

Berlin Night Drawings

To me Colette's Berlin Night Drawings look like cosmological maps, like she is trying to map the constellations of stars hypothetically appearing in, or comprising, our dreams. I can see Colette working on them in the middle of the night in Berlin, applying colorful glitter like stardust to the surface of the paper, or like metaphysical makeup, drawing lines as if she were tracing the moon's romance with the darkness inside us – and all of it emerging in forms so limpid and transparent, so full of light, their touch so facile, they would seem to come apart before they could lift off the page like exotic birds and butterflies destined for other worlds! And yet the lines hold firm, as delicate and strong and articulate as any Neo-Classical drawing by Ingres. If she is tracing the soul of a perfect stranger, then it is the soul of what is strange and exotic and forever elusive in all of us.

Colette's Berlin Night Drawings, like her work in general, remind us that we are always putting ourselves together, that we are all like women, the Universal Woman (not entirely unrelated to de Kooning's, and libidinally not really so much less grotesque), in front of an ontological mirror, gathering ourselves up into an image, a workable mask; that we are made of parts, a configuration, a topography, of connectible, if not connecting, lines; that there is no such thing as a whole, only abiding parts that never really fit together unless we patiently, and somewhat uninhibitedly, piece them together with few or no expectations, like micro-artists, knowing that at night we will wash the make-up away or that it will, most of it, simply wear off by the morning, like multi-colored mascara. We are all artists, as Beuys contended more than once, we are social creatures, we are all of us made up, like stories, determined by the forces surrounding us, but also compelled by the forces of intimacy. And we are all now, to riff on Warhol, potentially famous for the 15 seconds it takes for us to compose ourselves to snap a selfie. On the larger and deeper playing field, that is, for the sake of civilization, we wear the mask of civility, but we are also human, and inhuman, and therefore, driven by these external forces that shape us and by these internal forces (of intimacy) which we try, more often than not unsuccessfully, to shape. Forces that sometimes become more manifest at night, when we tend to let our guard down, and proximity with others and ourselves seems either more possible or less intimidating, depending on how we negotiate this comparably brutal and tender darkness.

But if we cast Colette as a mythic, Universal Lover versed in the civilizing arts of humanity, then we must see her also as an artist, a consummate creator of artifice, who sees beyond our individual needs and desires; hence, the emphasis she places on the eyes in each of her drawings. [...] She tells us it is up to us to see someone else in the mirror into which we steadily and often hopelessly stare. The drawings she makes during the proverbial "dark night of the soul" in Berlin, with its at times illustrious and at times despicable history, are portraits of us, and no one else, overflowing with nothing more than the clear, lucid, suggestive light of self-transformation!

From the essay "Colette's Berlin Night Drawings" by Richard Milazzo, April 2018.

Colette is a multimedia artist known for her pioneering work in performance art, street art and her use of photography. She is also known for her work exploring male and female gender roles, different guises and personas and for her soft fabric environments where she often appears as the central element. She was born in Tunis, Tunisia, of French nationality, and grew up in Nice, France before becoming a naturalized American citizen. She lives and works in New York City and Berlin. She has recently (2016) had a solo show at MOMA PS1, her solo show 2017 at Mitchell Alguo Gallery New York has been selected in Best of 2017 Art Forum Dec. Issue. 2016 she received the Guggenheim fellowship.

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Poster #30, 2017, Drawing, 42 cm x 29,3 cm
Reverse _left #5, 2016, Drawing, 42 cm x 29,3 cm _right #31, 2018, Drawing, 42 cm x 29,3 cm

COLETTE

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May 8 - June 9, 2018

Opening May 8, 7pm



