

Ulla Wiggen

Visionary Machineries

8 July - 26 August 2023

Galerie Buchholz presents “Visionary Machineries”, our second solo exhibition by the Swedish artist Ulla Wiggen (b. 1942). The exhibition brings together new paintings from the artist’s series depicting human irises (2016–ongoing) with a selection of early works from the 1960s.

In 1963, Ulla Wiggen started to make meticulous gouache paintings on gauze depicting electronic components, circuit boards, and the insides of computers. Although rendered with a quasi-objective accuracy and loosely based on real components, her diagrammatic representations are, in fact, fantastical interpretations; from a technical standpoint, the circuits are incoherent and non-functional. A few years later, Wiggen began using acrylic paints on panels and slowly increased the size of her works. But despite these changes in scale and medium, her content remained firmly within the sphere of technological portraiture.

Toward the end of the 1960s, the character of her painting changed. The motif of the closed circuit was replaced with renditions of receiving entities, including a radio tower, a radar screen, a number board, and finally a sphinx, all framed against a blue sky. “Sfinx” (1969), shown here for the first time since 1974, occupies a pivotal position between her early works and the numerous portraits in open landscapes that she produced thereafter. In these later compositions, figures tend to be pushed to the edge of the painting, with their bodies mostly outside the frame. Their near-disappearance foreshadow Wiggen’s own retreat from her artistic career, which lasted from the mid-1970s until 2012, when her work was included in the exhibition “Ghosts in the Machine” at the New Museum in New York.

This rediscovery prompted Ulla Wiggen to resume painting publicly again, and since then she has continued to shift her focus from the circuitry of computers to the inner mechanics of human bodies. The most recent articulation of this shift are the “Iris” paintings, a series of variations on the theme of the human iris, laboriously painted on circular panels. As the gateway for visual information, the iris occupies a liminal position between the inside body and the outside world. Much like the sphinx in its function as a guardian, it is at once a metaphor for, and an expression of, the concept of the threshold.

Ulla Wiggen took part in the landmark 1968 exhibition *Cybernetic Serendipity* curated by Jasia Reichardt at the ICA London. That same year, she had self-organized the first exhibition of her work at Galerie Prisma in Stockholm. In the following years she participated in various exhibitions, mainly in Sweden and the Nordic countries, before withdrawing from the art field to focus on her practice as a psychotherapist. The 2012 exhibition at the New Museum, curated by Massimiliano Gioni, was followed by the 2013 exhibition of her 1960s paintings at Moderna Museet, Stockholm. In recent years, she has participated in numerous international group exhibitions, including “Electronic Superhighway”, Whitechapel Gallery, London (2016), “The Policemans Beard is Half Constructed: Art and the Age of Artificial Intelligence”, Kunstverein, Bonn (2017), “Vista View”, curated by Caleb Considine, Galerie Buchholz, New York (2019), the 59th Venice Biennale: *Milk of Dreams* (2022), “Worlds of Networks”, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2022), “Party for Öyvind”, Museum Tinguely, Basel and Sven-Harrys Konstmuseum, Stockholm (2022). In February 2024, Ulla Wiggen will have a survey exhibition of her work at Fridericianum in Kassel.

Line Ebert