

The MMK Museum für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt am Main is now staging the first major museum exhibition of drawings by the American Concept artist Elaine Sturtevant (1924–2014). Scheduled to travel to the Albertina in Vienna and the Nationalgalerie im Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin in 2015, the presentation allows a concentrated overview of Sturtevant’s graphic works of five decades.

In the rooms of the MMK 1, a selection of more than one hundred drawings dating from 1964 to the present – and thus from throughout the late artist’s oeuvre – is on display. Among them are eighty drawings here on view to the public for the first time. The intense research and study of Sturtevant’s graphic work carried out in preparation for the show led to the conclusion that the early drawings are the key to understanding her conceptual work. Particularly the so-called Composite Drawings of 1965 and 1966 convey an impression of her radical artistic thought and the status of her work in recent art history.

“Sturtevant’s art is undoubtedly one of the most interesting and exceptional contributions to contemporary art. Although her name goes unmentioned in the majority of art-historical discussions of Pop and Concept Art, her work is essential for understanding both movements. The results of our research on Sturtevant’s drawing oeuvre shed new light on this aspect of recent art history. Planned in close cooperation with the artist, the presentation reveals the high quality, precise craftsmanship and great artistic freedom of her graphic work”, comments Dr Mario Kramer, head of the museum’s collection and curator of the exhibition at the MMK.

A native of Lakewood Ohio, during the 1960s Elaine Sturtevant lived and worked in New York City. In that period she cultivated very close relationships with fellow artists such as Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg. Her first solo exhibition, staged by the Bianchini Gallery in New York in 1965, amounted to a critical commentary on the art world of the time and its marketing strategies, and as such played a key role for the protagonists of American Pop Art. With her reproductive method, Sturtevant followed and expanded on Marcel Duchamp’s oeuvre by taking already existing artworks as her models. The results are “anti-readymades”, for what she created are original “Sturtevants”. As the artist once said about her works: “The emotional and intellectual shock of encountering a known object whose contents are then denied, even if it doesn’t trigger immediate rejection, always causes erratic and bewildering trains of thought. They lead to a loss of balance which promotes thought.”

Sturtevant placed duplicates at the side of her contemporaries’ artworks, exploring the relationship between original and originality in the process. In this way she questioned aura, authenticity, the pressure to be innovative, individuality, unicum and genuineness. Sturtevant adopted “the beauty of

repetition” as her artistic strategy.

Ten years ago, the MMK presented the first comprehensive survey of Sturtevant’s work, devoting the entire museum building to that purpose. Major solo exhibitions of the artist’s work in prominent museums worldwide followed. Three years ago, Sturtevant received the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement at the Venice Biennale, and last autumn she was awarded the Kurt Schwitters Prize in Hanover.

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