked together.

This takes the shape of collages on the wall itself, and on different format sheets of paper on which shapes and words are mutually constructed. They are often formed by short sentences coming from different literary sources which she has a soft spot for (Emily Dickinson, Robert Musil, Friedrich Nietzsche, Henry Miller...) and from cultural sources (magazines, advertising brochures,...). Unlike many collages made in the first half of the 20th century, she copies all these words, sentences and letters by hand. This operation calls to mind those mediaeval copyists who appropriated the language, let the text work its way into them, and really understood it through that slow movement of the hand, with thought advancing at the pace of the body. We can sense the pleasure felt by the artist in the perfection of the words she borrows, and the admiration she has for their authors. She gives them a particular scope, her own as reader, which she once again hands on to us, in her collages. Words and things are of equal significance, and they prepare a place made up of subtle exchanges which are both readable and visible. Language demands to be felt, and through its visual arrangement, contact is immediate and physical.

Frances Stark's method is deeply contemporary in the way in which it links together essential thoughts and stories, which are apparently opposed, and no longer have any validity as such in the present-day world. Her references to modernity and its radical practices do not prevent her from referring to her debt to romanticism. There is real lyricism in her evocation of nature, sketched landscapes, forests of lines and sentences, and trees of letters, and in the recurrent presence of animals (monkey, skunk, snail and various birds) as metaphors of man and his fragile condition. But we also find categorization, that well known reflective praxis of conceptual artists, by way of boxes, file cabinets and other computer age symbols, which are at once places for organizing everyday things, including masses of papers and many things in progress, as well as the construction of thought with its "pigeonholes" and its arborescences.

For Frances Stark's line of thinking also includes a great deal of pragmatism. Throughout her works she makes reference to things of life and things inside the household space. In autobiographical form, she imparts her thoughts and reflections with lucidity and at times sadness, as well as distance and wit, with regard to her condition as an artist and the system in which she operates (galleries, collectors). Turn by turn, she refers to the relationship she has with her "profession", her relations to money, and her career, which, far from being purely navel-gazing concerns, encompass conflicts, joys and sufferings which are common to all human beings in today's Western world. Frances Stark's work as a whole might well evoke that quotation from Mallarmé: "...perceiving oneself, simple, infinitely on earth".

Frances Stark's different works come across as small successive forms in an apparent discontinuity, and yet they form a large unit. Through the various scattered features, which give the onlooker/reader free rein in their movements, she describes the distance of the subject from herself and from the world. The surprising title chosen for this show is "The Fall" and below, in smaller lettering, "of Frances Stark". Through her reference to the eponymous rock group, Frances Stark plays with this reference to a tour by a musical group (whence the choice of the poster stuck on a wall to illustrate the invitation), because this exhibition is being shown in three venues, as she also plays with the meaning of the name of the group itself, fall or autumn. She thus has some fun and games with what ordinarily would represent a first retrospective exhibition, the highpoint of a career.

Claire Legrand
Translated by Simon Pleasance

The Fall of Frances Stark is being organized by Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, in association with the FRAC Bourgogne, Dijon, and Culturgest Lisbon. The Burgundy Frac thanks all the lenders.

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