

William N. Copley

AUTOEROTICISM: Paintings from 1984 and related works

46 & 57 rue du Temple, 75004, Paris

4 March – 15 April 2023

Opening: Saturday, 4 March, 6 – 9 pm

Galerie Max Hetzler is pleased to announce *AUTOEROTICISM: Paintings from 1984 and related works*, an exhibition of paintings and works on paper by **William N. Copley** (1919–1996). Through the iconography of Parisian imagery, and the car, Copley plays a game of multiple pictorial dimensions and presents a series of stories happening simultaneously, using an inventive compositional technique of painting pictures within pictures.

Recognised for his unique contribution to post-war painting, William N. Copley developed a singular link between European Surrealism and American Pop Art for which he is celebrated today. Copley was adopted by a newspaper magnate in 1921 and studied at Yale University before serving in the U.S. army in World War II. Back in California, Copley opened a gallery in the late 1940s, which allowed him to meet Surrealist pioneers such as Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp and Max Ernst. Following this, Copley pursued a career as an artist himself, signing his work with the pseudonym CPLY. He left for France along with Man Ray in 1951, where he lived (residing in Paris and Longpont-sur-Orge). During this time, Copley participated in the artistic life of post-war Paris, exhibiting at galleries Nina Dausset, Furstenberg, and Iris Clert. The artist developed images that were psychologically and socially liberating, as well as irreverent and humorous, rejecting the artistic conventions then firmly established in France. His self-taught style features anonymous, archetypal figures repeated through large, flat, vivid colour planes and bold, dark lines. He returned to the USA in 1962. In 1980, Copley's travelling retrospective organised by the Kunsthalle Bern opened at Centre Pompidou, Paris, an event the artist called 'a strange kind of home coming.'¹

For this series of works created in the 1980s, Copley revisited the compositions, motifs and themes of an earlier repertoire initiated in 1955, reflecting the signifiers of Paris at that time: street scenes, cafés, Wallace fountains, couples, prostitutes, the French flag, and classical imagery through quotations from modern French art. 1984 was a decisive period in his work, as Copley (then working in Key West, Florida) started combining the raw canvas with popular imagery related to the automobile, playing with the romantic notion of the Sunday drive leading to idyllic and bucolic spots. For Copley, the car was a place of safety and freedom, a protective womb in which fantasies could unfold



William N. Copley, *Sunday Drive*, 1984
Photo: Christopher Stach

¹ William N. Copley, 1978, quoted in *William N. Copley: The Coffin They Carry You Off In*, exh. cat., Miami: Institute of Contemporary Art, 2019, p. 19

directly from the subconscious. As he explained in 1983, *'It's always been the most important image that I've ever had simply because to me, the car is the stationary center of the universe. You're stationary, and the world is moving around you – over you, under you, around you. [...] I find I could say more with that image than almost anything I've tried.'*² Many of the works feature an oval-shaped form that seems to double as a wing-mirror, evoking a Renaissance tondo. Copley saw the automobile as an egg, with its interior exposed – a place of protection and transgression. This progresses into cut-outs and profiled silhouettes, inviting the viewer to cast an indiscreet eye into Copley's *autoeroticism*.

William N. Copley (1919–1996), known by the name CPLY, lived and worked in Paris, New York, and Roxbury, Connecticut, among other places. Copley's works have been exhibited in renowned institutions worldwide, including the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami (2018); The Menil Collection, Houston, travelling to Fondazione Prada, Milan (2016–2017); Museum Frieder Burda, Baden-Baden, travelling to Max Ernst Museum Brühl, Hannover (2012); Bonnefantemuseum, Maastricht (2001); L.A.C. Lieu d'Art Contemporain, Sigean; Herning Kunstmuseum; Forum of Contemporary Art, St. Louis (all 1999); Ulmer Museum, Ulm (1997); Kestner-Gesellschaft, Hannover (1995); The New Museum, New York (1986); Künstlerwerkstatt Lothringerstrasse, Munich (1981); Kunsthalle Bern, travelling to Centre Pompidou, Paris; Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe (1980); New York Cultural Center (1974); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (1966); and Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (1961), among others.

Copley's work is held in major public collections worldwide, including the Art Institute of Chicago; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Fondazione Prada, Milan; Israel Museum, Jerusalem; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Power Institute, Sydney; Städel Museum, Frankfurt; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Tate, London; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, among others.

² William N. Copley, 1983, quoted in *William N. Copley*, exh. cat., Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2016, p. 39

Further exhibitions and events

Berlin:

3 February – 10 March 2023

Barry Flanagan

Imaginary Solutions

Potsdamer Straße 77–87, 10785 Berlin

3 March – 15 April 2023

Thomas Struth

Unbewusste Orte / Unconscious Places

Bleibtreustraße 45, 10623 Berlin

3 March – 15 April 2023

André Butzer

Kirschmichel

Goethestraße 2/3, 10623 Berlin

3 March – 15 April 2023

Jinn Bronwen Lee / André Butzer

Bleibtreustraße 15/16, 10623 Berlin

17 March – 30 April 2023

Katharina Grosse

Spectrum without Traces

Potsdamer Straße 77–87, 10785 Berlin

London:

2 March – 15 April 2023

Rinus Van de Velde

41 Dover Street, W1S 4NS

Marfa:

4 May – 10 December 2023

Grace Weaver

1976 Antelope Hills Road

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