

Corita Kent

to the everyday miracle

kaufmann repetto is pleased to announce a solo exhibition of artist Corita Kent (b. 1918, Fort Dodge, d. 1986, Boston). Developed in collaboration with the Corita Art Center in Los Angeles, *to the everyday miracle* presents a retrospective view of Kent's work, bringing together over 40 prints and watercolors as well as a selection of archival materials spanning from the early 1950s until her death in 1986.

Corita Kent was an artist, educator, and advocate for social justice whose work reflects the ascendancy of Pop Art, the spiritual renewal of the Second Vatican Council and the political activism of the 1960s. A catholic nun for more than three decades, Kent was deeply committed to cultural, social, and aesthetic innovation. Her idiosyncratic approach to art and outspoken engagement with the world made her a target of criticism by conservative clergy but also secluded the reception of her work from more elite contemporary art circles. Born Frances Elizabeth Kent, she entered the religious order Immaculate Heart of Mary in Hollywood at age 18, taking the name Sister Mary Corita. By 1947, she began teaching art at the Immaculate Heart College and later became head of the art department in 1964. During this time, the art department became a well-known hub of creativity and liberal thinking.

Corita began producing her first serigraphs in the early 1950s. Influenced by the medieval art she was studying while obtaining a master's degree at the University of Southern California, her prints consisted of dense, multi-layered compositions featuring religious themes and iconography. While these early prints recall Byzantine paintings and the stained-glass windows of European cathedrals, in most cases Corita integrates more modern-day influences. A closer look at the work at *cana of galilee* (1952) reveals Christ and Mary surrounded by both medieval chalices and Charles Eames's iconic plastic chairs. Corita's mid-century artistic influences also extended into Abstract Expressionist painting, and she would soon eschew figurative forms for more abstract marks. In works like *you air that serves me* (1963), Corita used a brush and the tusche-glue process to reproduce painterly gestures and handwritten text. By the end of the fifties, Corita incorporated quotations from both biblical sources and prominent literary figures such as Gertrude Stein, E.E. Cummings, and Walt Whitman.

In the wake of the '60s, Corita's interests continued to expand and her prints reflected a more diverse group of influences that included philosophy, politics, and pop culture. It was in 1962 that Corita first encountered Andy Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Cans* at Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles. This formative moment initiated her interest in appropriating slogans and graphic design from consumer culture, not only for spiritual and religious, but also socio-political ends. By reinterpreting catchphrases from Chevy and Pepsi ads as religious affirmations, works

such as *handle with care* (1967) and *come alive* (1967) are archetypal examples of Corita's singular take on Pop Art, which uniquely emphasizes the polyvalent nature of language.

Throughout the '60s, Corita's work became increasingly political, urging viewers to consider poverty, racism, and injustice. Prints such as *stop the bombing* (1967) and *you shoot at yourself, america* (1968) not only reflect America's anti-war sentiments and widespread social unrest but also reveal Corita's sensitivity to the increasing presence and influence of mass media. Employing audacious colors and bold compositions, as well as more graphic news imagery, Corita's work became more confrontational by the late '60s. Her series of *heroes and sheroes* most explicitly reflects the era's social and political movements, addressing topics of the decade such as labor and civil rights, nuclear disarmament, and political assassinations, among others. *american sampler* (1969) is immediately striking in its symbolic use of red, white, and blue, spelling out in graphic typeface words like "nation," "American," and "Vietnam," while the viewer's eye isolates additional color-coded meanings like "TV," "sin," "I," and "why."

In the summer of 1968, exhausted from conflicts with the archdiocese and a demanding schedule of exhibiting, teaching, and lecturing around the country, Corita sought dispensation from her vows and moved to Boston. Influenced by living in a new environment as a secular and independent artist, her work evolved into a more introspective style after 1970. *now is enough - shell writing #8* (1976)—which features an abstract, close-up detail of a shell collected on the beach—offers a glimpse into Corita's exploration of new modes of spirituality and mindfulness of the natural environment.

Throughout the last years of her life, Kent also maintained an active watercolor practice, newly embracing the painterly gesture (as she did in early works from the 1950s) and its relationship to the personal. Her watercolors would form the foundational imagery for many of her late prints. This exhibition includes a selection of never-before exhibited watercolor paintings from that period, some which meditate on her natural surroundings (flowers, sky, and the water of Boston bay), while others continued to incorporate poetic adages and personal spiritual affirmations such as in *untitled* (1977): "the dark has its own light".

Corita Kent's work is held in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; National Gallery of Art, Washington DC; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; and many others. Notable exhibitions include: *Joyful Revolutionary*, Taxispalais Kunsthalle Tirol, Innsbruck (2020); *Artists Respond: American Art and the Vietnam War, 1965-1975*, Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis (2019); *Corita Kent: Get With The Action*, Ditchling Museum of Art+Craft, Ditchling (2019); *Corita Kent: Spiritual Pop*, Portland Art Museum, Portland (2017); *Corita Kent and the Language of Pop*, Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge (2015); *Someday is Now: The Art of Corita Kent*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland (2014); traveled to the Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh (2014); *R(ad)ical Love: Sister Mary Corita*, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington (2012); *Brussels Biennial*, Brussels (2008); *Yes People Like Us: Prints from the 1960s by Sister Corita*, Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2007).