The Age of Aquarius

Carol Bove, Amy Grappell and David Noonan

March 13 – May 1, 2011

Opening Reception: March 13, 6:00–7:00pm
Featuring a talk with filmmaker Amy Grappell from 5:00–6:00pm

CONCERT Wednesday, April 20, 8:00pm
Vincent Barbe and Jacques Demail

Based on the formal and conceptual rigor of these artists’ generation, Barbe and Demail have concluded, picking up where the likes of Kurt Schwitters and Pierre Henry-Duipuis left off. Hailing from Seine-et-Marne, France, the duo’s minimalist, anti-culture aesthetic was first heard in the mid-1960s. Their, At Last (1960) and Thru Sound (1961) is proof that the avant-garde, although controversial, is plenty viable. What seems access as dry humor in the duo’s elegant and smart renderings, could only gain through live. This concert is made possible by the Siragusa Foundation; The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; and our membership.

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Within the astrological calendar, each of the zodiac’s twelve constellations has an age. Each age lasts roughly 2,150 years corresponding to a 26,000-year cycle in which the earth’s axis gyroscopically shifts its orientation towards the various constellations. According to some, the Age of Aquarius is upon us. Under this rubric, the world’s strife and upheaval are mere growing pains. Socio-political revolution—the dismantling of old values and institutions—represents an evolution in human consciousness. In a universe where human affairs are governed by the dawn of a new celestial era, the world falls apart only to come together, putting a premium on a belief in the interconnectedness of all things.

The Age of Aquarius is not a period that has yet to be, but a moment that has come to pass. Indeed, the Age of Aquarius commonly refers to the latter half of the 1960s and early 1970s. It designates a period whose utopian aspirations achieved their fullest expression in alternative lifestyles. These were born of a turbulent decade whose rhetoric devolved from that of effecting social change to that of personal fulfillment: from 1964, in which Lyndon B. Johnson unveiled the “Great Society,” to 1968, which周恩来 dubbed “Year of the Commun.” Thanks to no small part to youth culture, the period’s aspirations found unforgettably expression. An endless celebration of the period, however, overshadows the fact that the retreat from the social into the personal took place against an encompassing sense of disillusionment. As an exercise in cultural memory, the Age of Aquarius yields an irony-riddled nostalgia often taking the form of self-mockery by those proclaiming “been there, done that.” But the disavowal of the period by liberals and its demonization by conservatives are what mark the Age of Aquarius’ estrangement from the present.

This three-person exhibition features Carol Bove (b. 1977), Amy Grappell (b. 1964), and David Noonan (b. 1968). For this generation of artists, the Age of Aquarius has become an archaeological site whose findings exist as effects of history. These artists are young enough to claim historical objectivity in relation to events of the 1960s, and simultaneously old enough to have a deeply subjective relationship to its effects. As wide-eyed and silent witnesses to the Age of Aquarius, they are granted an arm’s-length proprietary interest in the period, an ownership but at a critical and critically specific distance. More important than being linked by way of period-based content (free love, mimes, the inherent expressivity of natural forms), is the extent to which these very different artists allow the period to speak for itself. Under this constraint, the challenge is distinguishing the generation being spoken for from the generation being spoken of.

Whether it is Bove’s plinth-based reliquary, La Traverse Difficile (The Difficult Crossing), 2006, a curated selection of objects and images linking the unconscious to the expanded conscious via the figures of René Magritte and Gerald Heard; Grappell’s Quadangole, 2009, an unf Richard Bavington, Michael Evis and Richard Demierre; Noonan’s latest, The Newer Flowers, 2009, engaging multivalent forms of musical notation, instruction, emotional states and extended instrumental techniques; or GAUGHAN, 1964, was a radical score, involving with Scottish bagpipe music, a rhythms and drone-based caged influence, and studying Indian music with Punita Gupta. Later influenced by Kodály and Stravinsky, he moved to France in the early 1950s, studying with French musicologist, making him a “new complexity” artist. His music calls for performances committed to contemporary music with a fearless, experimental and open attitude towards unorthodox forms of notation and playing techniques; as ensembles devoted to conquering the utmost challenge in the face of adversity. In short, this is a 20th Century. The concert will be held at the Renaissance Society, 1160 E. 58th St., Chicago, IL 60637. Entry is in the Southwest corner of the main quadrangle.

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