

## **Kathe Burkhart, *The Liz Taylor Series***

13.03.2016 - 08.05.2016

**Fri Art presents the first European survey of Dutch-American artist Kathe Burkhart. Spanning over thirty years of work, this exhibition shows an important selection of large-scale paintings and works on paper taken from the *Liz Taylor Series*.**

Since 1982, Kathe Burkhart (born 1958) has composed an incredible landscape with her ongoing work titled *The Liz Taylor Series*, including nearly 300 paintings, drawings, and prints. Each work from this methodical and performative series is both a depiction of Elizabeth Taylor and simultaneously, a self-portrait of the artist. The iconic actress is represented throughout the years, her face systematically painted in a neutral pallor, that disembodies her and turns her into a projection screen. This project is a double chronicle: that of the mythical actress born in 1932, juxtaposing that of the artist, born 26 years later, in which personal and public issues, both individual and political, intertwine. Burkhart provides a political and social critique, directly addressing the viewer through verbal slurs painted on each portrait of the series.

These violent words engage the viewer in the equation put forward by the paintings. It is then that he or she chooses a role within this drama, and its multiple points of entry.

The scenes depict the dark underbelly of compulsory heterosexuality, hopeless social situations, sexual domination, psychological obedience and grim addictions. They are also an ode to nonconforming genders. An inquiry into interpersonal relationships is made more complex with collages of mixed objects and elements onto the canvas. These relics (letters, wallpaper, fabric, fake jewelry, or temporary tattoos) are in fact codified references to the artist's biography. By way of this gloomy chronicle, the artist offers a critique of media representations, delivering a feminist-punk tract. Her critical position echoes her personal life. By inserting autobiographical and narrative elements in her post-conceptual practice, Burkhart has opened unprecedented perspectives within the practices of painting and appropriation, in a way anticipating the important fictional series of Californian artist Jim Shaw, and more specifically his project started in 1986, titled *My Mirage*.

In comparison with the strength of her process, the problematics in her work, and the admiration that it sparks in her peers, Kathe Burkhart's art still remains under-represented. Despite totally different political concerns, she introduced along with many other artists of her generation (Mike Kelley, John Miller, Jim Shaw, or their predecessor Thomas Lawson, but also Jean-Frédéric Schnyder in Switzerland) a new understanding of painting, that can

now be envisioned as a conceptual praxis. Thomas Lawson believes this precise use of painting confirms the triumph of concept<sup>1</sup>. When the primacy of concept over medium is widely validated, it is no longer necessary to disregard painting for its conservatism.

Burkhart has chosen to express herself with this medium as a means of provocatively appropriating a traditional genre historically dominated by male painters. Contrarily, many female artists who were developing a conceptual practice articulated around a critique of the media and use of language had opted for photography (Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine, Cindy Sherman, Sarah Charlesworth). Kathe Burkhart's posture is a categorical appropriation of a territory in art history largely dominated by men, conjoined with a recoding of sexist language. Ultimately, these works challenge the viewer's preconceptions, they are an appeal to question the self and invite the viewer to act.

**This Kathe Burkhart retrospective has already been the subject of two important focuses in the following magazines: *Flash Art* 306<sup>2</sup>, and the March 2016 issue of *Art in America*.<sup>3</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Lawson, « Last Exit Painting », in : *Artforum*, October 1981.

<sup>2</sup> Fri Art, «Feature: The Liz Taylor Series – Kathe Burkhart», in: *Flash Art*, n. 306, January-February, Volume 49, 2016, pp. 66 – 73.

<sup>3</sup> Jane Ursula Harris, «Interview: In the Studio - Kathe Burkhart», in: *Art in America*, March 2016.