

ARTFORUM



View of “Dorothy Iannone and Juliette Blightman: The Köln Concert,” 2020–21. Photo: Mareike Tocha.

Dorothy Iannone and Juliette Blightman

KÖLNISCHER KUNSTVEREIN

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“The Köln Concert,” an exhibition of works by Dorothy Iannone and Juliette Blightman, curated by Nikola Dietrich, arose from an emotional connection between the artists across the nearly five decades that separate them, resonant with the vital role that love plays in both their practices. Their exchange was sparked by Blightman’s encounter with Iannone’s 1970 publication *The Story of Bern (or) Showing Colors* (exhibited here as a slideshow), which narrativized the censorship of her work from the 1969 group exhibition “Freunde” (Friends) at the Kunsthalle Bern in Switzerland. For that show, curator Harald Szeemann asked artists to invite friends to exhibit alongside them. Dieter Roth, who had selected Iannone, pulled his own works from the exhibition when Szeemann succumbed to pressure to remove Iannone’s for being pornographic. The debacle that led to Szeemann’s resignation as director of the kunsthalle. At her own exhibition there in 2016, Blightman showed a series of penis portraits—a loose conjuring of Iannone’s “obscene” drawings—and initiated the connection between their practices that this show and its “Prologue,” at Arcadia Missa in London last year, picked up on.

In distinct, almost discordant tones—Iannone is ecstatic and declarative where Blightman is understated and meandering—both artists took devotion as subject matter. This was particularly salient in the tarot-inspired works that bookended the exhibition: Iannone’s *(Ta)Rot Pack*, 1968–69/2016, and Blightman’s *Stages of Seed Development*, 2020, in which each artist depicts daily life in a form roughly fashioned after the prophetic deck. Iannone’s censored work from 1969—a group of vibrantly patterned felt-tip drawings (laser copies of their twenty-seven rectos were exhibited, as the originals are lost)—locates the divine in the pleasure and mundanities of a life in love.

PERES PROJECTS

In her distinctively reduced and ornamental style, Iannone's symbology repurposes esotericism's pictorial strategies to share her great love for Roth: A depiction of the pair joined in a tantric embrace is labeled THIS CARD BRINGS WHAT EVERYONE WANTS, while another, of her arms colored red and spread in rapture as Roth performs cunnilingus, reads THIS CARD BRINGS REVERENCE. Hanging at the show's entry, a grid of Blightman's photos and pencil-and-gouache drawings suggested the importance of attention to things that need looking after, such as plants and relationships. Sequenced as if in montage and stringing together life's everyday trappings and its odd delights—a trampoline, her daughter striking a pose—Stages of Seed Development is exemplary of Blightman's recursive approach to narrative, as she lingers on these peripheral details. Blightman positions the boundaries of her artistic practice, such as the duties of motherhood and domesticity, as its subject and as parallel practices that revolve around care. Here, she elevates recurrent motifs variously evocative of things that need tending to by titling the project's constitutive works after arcana: The High Priestess for a sketch of a toilet or Temperance for a photo of "pussy flower" seeds. These gimmicky giant poppy seeds recurred throughout the exhibition, also appearing in Blightman's video Diseaseeds and Pollutionation and her painting Pussy Flower, both 2020.

The question of whether or how Iannone and Blightman's works in "The Köln Concert" are (still) transgressive came to the fore. The pussies and penises were part of it. A parade of genitalia was on display along the kunstverein's windowed wall: Jouissance #1 and #2, both 2020, Blightman's garishly green phallus fountains, made from an inflatable pool and other garden-store materials, dribbled sporadically while the figure in Iannone's cutout Lord Liberty, 2019, had an erect and fleshy member surrounded by blue and red stars. What makes the artists' works subversive is how each constructs her own cosmos through eroticism. Where Iannone's libidinal psychedelia celebrates liberation via euphoric unity, Blightman assiduously documents transient moments, intuiting a quiet joy and a subtle humor in a constellation of nonevents related to caring for oneself and others. While the artists' takes on intimacy are wildly different, the presentation of their works in concert crystallized the way in which both practices are grounded in an awareness that love—rapturous or nurturing—makes the world go round.

— Camila McHugh