

# Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

## KIM LEVIN: PAINTINGS 1963 - 1973

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**June 11 - July 29, 2016**

Ronald Feldman Fine Arts is pleased to present this rare exhibition of early paintings by Kim Levin from 1963 to 1973, a confessional show of artwork by a prominent New York art critic and curator, who was a painter for ten years before her career in art criticism took precedence. A young artist of stature, Levin was represented by the Poindexter Gallery, and had solo shows there in 1964 and 1967. Although she started writing about art while studying archaeology in graduate school, Levin dates the beginning of her life as a critic to the publication by Abrams of her monograph on Lucas Samaras in 1974. Identifying herself as an "accidental critic," Levin attributes her change in vocation in the early '70s to her increasing theoretical interest in the near future of art history and its distant past, and to an acute allergy to turpentine.

Levin's large paintings are based on small black and white photographs, primarily from The New York Times, at a time when it was not only rare for artists to paint from photographs, but also controversial. The paintings have a distinctive figural style: their representational images are deconstructed into forms and structures, providing a key to the pictorial framework and unifying the composition of these works from a pre-conceptual era. The seemingly unfinished surface of these works reveals not only the texture of the primed linen but a conceptual structure that enhances the abstract reality. Levin often inverted the relation of figure to structure, painting from negatives or fragments. Contrasts were heightened and color was not documentary but invented.

This exhibition comprises an overview of Levin's body of work during her ten years as a painter. She painted in series, choosing popular political leaders of their day and historical images that were ubiquitous in the culture. Among them: a series on John Fitzgerald Kennedy, a series of historic conferences among FDR, Churchill, DE Gaulle, and Stalin, a series of North African horsemen of the Sahara; wing walkers performing aerial stunts, football players in motion; and the Beatles. What unites them is an unstated theme of power. A series of small canvases (1969-70), titled, "Action Paintings," depict couples transformed from pornographic photo postcards of the 1920s into erotic studies of the human form.

The exhibition, *Kim Levin: Paintings 1963 - 1973* follows Levin's first exhibition at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts in 2006: *Notes and Itineraries*, organized with John Salvest, a conceptual artist whose work relates to accumulation. That show, an installation of Levin's archive of coded itineraries on gallery cards and press releases, which she created to organize information during the twenty years that she wrote weekly for The Village Voice, traveled to Haas & Mayer Gallery in Zurich, the Ludwig Museum in Budapest, KIASMA in Helsinki, and at the Royal College of Art in London.

Reviewing *Notes and Itineraries*, for The New York Times, Ken Johnson defined the quality of Kim Levin's critical writing: *She [Kim Levin] rarely wrote negatively, and she freely dispensed stars to shows she deemed of particular interest. She was not a militant anti-elitist, but her impulse was to share rather than to exclude.*

This exhibition, which presents Kim Levin the painter, extends its sphere of inquiry to include a hidden autobiographical subtext of her experiences and how her accomplishments in two contrasting fields affected each other.

Kim Levin, author of *Beyond Modernism: Essays on Art from the '70s and '80s* (Harper Collins 1988; Tokyo Shoseki 1991), has taught at the Philadelphia College of Art, Parsons The New School for Design, Claremont Graduate School, and The School of Visual Arts. She was advisor to the 1995 Kwangju Biennial in Korea and has organized exhibitions in Europe, Asia, and the United States. President of the International Association of Art Critics from 1996 to 2002, her awards include the Art/World Award for Distinguished Newspaper Journalism in 1986, the SECA Fellowship for Criticism by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1993, and Fellow for the Annenberg/Getty Arts Journalism Program in 2004 and 2011.

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Reception: June 11, 6-8. Gallery hours are Tuesday-Saturday, 10-6. Monday by appointment. For information: Casey Dorobek at (212) 226-3232 or [casey@feldmangallery.com](mailto:casey@feldmangallery.com). Press information: <http://bit.ly/22qA3sq>

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