

POP LIFE

Art in a Material World



Counterfeit

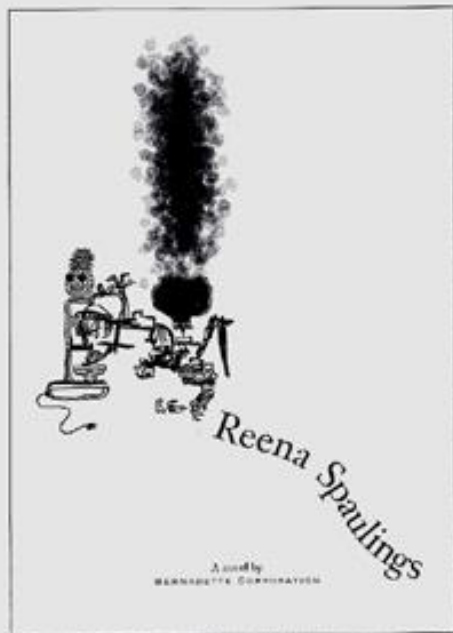
An important commodity in the art market is the originality of the work for sale – both in the sense that it is a unique expression, and that it is genuinely by the artist that its signature (or signature style) claims. Since her first solo show at the Bianchini Gallery in New York in 1965, Sturtevant has worked on the 'reproduction' of iconic contemporary paintings, sculptures and installations. She is credited with marking the beginning of the 1980s 'Simulationist' movement, but unlike certain of her peers such as Mike Bidlo and Richard Pettibone, her work is not appropriation art, and nor is it homage. Whilst Louise Lawler or Sherrie Levine appropriated other artists work via forms of mechanical reproduction, Sturtevant intricately remade works by hand: collapsing any distance between her work and the original by fully inhabiting the process in order to create apparently legitimate substitutions for those works. 'The brutal truth ... is that it's not a copy', Sturtevant has said.²¹ She overidentifies with the idea of the 'signature style' in order to reveal the hidden reverse of the legitimate art economy. Where the artist's genius ought to be is a hollow brand that shifts and identifies with different works at different times in a performative manner. By 'passing' as originals by Frank Stella, Keith Haring or Andy Warhol, her works make manifest the myths of originality and authenticity that the art system does its best to mask (pp.119, 120). The artists she

fakes have sometimes themselves been complicit in the process. Warhol, always one step ahead, allowed her to make her *Gold Marilyn* on his own silkscreening press. And when Sturtevant met Marcel Duchamp and showed him an early 'Duchamp' that she had made, as the artist recounts, he did not bat an eyelid, and played the game by simply asking, 'Well, where did you get that?'

Bernard Blistene has commented:

Sturtevant's project ... takes the form of an analysis of the myth of the artist from an age of the exchange value and the free circulation of goods. So why therefore pay less for a Sturtevant than for all those she recycles? And why then this schizophrenia, which Deleuze demonstrated was pushing the capitalist system to bankruptcy? By mixing up artistic codes, by destabilizing its fetishist function, Sturtevant aims to undermine art as absolute merchandise in the circulation of signs and values that knows no place.²²

In challenging the very notion of the 'original' she also challenges ideas of copyright or counterfeit, and so disturbs the basic tenets of the art market.²³ [By way of contrast, Murakami's recent touring retrospective, which included



Cover of *Reena Spaulings*:
A Novel by Bernadette
Corporation, New York 2004

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Reena Spoolings
Untitled (Flag) 2009
Mixed media and aluminium
pole, bracket, plastic eagle
Pole 182.9 cm high,
Flag 91.4 x 15 cm

Wallpaper
(after Merlin Carpenter)
2009
Ink on paper
Dimensions variable

Sturtevant
Warhol Gold Marilyn 1973
(p.119)



a shop selling Kaikai Kiki products, as well as large-scale product displays, was titled ©MURAKAMI; p.78).

Even Sturtevant's name alludes to the idea of a brand whilst maintaining a kind of genderless anonymity for the artist. Paradoxically, she performs her brand-identity while perpetually assimilating any sense of signature style into the 'signature styles' of others. But Sturtevant's work projects not just the success of individual 'passes', but her entire system of language and all that it encompasses. Her doubling of iconic works creates a virus in the system, a multiplication of cells that – via an excessive form of complicity – corrodes and destabilises the very foundations of its belief.

Rather than being a sibling of the appropriation artists of the 1980s, then, Sturtevant in her practice looks forward to contemporary attitudes in art. In particular, her work chimes with the corrosive endeavour of the artists' collective Reena Spaulings. Reena Spaulings is a fictional character, now 'artist' and 'gallerist', who evolved within the context of a multi-authored novel by the Bernadette



Sturtevant
Beuys La
Rivoluzione
Siamo Noi
1988
Courtesy the
artist and
Anthony
Reynolds
Gallery,
London

Corporation in 2004. Bernadette Corporation is a collaborative project, begun in 1994, of which Bennett Simpson has written, 'In a cultural landscape littered with "alternatives" (grunge, heroin chic, Bill Clinton), BC were quick to see identity as a fallacious term usurped by capital – and so they sought to undermine it from within, in their words, by, "emulating a corporate image through 'joke' forms of business that are serious".'²⁴ The existence of Reena Spaulings, a cipher whose nominal identity serves as an anchor for the practices of a number of different artists, and simultaneously plays the gallery dealer, exposes the inverse of Sturtevant's revelation of lack so far as the marketable individual is concerned: there is no face, no singular life narrative to be matched with the artist's output. Or, rather, an excess of narratives, an excess of faces, and of artistic styles that cannot satisfy the shape of cultural demand for their commodification. Both Sturtevant and Reena Spaulings cleave apart assumed relations between persona, product and biography as extreme exaggerations of the Warholian adage about having 'a product that's not you'.