



Under the Sign of [sic]: Sturtevant's Volte-Face (Semiotext(e) / Active Agents)

By Bruce Hainley

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Asked to sum up her artistic pursuit, the American artist Elaine Sturtevant once replied: "I create vertigo." Since the mid-1960s, Sturtevant has been using repetition to change the way art is understood. In 1965, what seemed to be a group show by then "hot" artists (Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein, George Segal, and James Rosenquist, among others) was in fact Sturtevant's first solo exhibit, every work in it created by herself.

Sturtevant would continue to make her work the work of others. The subject of major museum exhibitions throughout Europe and awarded the Golden Lion for lifetime achievement at the 54th Venice Biennale, she will have a major survey at the MoMA, New York, in 2014.

In *Under the Sign of [sic]*, Bruce Hainley unpacks the work of Sturtevant, providing the first book-length monographic study of the artist in English. Hainley draws on elusive archival materials to tackle not only Sturtevant's work but also the essential problem that it poses. Hainley examines all of Sturtevant's projects in a single year (1967); uses her *Gonzalez-Torres Untitled (Go-Go Dancing Platform)* from 1995 as a conceptual wedge to consider contemporary art's place in the world; and, finally, digs into the most occluded part of her career, from 1971 to 1973, when she created works by Michael Heizer and Walter de Maria, and had her first solo American museum exhibit.

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Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #603313 in Books
- Published on: 2014-01-17
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.14" h x .90" w x 7.18" l, 1.96 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 344 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

Under the Sign of [sic] is ostensibly a study of the haunting American artist Elaine Sturtevant, but what Bruce Hainley has written, really, is a poem about postwar American art and the woman who remade it in her own image by "appropriating," which is to say, reconfiguring, the distinctly male and sometimes male queer vision that informed the work of artists such as Warhol, Oldenburg, Johns, and the rest. As the first book-length monograph in English of a baffling, moving, and mysterious artist -- "I create vertigo," Sturtevant said about herself -- Hainley has written a splendid study not only of the artist's work but also of the atmosphere of change it helped foster.

(Hilton Als *The New Yorker*)

With prose that is at turns incisive, lively, and deliciously irreverent, this book takes risks in mirroring its artist-subject, but ultimately rewards.

(*Publishers Weekly*)

Writing about art is most valuable when it does just that thing that Hainley describes Sturtevant as accomplishing: the separation of "cognition from the habit of mindless recognition." As in his poetry and previous prose efforts, this is exactly the experience Hainley offers.

(*Brooklyn Rail*)

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Art scholars might argue that concept, not flattery, was at the root Elaine Sturtevant's work, in which she manually copied pieces by pop artists ranging from Roy Lichtenstein to Andy Warhol, at one point inspiring Claes Oldenburg to say he wanted to kill her. Intrigued yet? "Under The Sign of [sic]: Sturtevant's Volte-Face," is a challenging and informative undertaking written by Bruce Hainley, and the first book-length monograph of her art to be released in English.

(*Cool Hunting*)

For a sense of Sturtevant's assertive elusiveness, read Bruce Hainley's brilliant, sinuous, interruption-riddled *Under the Sign of [sic]: Sturtevant's Voltle-Face*.

(Holland Carter *The New York Times*)

Complementing the frisson of the artist's legacy is Bruce Hainley's brilliant and timely *Under the Sign of [Sic]* (2014), a jaw-dropping study of Sturtevant's practice in which no exegetical expense is spared.

(*Artforum*)

About the Author

Bruce Hainley lives and works in Los Angeles. A contributing editor at *Artforum*, he is the author of two books of poetry, one of which, *Foul Mouth*, was a finalist in the National Poetry Series. With John Waters, he wrote *Art -- A Sex Book*. He teaches in the MFA programs of Art Center College of Design and the Roski School of Fine Arts, University of Southern California.

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