

William N. Copley

The Ballad of William N. Copley

Berlin: Bleibtreustraße 45, 17 January – 7 March 2020



Galerie Max Hetzler is pleased to announce the solo exhibition *The Ballad of William N. Copley* with paintings and works on paper by **William N. Copley** at Bleibtreustraße 45.

William N. Copley (1919-1996) is known for his unique and laconic way of portraying society's common absurdities, often underlined with his own peculiar slapstick humour. Copley started as an art collector and dealer in the 1940s and quickly got to know Surrealist pioneers such as Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp and Max Ernst. After a brief detour of running a gallery in California, Copley decided to follow

a career as an artist himself, signing his works with the pseudonym CPLY. Together with Man Ray, he left California for Paris in 1951.

Copley's canvases are inhabited by cartoonish, faceless men wearing bowler hats, women, often undressed, in explicit poses, everyday objects such as automobiles, pianos, vividly patterned backgrounds and patriotic symbolism reflected in flags or banners. In his colourful, animated settings, the artist satirically depicts public and private encounters: Simple contours and sharp observations reveal the repressed desires of a white, hetero middle class.

The exhibition at Galerie Max Hetzler unites a selection of works realised by Copley from 1959 to 1992. It offers a broad insight into the manifold topics and different series of his practice: Canvases including collage elements such as pieces of lace, shaped mirrors, shirt buttons, or matches; a group of black marker drawings partly revisiting motifs of earlier paintings, as well as a selection from his ballad series, a series of works the artist based on popular American songs, among others. The present works illustrate Copley's keen sense for the contemporary always inherent in his oeuvre.

"Whether the critics agree or not that the purpose of painting is to bring our experience of life more into focus, Cply makes his statements with unconcerned candour. The images he gives us are direct, almost primitive in the sense of Romanesque Catalan frescoes, or unsophisticated like strip cartoons. It is the lack of subtle refinements in the contours of his nudes, the featureless faces of his lovers, the disregard for all painterly tricks such as perspective, modelling, chiaroscuro that we enjoy like rebellious schoolboys. The golden section in his hands turns up as a golden cross-section of desires and frustrations common to us all"

(R. Penrose in *Copley*, Amsterdam, 1966, p. 4.)

William N. Copley (1919-1996), a painter, writer, gallerist, collector, publisher, and patron to the arts, lived and worked in Paris, New York and Roxbury, among other places. Copley's work was part of solo and group exhibitions in renowned institutions, such as ICA, Miami; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid (both 2018); The Brant Foundation, Greenwich; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (both 2017); The Menil Collection, Houston; Fondazione Prada, Milan (both 2016); Museum Brandhorst, Munich; Mumok, Vienna (both 2015); Museum Folkwang, Essen (2007); Staatsgalerie Stuttgart (2004); Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Geneva (2004); Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht; Museum Ludwig, Cologne (both 2001); Kestner-Gesellschaft, Hanover (1995), New Museum, New York (1986), Kunsthalle Bern; Centre Pompidou,

Paris; Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven and Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe (all 1980), among others. Copley participated in the documenta V (1972) and VII (1982) in Kassel. His works are in the collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; Whitney Museum of Art, New York; mumok, Vienna; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia; Tate, London, among others.

The Ballad of William N. Copley is part of a trio of coordinated international exhibitions that will present major series of works by William N. Copley in the first part of 2020. See also *William N. Copley: The Temptation of St. Anthony (Revisited)* at Nino Mier, Los Angeles, from February 15, and *The New York Years* at Kasmin, New York, from March 11.

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