

via a. stradella 7

simone forti
distant lands

PRESS RELEASE

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opening thursday, february 16, 6–8pm

Galleria Raffaella Cortese is delighted to present three solo exhibitions by renowned American artists Simone Forti, Joan Jonas, and Kiki Smith, opening on February 16, 2023. Each of their decades-long practices of experimentation across different media can be united through their common interests in and study of the human body, the animal kingdom, and movement as a vital force. Animals in particular have inspired a number of Simone Forti's works across photographs, drawings, and performances since the late 1960s; they have made appearances in nearly all of Joan Jonas' multimedia installations and have been the subject of countless drawings of hers; and finally, cats and pigeons are the main protagonists of the sculptures and drawings exhibited as part of Kiki Smith's latest show at the gallery.

The title of Simone Forti's second solo show at Galleria Raffaella Cortese, *Distant Lands*, expresses a desire for convergence and exchange between Italy and California. Born in Florence in 1935, Simone and her family emigrated to Los Angeles in 1938, where she later studied with choreographer Anna Halprin and has since spent most of her life. After her association with the Judson Dance Theater—a collective of dancers, composers, and visual artists who performed at the Judson Memorial Church in Downtown Manhattan in the early 1960s—and realizing her acclaimed *Dance Constructions*, in 1968, during the artist's time in Rome, Forti first took interest in the movements and gestures of the animals she saw at the zoo. It was during that same year that the artist spent in Rome that she also made photographs of the cats lounging in the archeological area of Largo Argentina, which is still to this day the permanent residence of many cats.

In the exhibition at the gallery, Forti presents a number of drawings from the series *News Animations* (1985-2012). In this practice, which the artist has continued working on since the mid-1980s, she explores the potential of language expressed through movement, words, images, and sound, all originating in response to stories found in newspapers. Forti started "reading" the news in 1983 as a sort of cathartic response to the death of her father, who would attentively read newspapers each day, and has since developed this body of work through performances, video works, and drawings. Sketches of human figures, a tree, a crow, and lightning appear in the drawings alongside words, fragmented and covered up, describing thoughts and concerns as disparate as "Ecol Econ Ogy Omy" and war occurring in "Distant Lands". They all come together in the reflections on language and media transported on paper.

The video work *News Animation: The Getty Center* (2004), installed on a screen in a corner of the gallery space, displays Forti's actions on stage, incorporating two

props that together make up the iconic flag of the United States of America: stars and stripes, painted on rough pieces of canvas. Her words, interspersed with rapid movements and onomatopoeic sounds, speak of themes as varied as the Euphrates, "Gilgamesh people", gardening, and how herbs such as oregano can be invasive, thinly veiling a strong anti-war position. Weeds and the earth prominently appear in the exhibition as the central themes of three videos shot in Vermont in 2019, *Weeding: Simone's Garden*, *Weeding: Steve and Lisa's Garden 1*, and *Weeding: Steve and Lisa's Garden 2*. The camera is often low to the ground, close up to Simone's hands as they move through blades of grass.

Writings by the artist take on several different forms in the exhibition: complementing the video works and drawings, an installation of three silkscreens on canvas presents the text *The Skin of My Teeth*, written by Forti in 2018. The writing includes references to the Beat Poets, contemporary political scenarios, as well as personal experiences. Finally, Simone's voice echoes across the space from the speakers reproducing the sound piece *Made in LA Reading* (2012), in which the artist muses on social experiences and history close to her own as a Jewish Italian person.

Following a number of exhibitions and performances in Italy — including the artist's 2019 show at Fondazione ICA Milano and her 2021 survey at Centro Pecci in Prato, the hometown of the Forti family — in January 2023 the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles opened the largest exhibition on the West Coast dedicated to the artist's groundbreaking practice. On February 8, Simone Forti was awarded the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement of the Biennale Danza 2023.

BIOGRAPHY

Simone Forti was born in Florence (Italy) in 1935. She lives and works in Los Angeles.

Select institutions that have hosted solo exhibitions and performances by Simone Forti include: Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles (MOCA), Los Angeles (2023); Centro Pecci, Prato (2021); ICA Milano, Milan (2019); Kunsthau Baselland, Basel (2019); Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2015); Louvre Museum, Paris (2014); Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2013); Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (2013); The High Line, New York (2012); Galleria L'Attico, Rome (2009); Getty Museum, Los Angeles (2004); Musée d'art moderne et contemporain (MAMCO), Geneva, (2003); Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris (2002); Castello di Rivoli, Turin (1999); Fundacao Serralves Museum, Porto (1999); P.S.1, New York (1983, 1977, 1976); Kunsthalle, Basel (1979); Sonnabend Gallery, New York (1978, 1974), San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco (1977); Yoko Ono Studio, New York (1969, 1961); Merce Cunningham Studio, New York (1961).

Her work has been included in group exhibitions such as: Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York (2018, 2014, 2013, 2009, 1979, 1978); Kunsthau Zurich, Zurich (2017); Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2015, 2012); Centre Pompidou, Paris (2015, 2011); Guggenheim Museum, New York (2013); Haus der Kunst, Munich (2011); Hayward Gallery, London (2010); Galleria L'Attico, Rome (1972, 1969, 1968).