

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

MARY KELLY: *The Practical Past*

534 West 26th Street

October 19 – November 22, 2017



NEW YORK, September 14, 2017 – Mitchell-Innes & Nash presents conceptual artist Mary Kelly's inaugural exhibition, *The Practical Past*, a project-based work that considers the meaning of an era concurrent with the artist's lifetime and deeply influenced by the events of 1968. The installation combines "Circa Trilogy," large-scale works that reference iconic representations of the historical past, with two series that focus on the more intimate and pragmatic politics of the everyday: "News from Home" and "7 Days."

Concerned with affect as much as fact, Kelly's reworking of archival images is intensely involved with both material process and duration. All of the works in the exhibition are made of compressed lint, a material Kelly has been working with for almost two decades. Individual units of compressed lint are cast in the filter screen of a domestic dryer over several months and hundreds of washing cycles, and then assembled as large panels of low relief. As the physical detritus of a cleansing process, the dryer lint becomes a material residue of collective memory in the aftermath of an event.

The three works that comprise "Circa Trilogy" have light noise projected onto the surface of the lint, making an aesthetic link to early black-and-white films or contemporary computer screens, and creating a phenomenological uncertainty about what is seen. "Circa 1940" reworks a commissioned news photo of London during the Blitz that shows three men reading books among the ruins of Holland House Library, obviously posed to capture a transcendent moment in the midst of chaos, while "Circa 1968" reflects on Jean-Pierre Rey's famous photograph of Paris on the eve of the general strike. The Marianne figure hoists a flag in the manner of "Liberty Leading the People," but appears trapped by the role she tries to portray. "Circa 2011" draws on the prolific and often anonymous Internet images of the Arab Spring. Cell phone shots of Tahrir Square—taken just before the military takeover at the high point of mass demonstrations demanding the removal of the regime—capture the euphoria of the moment in a way that resembles a strange constellation in the night sky.

The title of the exhibition is adopted from Hayden White's book of the same name. The term is used to describe the way we consider the past from a utilitarian viewpoint separate from factual evidence. This idea is in contrast with the 'historical past,' which exists as a sequence of events without interpretation. *The Practical Past* exemplifies Kelly's preoccupation with the past as a repository of memory and desire as well as a means of interpreting both future and present moments. "News from Home," unlike the emblematic images of "Circa Trilogy," deals entirely with the practical past as a tactic for problem solving in everyday life. Personal letters from the artist's archive, which have been recreated in compressed lint, encapsulate the lived experience of feminists in the early 1970's. "Beirut 1970" grapples with sexual politics, noting the difficulty of putting French philosophers Sartre and De Beauvoir's critique of monogamy into practice. "London 1974" gives a fleeting glimpse of communal living. Conflicting messages (one from a mother and another from a child) invoke the chaos and excitement of women negotiating their commitment to activism with childcare, illness, accidents, and domesticity. In "Tucson 1972," the focus is on economic survival and alternative ways of living in the context of protests against the Nixon administration's escalation of the war in Vietnam.

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Kelly questions what defines an era and for whom it is defined. Her interest in the dissemination of political discourse through images is also addressed in the selection of works from “7 Days,” named after a publication born out of the New Left and the Women’s Liberation Movement during the 1970s. The covers of “7 Days” traverse a broad range of issues from the unionization of prisoners to unemployment, abortion rights, and the anti-apartheid struggle. As a short-lived weekly newspaper, 7 Days was in print from October 1971 to May 1972. During this time, Kelly contributed articles and illustrations to several issues. The inclusive overview of this publication is indicative of Kelly’s project overall and represents a forceful precedent for the intersectional feminism of today.

About Mary Kelly

Mary Kelly (b. 1941, Fort Dodge, Iowa) is a Los Angeles-based artist and theorist whose practice spans more than four decades and encompasses ideas about the body, systems of classification and power, memory, and history. She is best recognized for her large-scale narrative installations, including *Post-Partum Document* (1973-79). Kelly’s projects frequently blend personal and political issues so as to visualize the impact of historical events on the nature of everyday life. Kelly’s work has been central to discussions of Conceptual art and feminism since the 1970’s, and her writings have been requisite to the discourse of postmodernism. Her current project, “Circa Trilogy,” which continues the exploration of generational and historical themes, has been undertaken with the support of 2015 John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship.

Kelly graduated with an MA in Studio Art and Art History from Pius XII Institute in Florence, Italy, and a Postgraduate Certificate in Painting from St. Martin’s School of Art in London. She received Honorary Doctorates of the Arts from University of Wolverhampton, UK, and Lund University, Sweden. She is currently Judge Widney Professor of Art at the University of Southern California.

Kelly’s work has been shown internationally as the subject of solo shows at Moderna Museet Stockholm (2010); The Center for Contemporary Art in Warsaw (2008); The Institute of Contemporary Art in London (1993); and The New Museum for Contemporary Art in New York (1990). She has participated in a number of group exhibitions and biennials, including *I Self Collection: Other Faces* at Whitechapel Gallery in London (2017); *Women and Work* at the Tate Modern in London (2016); *Le Grande Madre* at Palazzo Reale in Milan (2015); *Take It or Leave It: Institution, Image, Ideology* at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles (2014); *Ends of the Earth* at MOCA Los Angeles (2012); *This Will Have Been: Art, Love and Politics in the 1980s* at MCA Chicago, ICA Boston, and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis (2012); *The Deconstructive Impulse* at Nasher Museum, Dallas, CAM Houston, and Neuberger Museum of Art in Purchase, NY (2011); *Wack! Art and Feminist Revolution* at MOCA Los Angeles and PS1 in New York (2007); Sydney Biennale (2008), documenta 12 (2007), and The Whitney Biennial in New York (2004).

About Mitchell-Innes & Nash

Founded by Lucy Mitchell-Innes and David Nash, who previously headed the worldwide Contemporary and Impressionist & Modern Art divisions of Sotheby’s, Mitchell-Innes & Nash places exemplary contemporary artists within a historical context, revealing a continuity of ideas and aesthetic virtuosity from the Modern era through the present day.

Mitchell-Innes & Nash’s renowned exhibition program, in both their Madison Avenue and Chelsea locations, fosters excellence within artistic practice, while forging an informed dialogue between emerging and established internationally recognized artists. From acclaimed surveys of 20th century masters, such as Jean Arp, Anthony Caro, Jay DeFeo, Willem de Kooning, Leon Kossoff, Kenneth Noland, Roy Lichtenstein, and Nicolas de Stael, to solo exhibitions of Sarah Braman, Keltie Ferris, Daniel Lefcourt, Pope.L, Martha Rosler, and Jessica Stockholder, Mitchell-Innes & Nash has proven expertise in both advancing the careers of emerging artists and maintaining the superior standard set by established artists.

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Caption: Mary Kelly, *Circa 1940*. From *Circa Trilogy*, 2004-16, 2015. Compressed lint and projected light noise. 95 ½ by 127 by 1 ½ in. 243 by 323 by 3.8 cm.

Listings Information:

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