

## Sturtevant

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Gathering sixteen of Sturtevant's video works, this exhibition sought to connect the artist's strategies in televisual media to younger generations' production, consumption, and distribution of memes on the internet. Recommending these particular videos for this kind of re-reading was the fact that nearly all are less than five minutes long, and thus handily consumable.

Most of the works played on a bay of wall-mounted monitors, with the exception of one projected work and a pair of 2006 videos shown on two CRT cube monitors installed in the middle of the gallery. Both featured a short sequence of a white-gloved cartoon hand mechanically waving from the plump cleavage of a prosthetic ass. When all else was quiet, a faint conversation became audible: [*male/female voices, some-*

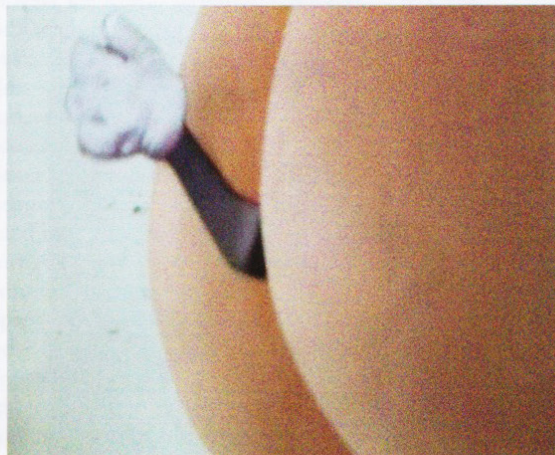
*times in exaggerated accents*]: "Hey! Any of you assholes out there?!"; [*female voice, singsongy; telephone ringing in background*]: "Hello!"

This staged "conversation" never continues beyond an absurdist standstill between theatrical hostility and naive welcoming, indicating that Sturtevant was more #TeamBeckett than #TeamBrecht. The best of Sturtevant's videos proceed under these terms—puckish jokes enfold needle-sharp critiques of the kind of stasis that Sturtevant often referred to as "sameness." Think more! This was the artist's great wish, made clear in a 1993 lecture she gave at the Salzburger Kunstverein in Austria titled "Sliding Parameters of Originality," photocopies of which were available here as a paratext for the exhibition. Driven by melancholy and rage, the lecture is bracing in its scope (aiming to "capture the deep

and rage, the lecture is bracing in its scope (aiming to "capture the deep prevailing currents—the whole as opposed to specifics") and unsparing in its historical exegesis (providing a highly condensed blow-by-blow of twentieth-century Euro/American art practices, where all is part of a downward spiral, emptying out into the then-contemporary art world). Sturtevant identifies the crux of the problem as follows: "Art no longer imposes its modes but rather takes its modes from mass culture, is the lowest common denominator: the entertainment world; artists have become consumer objects, meaning is externalized, arbitrary and thus meaningless, originality is no longer a critical factor, critics justify rather than critique, and museums try to be 'open,' muddling the mess."

I agree on some diagnoses (especially regarding the conflation of art and entertainment, which has only intensified since 1993), but I think Sturtevant woefully misses the mark on others. Museums' attempts at inclusivity, for example, while sometimes clunky and self-congratulatory, are often *responses* to a messy polis's efforts to grapple with what it may or may not need from art. To suggest, as Sturtevant does, that there might be a problem with museums being more "open" is to dismiss the politics of identity that are at the center of those institutions' varied responses to their viewerships. This was a continual bugbear for Sturtevant: As she bemoans the "fragmentation of subjectivity" (she never fully defines the phrase, but it is likely an outgrowth of her reading of Deleuze and his reimagining of the Nietzschean concepts of active and reactive forces, the latter essentially entailing a perceived lack of power to change one's actions and conditions), she also blasts those who use subjectivity as a fulcrum in their thinking (notably, she writes off "body art" and "political correctness"). In her mind, these critiques are connected in that the latter contributes to the former; in mine, they're near paradoxical complaints.

But, much as we might like to indulge her paratext, the artist's work itself largely avoids this critical cul-de-sac. *THE ADVENTURES OF DICK Bull inc. Elegant Porn / A Conceptual Dick / Dick in Paris / Dick's Toys / Art & Sex / For Those Who Are into Holes*, 2001, for example, gives voice to cutout collages of penises and orifices, while *Cut & Run Productions*, 2006, stars a battery-operated pig shuffling and oinking its way off the edge of a table (the word PORN appears on-screen, as if to identify the piggy or, perhaps, its cause of death). These videos evince a critique of mass-cultural representations of sex that wouldn't have been possible without feminist theory, praxis, and art, all of which took subjective experience as a starting point for thought and political change. Hello!



Sturtevant, *HELLO*, 2006, digital video, color, sound, 27 seconds.

—Andy Campbell