

## PEDER LUND

STURTEVANT

27 February 2020 – 2 May 2020

Opening Reception: 27 February 2020, 6-8 pm

Beginning Thursday, February 27, Peder Lund will present works from the iconic *Warhol Flowers* series by the American artist Sturtevant (1924-2014). Sturtevant created one of the most interesting oeuvres in the 20th century. By following a unique approach that consisted of creating stunning repetitions of the artworks of her contemporaries and presenting them consciously as independent works, she questioned the foundations of our understanding of art and her oeuvre confronts us with a fundamental expansion to Duchamp's concept of the readymade. The show includes 19 unique works from the 1970s that have never been shown in Scandinavia before.



While some of her repetitions were essentially exact copies of the artworks she chose to work with, others were recreated manually from memory. Through the artistry of Sturtevant's detailed repetitions, the works she referred to can be easily identified, but their meaning was far from being a simple duplication, as her intention was never to create just a close resemblance, but to explore through her work topics such as authorship, authenticity, and originality. Issues that are of the highest relevance in our digital age, which is defined by the endless stream of images and their recombination.

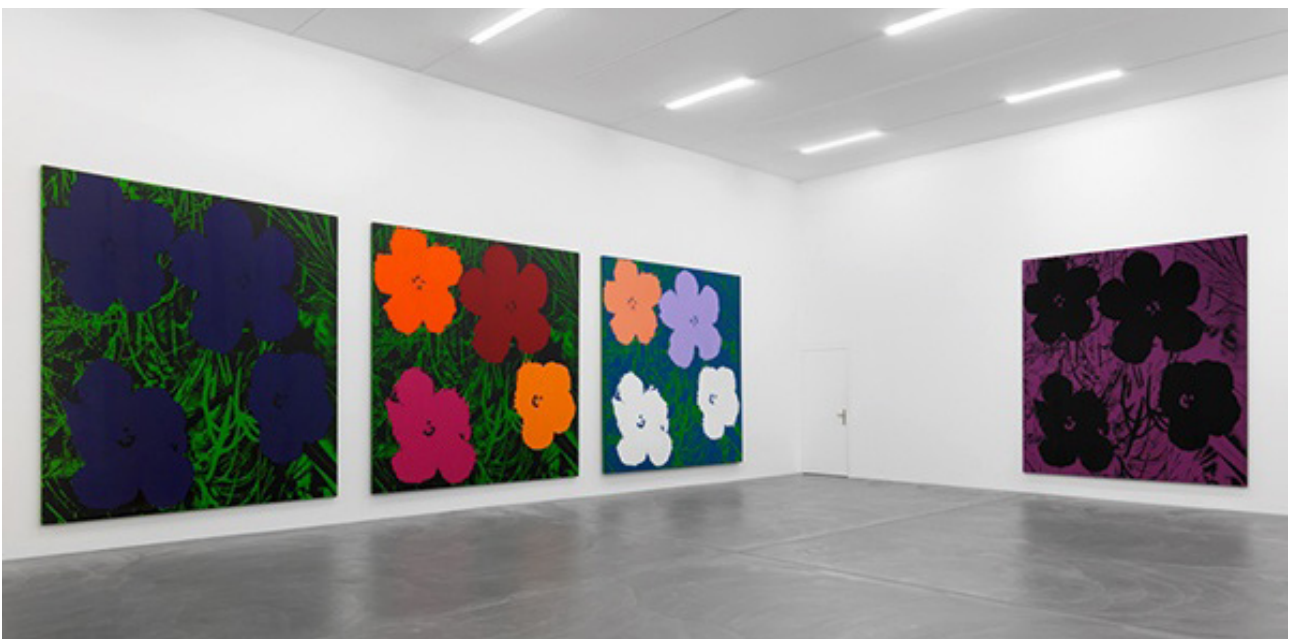
Starting in the early 1960s, Sturtevant created in half a century an impressive body of work that challenged the viewer to look closely and think about the social and historical context of art. During her lifetime, Sturtevant's work was met with much resistance and, similar to other great female artists, her oeuvre was only first truly given recognition in the last decades of her life. Sturtevant began her career in New York, where she studied at the Art Students League, an art school that has been historically known for its broad appeal to both amateurs and professional artists. Among the alumni of this school are many artists who became key figures of Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art, such as Cy Twombly, Roy Lichtenstein, and Robert Rauschenberg. This vibrant environment was an important source of inspiration for Sturtevant's work and some of her fellow students became close friends and sometime collaborators.

Her first solo exhibition at the Bianchini Gallery in 1965 featured her versions of artists' works that we now see as icons of their time. It demonstrated her remarkable ability to repeat important artworks shortly after their creation, and it is clear that Sturtevant had a keen sense for quickly analyzing the qualities of an artwork and its cultural reception. Among the exhibited works were, for example, repetitions of Andy Warhol's silkscreened flowers, which he had only started to produce in 1964 and a colorful, concentric square from Frank Stella's Benjamin Moore series which he had begun in 1961.

While some of her contemporaries were offended, other artists such as Rauschenberg and Warhol encouraged her to create repetitions of their work. Memorably, Warhol replied in an interview, in which he was asked about his process

and technique, "I don't know. Ask Elaine" (B. Arning, "Sturtevant," *Journal of Contemporary Art*, vol. 2, no. 2, Fall/Winter 1989, p. 43). According to Sturtevant, Warhol had given her full access to his factory and allowed her to use the original silkscreen of his flower series. (Peter Eleey, *Sturtevant – Double Trouble*, Museum of Modern Art, 2014, p. 73)

Of course, Warhol's oeuvre is especially linked to Sturtevant's work since repetition, authenticity, and authorship are also key elements of his work, however, his implementation clearly differed from Sturtevant's pursuit, as his quote perfectly illustrates. While Warhol's factory operated under the premise that he delivered the concept of the work to his assistants, who were then responsible for the work's execution, therefore his name became the brand. Conversely, it was of utmost importance for Sturtevant to execute the work herself. Hence, her flower series, for which she used the same technical tools, demonstrates perfectly that each work will nevertheless differ. In the same way as the products of Warhol's factory are original artworks because of the conceptual idea that lies within them, Sturtevant's works are absolutely unique, exactly because they depict the same thing but with a different meaning.



The fact that Sturtevant, as a woman artist, chose to repeat this particular series by Warhol, a decorative motif which is associated with beauty and femininity and for which he used an image of hibiscus flowers first taken by the photographer Patricia Caulfield, is significant. Her choice grappled with the notion that male artists have historically dominated art history and have had much better chances to be taken seriously by exploring and replicating the mundane motifs that Pop Art used. Even though Pop Art has an ironic element, it draws from the visual archive of a commercial culture; most artworks by men of this movement simply repeat the male gaze through which women were objectified - most often by being depicted as either the devoted housewife or a glamorous, seductive pin-up. Of course, female artists worked with this visual vocabulary, as well, and the second series that Sturtevant focused on when repeating Warhol's work used the famous portrait of Marilyn Monroe. The key difference is that female artists re-appropriated images of their gender. Hence, most of their works' intentions came from a point of feministic empowerment that challenged the given social structures of this time.

However, since her work was, of course, putting key values of the art system in question, many important gallerists, collectors, and curators avoided giving her work the attention it deserved. Considering this hostile climate, it is no surprise that Sturtevant chose to retreat from the art scene in 1974 for over a decade. During this time, appropriation became a widely accepted practice in art, and in hindsight, it is clear that Sturtevant's work must have had a powerful influence on a younger generation of artists. Sherrie Levine, Louise Lawler, and Cindy Sherman became, for example, prominent

## PEDER LUND

figures of the Picture Generation and explored the constructed nature of images and the parameters that define the social reception of an artwork further.



In 1985, Sturtevant returned to an art world which had, in the time of her absence, slowly evolved, and she continued to repeat the works of the next generation of artists who were on the rise and in 2000, she expanded her methods and began to create new film and video-based works. In Sturtevant's career, her breakthrough came in 2004, with the major solo exhibition *The Brutal Truth* at The Museum für Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt. After this show, her influence finally began to be widely acknowledged and the demand for her work rose significantly. Many renowned museums started to feature her work prominently, including the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, the Kunsthalle Zürich, and the Serpentine Galleries in London. In 2011, she was honored with the Golden Lion for her lifetime achievement at the Venice Biennale, and in 2012, the Moderna Museet in Stockholm dedicated the retrospective *Image Over Image* to the artist. In 2013, she was awarded the Kurt Schwitters Prize for Lifetime Achievement by the Sprengel Museum, Hannover, Germany, and in November 2014, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, finally opened the first major institutional exhibition, entitled *Double Trouble*, in the US, which traveled in the following year to Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, California. Tragically, the artists never got the chance to experience this recognition in her home country in its entirety, as she died in May 2014.

Born in Lakewood, Ohio in 1924 as Elaine Sturtevant, Sturtevant moved to New York in the early 1960s and decided to use only her last name as an artist name. Besides her artistic education, 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. Later in her career, she held a professorship at MIT in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In 2014, Sturtevant died in Paris where she had lived since the beginning of the 1990s at the age of 89.

Works by Sturtevant are held by renowned public and private collections, including ARC, Paris; DAP, Paris; FRAC, Bretagne; MAMCO, Geneva, MOCA Los, Angeles; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Musée d'Art Moderne de la ville de Paris; Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Pinault Foundation; Secession, Vienna, Sintra Museum of Modern Art, Sintra; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Weimar Neues Museum, Weimar; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City, ZKM, Karlsruhe.

### Illustrations

1-3 Sturtevant, Warhol Flowers, 1970.

4 Installation view of the exhibition *Image over Image* at Kunsthalle Zürich, 2012.

5-7 Sturtevant, Warhol Flowers, 1970.