

THE WORD

Curator Wim Waelput on Dorothy Iannone's current show at KIOSK in Ghent

With art writer Sophie Verhulst now overseeing our monthly Curator Talk series, we begin with a timely talk with Wim Waelput, founding director of Ghent-based non-profit KIOSK and curator of the art space's current show, Lineage of Love by Dorothy Iannone, which is on until the end of the month. American-born artist Iannone has been creating trouble both in and outside the art world since the sixties and seemed to us very deserving of the title.

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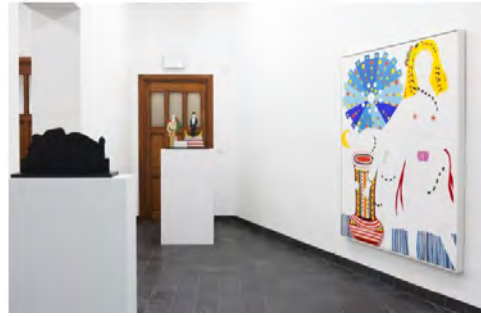


With only one day to go before Trump's inauguration as the US' 45th president, it's somehow hard to choose between the many deplorable – and downright despicable – things the real estate mogul turned licensing magnate has recently said. One of the more jarring moments though, one that sticks out, was when he called Hillary Clinton a nasty woman, during the final presidential debate. This insult, muttered under Trump's breath, was quickly appropriated by Clinton's supporters, turning it into a title to be worn with pride.

“In a way, Dorothy Iannone's show fits with the new direction we want to take with our next exhibitions,” says Wim. “We continue showing artists who work more figuratively and narratively, and Iannone is the first of a series of artists we'll show whose work is more critical of our society. KIOSK is an artist-oriented space, but we want to be an active part of our world today. This show goes against KIOSK's usual spiel to show contemporaries, because Iannone, being a woman in her 80s, could be considered a historical artist. She started her career in the 60s and came to her own during the 70s, when she developed a more figurative style, taking in developments from her own life as most important subjects. You could say her work is very autobiographical. I personally feel her work is very contemporary, the themes she still explores in her work are very relevant today.

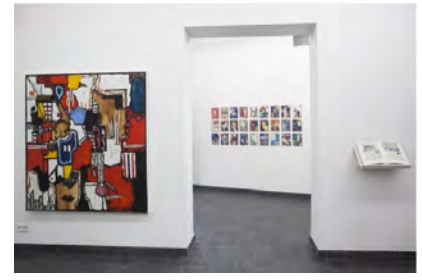
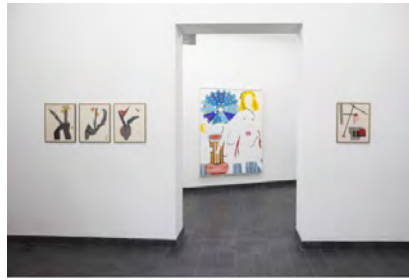
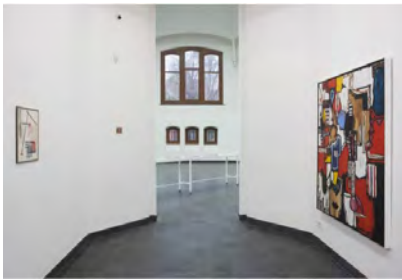
That's why we felt it was worth showing her now. Artists today are not afraid anymore to work figuratively, to draw from their own lives. Young artists like Nel Aerts (who had a show at KIOSK together with Miet Warlop at the start of 2016) look to the work of Iannone as inspiration. I first saw Dorothy Iannone's work at a presentation of Air de Paris in Turin, Italy (Air de Paris is also the gallery of her mother, the artist Sarah Pucci, who creates small but impressive baroque pieces with pearls and gemstones). I visited her home in Berlin and most of her works are right with her in her home. At the same time, her work is gaining in popularity. One of the works I wanted to use for the show was recently sold to an important collector and a major arts centre is starting to acquire one of her works. So, at 83, she's having some sort of breakthrough. Iannone's paintings, drawings and videos incorporate many luscious female forms, erect penises, swollen labia and explicit scenes, fitting neatly into the wave of sexual liberation of the era. However, 'feminist' would be too limiting a description of her view on the world. To us, the work seems to be more about love than about sex, more about vivaciousness and playfulness and less about provocation and demoralization.”

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Iannone's professed love for artist Dieter Roth has influenced every aspect of her artistic career, says Wim, although this influence needs to be nuanced; not every depiction of a man and a woman is Iannone and Roth, but should be read on a higher plan as being about a male-female relationship. Because Iannone loved Dieter Roth passionately, but she loved all men: "You will not be vanquished although you are a man," she jots down on one of her works. "Centuries of gazing at your fragility have augmented my love for your sex."

"Buddhism is very important in this all-encompassing worldview. The idea of an aesthetic unity' proclaiming not only a unity between life and art but between man and woman as well, was very important to Iannone. This equality does not mean a leveling but rather an appreciation of the duality between a patriarch and a matriarch figure," continues Wim. To her contemporary feminists, this idea of a strong man was not so easy to accept.



Both Iannone and her work were censored, adjusting our idea of the 1960s and 1970s as free-for-all ages of anything goes. The artist herself remains stoic in the face of this censorship. In an interview with Maurizio Cattelan from 2014, she claims that "In no way was my content affected by censorship. I completely ignored it and kept my eyes on my heart. I still do." More than ignoring the censorship, Iannone set out to change some of it. After the U.S. Customs had taken her copy of Henry Miller's book *Tropic of Cancer* in 1961, she sued them and not only got her book back but also lifted the ban on Miller. That, says Wim, "is maybe more known in the U.S. than for her artistic work." Her *Story of Bern*, an artist book on display at KIOSK, tells the story of another bout with censorship. Iannone was invited to join *Freunde*, one of the final exhibitions infamous curator Harald Szeeman made before his resignation from the Kunsthalle in Bern, in 1969. Iannone's work was found to be too sexually explicit. After the suggestion came to cover the offending parts of the work with brown tape, both Iannone and Dieter Roth chose to withdraw from the show. Szeemann suggested that he, too, opposed the censorship, but from what we can gather from *Story of Bern*, Iannone's doesn't believe a word of it.

Choosing to wear neither the title of feminist nor of provocateur, it seems that Dorothy Iannone has always been above and beyond categorization. Maybe the best description of a nasty woman is she who is comple and herself. Or, to quote that other forceful nasty woman, Carrie Fisher, "one who takes what's in her heart and makes it into art." Make sure to go see for yourself.

SPIKE

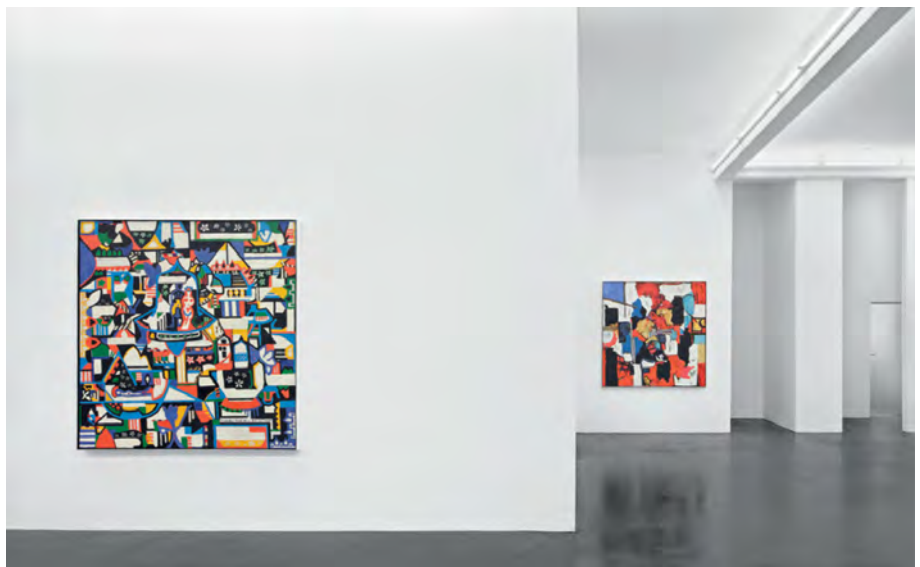
Views

Dorothy Iannone

“My Heroine and Her Mate”

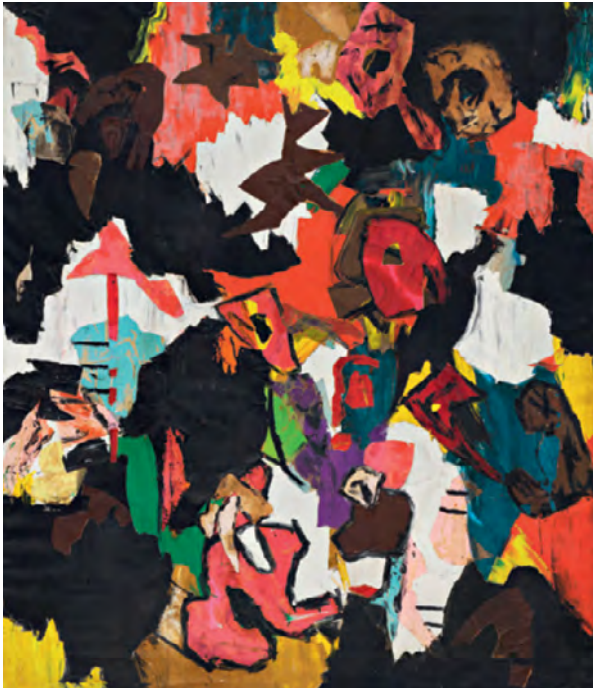
Peres Projects, Berlin 17.1 – 7.3.2015

Those who have associated the work of artist Dorothy Iannone (*1933 in Boston) with a graphic, figural, genital, and declarative liberation of the male and female erotic nude might well be surprised by this exhibition of her early oil paintings. The seven canvases presented here do not quite conform to what has become Iannone's signature style: vibrant, anatomical, planar, illustrative, outspoken, and shot through with explicit eroticism. In the wake of a resurgence of interest in Iannone's work before and after her inclusion in the 2006 Whitney Biennial, a number of retrospective exhibitions in the past few years have reinforced this signature, which first emerged in the mid-to-late 60s and was sustained throughout the majority of Iannone's practice. The painter here on display - who has not yet come into her own - is, rather, attuned to historical painting traditions, to a studious interest in primitivism and archetypal iconography, and to an uncertain, though intriguing, alternation between figuration and abstraction.



The seven canvases in the exhibition date from 1962 to 1964 and were made in the US, predating Iannone's artistic-erotic partnership with Dieter Roth, her crucial experience of censorship from the 1969 exhibition at

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her life in Iceland, and her move to Berlin (where she has resided since 1970).

The works exhibit productive strains between the lush, graphic iconographical style she was to develop (which owed as much to Pop as to political signage and illustrative techniques such as the chunky back outline), an interest in folkloric iconography, feminism, and the later practitioners of Abstract Expressionism in America.

There is scarcely any body in these canvases, which are vigorous, vivid, and rich. The flat, rhythmical blobs, forms, and molting patches of color are vestigially transmuted to Iannone's later works, although here, too, an inspection of details reveals figurative elements: eyes, teeth, berries, bouquets of flowers. *Signs of Love* (1963) looks like a hellish, saturated, primary-colour primitivism, with nods to folksy and psychedelic references (discordant colors, a mouth eating what appears to be a small figurine-like couple). Insofar as Iannone's quasi-abstractions harken back to AbEx traditions, it's not the muted, broad strokes of Helen Frankenthaler, nor the scurrying organics of Joan Mitchell, but something more like the fragmented, rhythmic, patchwork geometry of Hans Hofmann (Hofmann having been Roth's tutor, for a time, in Provincetown, where Roth and Iannone met). The exhibition is more significant for what it excludes; an exclusion which correctively frames the genesis of Iannone's style. It thus gives historical weight and documentary accuracy to a significant artist whose

recognition has been somewhat belated. The title "My Heroine and My Mate" was, perhaps, less apt for this grouping of good, if sometimes uneven and not wholly original works. *Secret Blossom* - to take the title from a 1962 painting on display - may have been more fitting: the show is a secret blossom indeed.

- Pablo Larios

