

William N. Copley

10.09. — 31.10.2015

Paintings from 1960–1994

cply

Prins Hendrikkade 132 HS
1011 AR, Amsterdam
The Netherlands

SHOWROOM
by Paul van Esch & Partners Art Advisory



Josephine Baker, 1963, oil on canvas, 81,5 x 65 cm



William N. Copley
La Muerticita, 1984
Acrylic on canvas
152,5 x 114,5 cm

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Works from Private Collections

SHOWROOM is proud to announce the opening of its first exhibition dedicated to the multifaceted American artist William N. Copley. Painter, writer, gallerist and patron of the arts, Copley is a unique figure in post-war art history, well known for his humorous and sarcastic imagery.

The current exhibition brings together works from all his phases of creation, from the Parisian years to the last period spent mostly in solitude in his home in Sugarloaf Key, Florida – all from private Dutch collections.

Historically, Copley has been an artist of much interest in The Netherlands. His first European museum showing took place in 1961 at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, while the Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven hosted the great exhibition tour organized by Kunsthalle Bern in 1980. The Amsterdam Stedelijk Museum became the first public institution to add a Copley to its collection, and currently has several works by the artist on display in the permanent collection presentation.

Before several works from local private collections will travel to the 2016 exhibition “William N. Copley: The World According to CPLY” organized by The Menil Collection in Houston and Fondazione Prada in Milan, SHOWROOM is pleased to present an overview of the most important works acquired by private Dutch collectors throughout the past two decades.



William N. Copley
Lune de Miel (Variations on a Theme by Francis Picabia), 1978
Acrylic on canvas
168 x 140 cm



William N. Copley
L'amour c'est ce qu'on fait, 1993
Acrylic on canvas
132 x 162,5 cm



William N. Copley
Cinzano, 1981
Oil on canvas
96,5 x 129,5 cm



William N. Copley
Untitled, 1989
Acrylic on canvas
152,5 x 193,5 cm

About the exhibition

CPLY’s paintings can be summarized as the exploration of what he called “the battle of sexes”, creating a highly idiosyncratic artistic language, inspired from everyday life and American imagery of pin-up and comic strips, as well as folk art. Even though he spent most of the 1950s and early 1960s in Paris in the company of Surrealists, upon his return to New York in 1963 he effortlessly fit into the local Pop Art movement. Drawing inspiration from newspaper cartoons and working in series, CPLY’s simplified cartoon style figures, at times without facial features, alone or in animated groups, corresponded to the aesthetic concepts of Pop Art.

While ostensibly American, his paintings were also imbued with French symbols. Matisse might very well have inspired his handling of space and decorative surfaces, while other typical French motives are also present in his works, such as the Parisian café sceneries in *L’amour c’est ce qu’on fait*, or the public urinal with the Cinzano ad.

Inspired as well by great work of Surrealist masters, CPLY created new variations on already existing subjects. In 1978 he executed a series of twelve paintings inspired by one of Francis Picabia’s most emblematic paintings, *La Nuit Espagnole*, 1922. The painting represents the contour of a man and woman set on a black and white background. As indicated by the title, the work might be showing a Spanish dancing couple (as suggested by the man’s arm position). Nevertheless, the colored targets on the female figure complicate the deciphering. The man could thus become a knife thrower aiming for the colorful boards. These are seemingly placed on vital female organs, and may metaphorically allude to women as targets of men. It is no surprise that CPLY took great interest in reinterpreting this work, as it fit in perfectly with his exploration of male/female dichotomies. Two of the twelve paintings of the series presented in this exhibition, *Pasado Mañana* and *Lune de Miel* reinterpret the theme of Picabia’s renowned painting, nevertheless in a typical CPLY style, with animated figures set upon a colorful background and flamboyant ornamental structures that almost take on an independent life of their own.

Sexuality and the female body represent recurring themes for CPLY. Throughout his entire career he has been representing the female figure, almost exclusively nude or in highly revealing clothing, and without distinct facial features. Thus his decision of painting a greatly personalized representation of Josephine Baker makes this work even more special. Painted on a background reminiscent of the burlesque world of nightclubs, Josephine Baker is depicted with her typical smile, pearl necklaces and show costume, emanating a joie de vivre typical of the oeuvre of an artist dedicated to capturing the erotic pleasures of both life and art.