

GALERIE THADDAEUS ROPAC

LONDON PARIS SALZBURG



Sturtevant, *Lichtenstein Girl with Hair Ribbon*, 1966-1967
Oil and acrylic on canvas, 120 x 120 cm (47.24 x 47.24 in)

Courtesy Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac London · Paris · Salzburg. © Estate Sturtevant. Photo: Max Yawney.

STURTEVANT *VICE VERSA*

23 FEBRUARY – 31 MARCH 2018

Opening
Thursday 22 February 2018, 6 - 8pm

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PRESS RELEASE

Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac is pleased to present *Vice Versa*, a solo show of iconic paintings, photographs, installation, videos and wallpaper by the American artist Sturtevant, who has been represented by the gallery for over 25 years. Taking place from 23 February to 31 March 2018, this exhibition will be her first posthumous London showing and the most recent in the UK since 2013. Curated by Julia Peyton-Jones, Senior Global Director: Special Projects, in dialogue with Loren Muzzey, Sturtevant's daughter, it consists of works from the Estate and private collections.

Sturtevant has been acknowledged as one of the most important artists of the 21st century, having presaged the endlessly repeating, unattributed imagery that characterises the digital world of today. 'All reality is now virtual reality', said Sturtevant. There is a unique blend of urgency and timelessness in her work that explains its growing impact on younger generations of artists. 'Sturtevant's work is very "now", and even her pieces from the '60s look as fresh today as they did when she created them', states Hans Ulrich Obrist, co-curator of the triumphant Sturtevant retrospective at London's Serpentine Gallery in 2013.

A female artist in a male-dominated world, Sturtevant took on a role that was both one of exception and belonging. Through the lens of her investigation into notions of authorship and aesthetics, she examined the relation between original and origins. By 'pushing the limits of resemblance', Sturtevant's repetitions of works by other artists articulate a tension between the source image and the resulting artwork, which she created from memory. According to Peter Eleey, curator of *Sturtevant: Double Trouble* at MoMA in 2014, 'she was not a copyist, plagiarist, parodist, forger, or imitator, but was rather a kind of actionist, who adopted style as her medium in order to investigate aspects of art's making, circulation, consumption, and canonisation'.

The historic building of Ely House provides a foil to the works, mixing its ornate architecture with radical interventions that play on the underlying tensions inherent in the work. The Berkeley gallery, on the ground floor of the building, features a selection of Sturtevant's Frank Stella works, encompassing the Black, Aluminium and Copper Paintings, as well as a number of Concentric Squares. Stella rose to prominence in 1959, when several of his Black Paintings were included in the group show *Sixteen Americans* at The Museum of Modern Art, New York. In her versions of these Black Paintings, Sturtevant mirrored Stella's Minimalist style, applying stripes of the same industrial enamel paint with a brush and leaving lines of unpainted canvas visible in a geometric pattern.

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From 2000 onwards, Sturtevant focused primarily on video, using her own footage alongside stock clips from films, television and advertising to explore the politics of image production and circulation. She characterised contemporary visual culture as an 'overload of communication', reflected in the endlessly looping imagery in video works like *Elastic Tango*, 2010, a three act play shown across nine stacked monitors that suggest the commercial displays in electronics stores. Another of her video pieces, *Dark Threat of Absence Fragmented & Sliced*, 2003, is displayed across seven screens and references Paul McCarthy's film *Painter*, 1995.

These digital works are dispersed between paintings and sculpture on Sturtevant's 'Kill' wallpaper (based on the Quentin Tarantino film *Kill Bill*, 2003) in the first-floor Library Gallery. Referred to as the 'Hall of Fame', this room brings together Sturtevant's repetitions of emblematic works from American Pop, including her versions of Warhol's flowers that featured in her first solo show. From the very beginning of her career, Sturtevant showed an uncanny instinct for zeroing in on the work of contemporaries who would later become masters. Her Warhol Marilyns, Johns flags, Lichtenstein Ben-Day dots and *Wesselmann Great American Nude* are displayed together in this gallery.

Sturtevant also engaged with the works of her artistic predecessors, including Marcel Duchamp and Joseph Beuys; her re-creations of their photographs and sculptures are displayed together in the Chapel Gallery.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

The American artist Sturtevant (1924, Lakewood, Ohio – 2014, Paris) is best known for her repetitions of the works of other artists, which she recreated manually from memory after having seen a piece that intrigued her. These can immediately be identified with the original, but they are not copies. Her aim was not to achieve an exact replica, but rather to address notions of authorship, authenticity and originality that would later come to the fore in our own digital age, characterised by the endless circulation and recombination of images.

Sturtevant's first exhibition, held in 1965 at the Bianchini Gallery, New York, featured her versions of Andy Warhol's silkscreened flowers, with her Jasper Johns flag, Frank Stella concentric square, Claes Oldenburg garment and other paintings suspended on a clothes rack. The relationship between repetition and difference, as articulated in Gilles Deleuze's seminal philosophical text, was central to her practice. Before it became available in English translation, Sturtevant read *Différence et répétition*, 1968, in the original French with the aid of a dictionary. The disparities between the versions encourage the viewer to look beyond their surface similarities to what Sturtevant termed the 'under-structure of art'. She achieved these crucial differences by working 'predominantly from memory, using the same techniques, making the same errors and thus coming out in the same place'. When Warhol was asked how he made his work he replied: 'Ask Elaine [Sturtevant]'.

The artists with whose work she engaged include her contemporaries in American Pop – Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, James Rosenquist, Andy Warhol and Tom Wesselmann – as well as Marcel Duchamp, Joseph Beuys, Frank Stella, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Keith Haring and Anselm Kiefer, amongst others. Sturtevant worked across media, ranging from painting and sculpture to photography, wallpaper and, from 2000 onwards, video works that combined advertising and internet images with her own film material. These later video works turn a critical gaze on today's image-saturated media culture, creating repetition of a different kind on a continuous loop.

Sturtevant was awarded the Golden Lion for lifetime achievement at the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011, and her pioneering work has been featured in numerous exhibitions, including at The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2014); Serpentine Galleries, London (2013); Kunsthalle, Zurich (2012); Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2012); Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (2010) and the Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main (2004).

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TUESDAY – SATURDAY 10 AM – 6 PM

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