

# MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

## GENERAL IDEA: *P is for Poodle*

April 9 – May 22, 2020

534 West 26th Street & 293 Tenth Avenue, New York

Opening reception: Thursday, April 9 from 6 to 8 PM



**NEW YORK**, March 10, 2020 – Mitchell-Innes & Nash is pleased to present *General Idea: P is for Poodle*, an exhibition of works by **General Idea** (1969-1994) focusing on one of the central motifs in the artist group's oeuvre: the poodle. Spanning two venues, this exhibition brings together three major installations dating from the early- to mid-1980s. Previously exhibited at the Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris as part of General Idea's retrospective in 2012, two of these three works will be on view in the United States for the first time, along with a selection of paintings, drawings and sculptural wall works. A fully illustrated catalogue will accompany this exhibition.

Founded in Toronto in 1969 by AA Bronson, Felix Partz and Jorge Zontal, General Idea were among the first artists to implement media critique and queer theory in their work. For twenty-five years, they created a pioneering and singular practice that addressed the intersection of art and commerce, the role of the artist and the museum, body politics and, later, the AIDS crisis. Using strategies of appropriation, audience participation, humor and irony, they staged performances and created paintings, posters, photographs, installations, videos, magazines and other multiples that together form a kind of meta-spectacle as much as a formal artistic oeuvre. As Bronson has noted, General Idea “emerged in the aftermath of the Paris riots, from the detritus of hippie communes, underground newspapers, radical education, Happenings, love-ins, Marshall McLuhan and the International Situationists....[It] was at once complicit in and critical of the mechanisms and strategies that join art and commerce, a sort of mole in the art world.”

Known for “its wit, pampered presence and ornamental physique,” the poodle arrived into the visual lexicon of General Idea in the early 1980s and quickly became a vehicle by which the group addressed issues ranging from sexual stereotypes to the commodification of contemporary art. However, beyond its use as an agent of subtle yet substantive political and social critique, the poodle also served as a kind of heraldic device—an emblem for the mythology of General Idea and its processes of mythmaking. Through its various incarnations of the poodle, General Idea strived for a metanarrative that skirted the boundaries between artifact and artifice; history and fantasy; truth and fiction.

The large-scale installation *P is for Poodle (The Milky Way from the 1984 Miss General Idea Pavillion)* (1982-1983) will be presented at 293 Tenth Avenue at 27<sup>th</sup> Street. Featuring three poodle mannequins within a dramatically lit stable of bedded hay, it recalls the familiar mise-en-scene of the nativity—the archetypal family unit. Each of the poodles is surrounded by a golden curlicue, suggesting both divine intervention and urination, while a backlit aluminum panel in the background depicts the Canis Major constellation, which appears within the Milky Way. Gilded milking stools, brass buckets and a soundtrack of chanting, drums and audience applause add to the mystery and mysticism.

Also on view at 293 Tenth Avenue, *Firewall* (1985) further draws attention to the mechanics of display. Presented as a recovered wall fragment from the so-called ruins of the 1984 Miss General Idea Pavillion—an

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elaborate but unrealized structure that was, according to a myth promulgated by the artist group, destroyed in a fire, it measures more than eighteen feet long and includes over 200 poodle-embellished plaster bricks painted in yellow and orange hues suggestive of the volcanic fires of Pompeii. Among the plaster tiles, a painting displays three poodles bouncing over an inferno, their curlicues now seemingly pulling them towards the flames, evoking pre-Christian pagan rituals. Embedded baby faces and skulls on its frame are repeated alongside the top and bottom of the wall, referencing Renaissance putto and vanitas—love and death.

The erotic subtext of the poodle is most explicitly explored in *Mondo Cane Kama Sutra* (1984), a cycle of ten large paintings on view at 534 West 26<sup>th</sup> Street. Each depicts three distinctly colored, stylized poodles against a black background, combined and recombined in various sexually suggestive positions. While their round bodies, fluorescent colors and systematic permutations were formal references to the stylized abstractions of Frank Stella's *Protractor* series from the late 1960s, the paintings unabashedly offered a rare, early engagement with gay discourse. The poodles, ultimately, were tongue-in-cheek metaphors for General Idea's own ménage-a-trois, and as such a potential challenge to the cultural ideal of a nuclear family.

### About General Idea

Formed in Toronto in 1969 by AA Bronson, Felix Partz and Jorge Zontal, General Idea has been the subject of several major traveling museum exhibitions: *The 1984 Miss General Idea Pavillion*, Kunsthalle Basel; Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; and the Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal (1984-85); *The Armoury of the 1984 Miss General Idea Pavillion*, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; 49th Parallel, New York; University Art Gallery, California State University, Long Beach; Contemporary Arts Museum Houston; and the Setagaya Art Museum, Tokyo (1968-87); *Fin de siècle*, Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart; Centre d'Art Santa Mònica, Barcelona; Kunstverein, Hamburg; The Power Plant, Toronto; Wexner Center for the Visual Arts, Ohio State University, Columbus; and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco (1992-1993); *One Day of AZT / One Year of AZT*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (1994); Museum of Modern Art, New York (1996); *General Idea Editions: 1967–1995*, The Henry Art Gallery, Seattle; Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, Seville; Kunstverein Munich; Kunst-Werke, Berlin; Kunsthalle Zürich; Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh; and Blackwood Gallery, University of Toronto, Mississauga (2003-2007); *Haute Culture: General Idea | Une rétrospective, 1969–1994*, Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris and Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (2011); *Broken Time/Tiempo Partido*, Fondation Jumex, Mexico City (2016); and Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (MALBA), Buenos Aires (2017).

Additionally, General Idea has exhibited in the Canadian Pavilion at the 40th Venice Biennale (1980) and at Documenta 7, Kassel (1982).

General Idea's work is included in the collections of important institutions worldwide, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia; the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; the Kunsthaus Zurich, Zurich; and the Tate, London, among others.

### About Mitchell-Innes & Nash

Founded by Lucy Mitchell-Innes and David Nash, who previously directed the worldwide Contemporary and Impressionist & Modern Art divisions of Sotheby's, Mitchell-Innes & Nash places exemplary contemporary

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artists within a historical context, revealing a continuity of ideas and aesthetic virtuosity from the Modern era through the present day.

Mitchell-Innes & Nash's renowned exhibition program, in both their Madison Avenue and Chelsea locations, fosters excellence within artistic practice, while forging an informed dialogue between emerging and established internationally recognized artists. From acclaimed surveys of 20th century masters, such as Jean Arp, Anthony Caro, Jay DeFeo, Willem de Kooning, Nancy Graves, Leon Kossoff, Kenneth Noland, Roy Lichtenstein, and Nicolas de Stael, to solo exhibitions of Sarah Braman, Keltie Ferris, Eddie Martinez, Pope.L, Martha Rosler, and Jessica Stockholder, Mitchell-Innes & Nash has proven expertise in both advancing the careers of emerging artists and maintaining the superior standard set by established artists.

**Caption:** GENERAL IDEA, Mondo Cane Kama Sutra, 1984

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**Listings Information:**

Mitchell-Innes & Nash is located at 534 West 26<sup>th</sup> Street in Chelsea

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