

ARTFORUM

Sturtevant

AIR DE PARIS

32, rue Louise Weiss

March 14–April 18

This is a slightly forbidding exhibition, which at first glance appears rather flat and insufficiently developed. But appearances are often deceiving—especially in Sturtevant's case. *BLOWJOB* (all works 2006) consists of three videos, each depicting a close-up of an older woman's lips, alternating with footage and the sounds of Beavis and Butthead laughing. There are also six framed stills of these lips on an adjacent wall. *HELLO* and *HEY* occupy each of the smaller side galleries, whose walls have been painted orange-red. In each, there is only one screen, showing a doll's hand emerging from a close-up butt and waving, while a voice-over asks, "Hey, any of you assholes out there?" One wonders, at first, at the vulgarity, which is in no way stylish or erotic, and at the apparent artlessness of it all. Perhaps that's just the point: It is a critique, as Sturtevant herself writes, of the "vast space of pornography: its blatant subjectivity, its use and abuse, its reality and brutality, its beauty and distortions; its 'funny-fun' and rabid sadness and sadism."

With time, though, one begins to see how rigorously structured the exhibition is: blowjobs, laughter, assholes, and *things*—not necessarily tasteful things, and not necessarily in the natural order—going in and out of assholes and mouths. With this confounding of entrance and exit, this shifting and reversal of orifices, ingestion, and excretion, of language and eating and language and shit, Sturtevant is in rather classical territory: One thinks of Burroughs, for instance, and of Deleuze in *The Logic of Sense* (1969), and so on. What is sacrificed in this terrain is, of course, the *voice*, understood as our pure claim to truth, originality, and individual presence. The exhibition thus presents a careful and, despite its blasé surface, very sophisticated comment on Sturtevant's longtime practice, with its repetitions and apparent eschewal of originality. Unwilling to merely criticize, it also constructs, or at least begins to construct, alternative models of subjects as desiring and communicating machines.

— David Lewis



Sturtevant, *BLOWJOB*, 2006, three color videos, 1 minute 30 seconds each. Installation view, 2009.