

STURTEVANT

ça va aller

Exhibition from January 12 to March 14, 2020

Opening on January 12, 12PM - 6PM

43, rue de la Commune de Paris 93230 Romainville



Sturtevant, *Shifting Mental Structures Millionaire / Money*, 2000

A resolute force from the moment she first appeared on the scene, Sturtevant was always stirring things up. If her repetitions of works by artist peers conceptually strike viewers like a brick thrown against the head, the recent videos are no less trouble. In these videos, short scenes of extreme examples from the realms of consumer and entertainment cultures, such as beauty, food, porn, and sports, are collaged and montaged to produce a noisy, restless state of agitation, confusion, and movement back and forth, without it ever being clear what started off this big brouhaha in the first place.

Ranging from footage taped from television game shows and commercials in early examples, such as *The Final Articulation of Origins* (1999), *The Greening of America* (2000), and *Shifting Mental Structures (Millionaire/Money)* (2000), to filmed material like the variously animated plush toys in *I Love Arlette* (2002), *Cut and Run Porn Productions* (2006), and *Cut and Run Porn Productions (Chick Things)* (2006), all videos are fastidiously compiled, edited, and trimmed. Quick alternations between repetition and reversal, similarity and difference, real and fake, beginning and ending create a dizzying sequence of images that's impossible to get one's head around, not entirely unlike the unsettling experience of a Warhol signed "STURTEVANT".

Counting more than thirty items, the videos constitute a significant body of work, which debuted at Air de Paris in 1998 with an exhibition entitled "Ça va aller" that also lent its name to Sturtevant and collaborator L. Muzzey's production company. While entailing a shift in form and medium that allowed time and movement, as well as sound and light, to enter into the work, by Sturtevant's own account, the videos still dealt with similar concerns that preoccupied her in making the repetitions, but that became ever more urgent under conditions of cybernetics and the digital, namely "to push out the fault lines and the falsity of current thought structures, to display the impediments and brutality inherent in our obsessive desire for appearance and immediacy" (2004).

Incoherent cuts and abrupt shifts within individual videos and across different ones when installed in the same space produce a perceptual play that, rather than reveal anything as to what lies behind the immediately available surfaces, raises more fundamental questions about the relation between appearance and reality. In the age of fake news and digital manipulation, works like *The Greening of America* and *I Love Arlette* could not be timelier, even with their conspicuously low-tech qualities of grainy images and puppet theatre. But what is darkly serious matter, rather than presented as stern warning or dry theory, in Sturtevant's work still makes for excitingly good fun – what with the oinking, tail-swishing electronic toy piglet tumbling off a table-top in *Cut and Run Porn Productions*. With its life-affirming energy and humour, her work offers viewers a kind of solace even as it has them stare straight into the contemporary abyss.

—Elisa Schaar

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The artist began showing under the name “Sturtevant” in a group exhibition at the Betty Parsons Gallery in New York in 1960. She started making her own versions of the works of her contemporaries in 1964, using some of the most iconic artworks of her generation as a source and catalyst for the exploration of originality, authorship, and the interior structures of art. Beginning with her versions of works by Jasper Johns and Andy Warhol, Sturtevant initially turned the visual logic of Pop art back on itself, probing uncomfortably at the workings of art history in real time.

Yet her chameleonlike embrace of other artists’ art has also led Sturtevant to be largely overlooked in the history of postwar American art. As a woman making versions of the work of mostly better-known male artists, she has passed almost unnoticed through the hierarchies of mid-century modernism and postmodernism, at once absent from these histories while nevertheless articulating their structures.

Though her “repetitions” may appear to be simply mimetic exercises in protoappropriation, Sturtevant is better understood as an artist who adopted style as her medium and took the art of her time as a loose score to be enacted and reinterpreted. Far more than mere copies, her versions of Johns’s flags, Warhol’s flowers, and Joseph Beuys’s fat chair are studies in the action of art that expose aspects of its making, reception, circulation, and canonization.

Working primarily in video during her last decade, Sturtevant extended her interest in simulation to the media environment, incorporating footage from Hollywood films, television, and advertising to make literal reference to larger considerations of politics, truth, and violence—concerns that animated her work from its inception.

Sturtevant (1924, Lakewood, Ohio – 2014, Paris) 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 Abertina Museum, Wien (2015); Hamburger Bahnhof Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin (2015); 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 and 2014).