

Hildegarde Duane WESTERN WOMAN

Los Angeles-based conceptual artist Hildegarde Duane has worked across mediums since the mid-seventies, courting the peripheries of mass media entertainment and its archetypal figures in videos and photo stories. This exhibition is Duane's first solo presentation in Europe and brings together a comprehensive survey of work made between 1978 and today; charting the evolution of her practice, an exploration of language, and the subversion and reappropriation of the image.

The title, *Western Woman*, is simultaneously a nod towards the artist's Californian roots, and the set of stereotypical conventions she both engages and unsettles in her work. Her approach to feminism reflects her subversive attitude towards modes of representation, employing humour, irony and ambiguity in equal measure. This, alongside a fascination with the subtleties and potential perversions of iconic representation, speaks of a sensitivity towards the edge or tipping point of an image that Duane describes as a "piercing quality, yet detached."

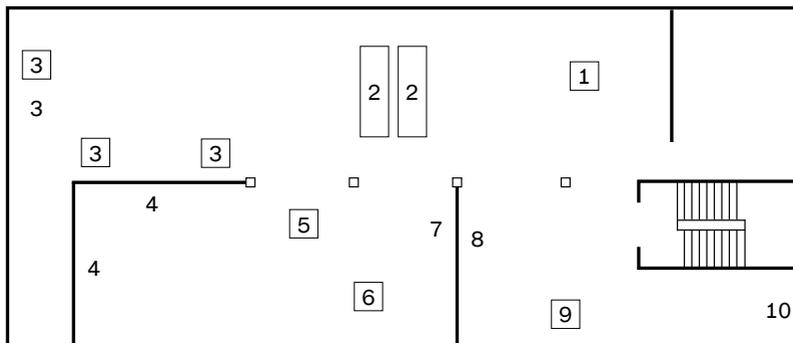
Duane's practice is born from a spirit of collaboration initiated at Los Angeles' Long Beach Museum of Art in its multiple video programmes, commissions, and editing facilities in the mid-seventies. A recurring group of artists, actors, and musicians from this LA scene feature on and off camera. Other frequent collaborators, including artists David Lamelas and Ilene Segalove, form a West Coast peer group of artists and video makers whose concerns preceded those of the Pictures Generation.

This guide contains an overview of the exhibition and a conversation with Duane, focusing on some of the persistent concerns of her practice, including romance and its reversals and tragedies, implicit hierarchies and equality, the power of girlfriends, a classical style, and the revelation of narrative through storytelling.

Hildegarde Duane
WESTERN WOMAN
09 September – 22 October 2017

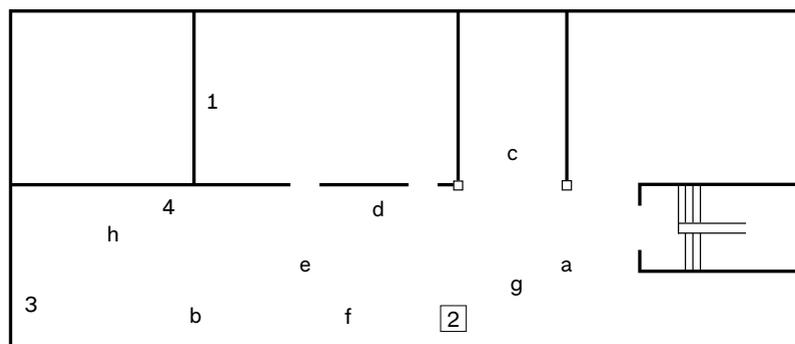
Künstlerhaus Stuttgart
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Level 4



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| 1 Hildegarde Duane and David Lamelas, <i>G.U.N.</i> , 1997, video, 12 min 15 sec | 6 <i>Wild Honey</i> , 1978, vitrine with Wild Honey's sweater and anklet, Lavender Liz letter, Honey's Eye and polaroids |
| 2 <i>Marilyn Monroe – 14 Stations</i> , 1982, book – photo and text | 7 <i>Lubna of Sudan</i> , 2009, print |
| 3 <i>Goat to Woolf</i> , 1978, two-channel video installation, 15 min 9 sec | 8 <i>Joan of Arc</i> , 1982, print |
| 4 <i>Juliet</i> , 2003, ten prints | 9 <i>Down with Cocaine</i> , 1983, video, 1 min |
| 5 <i>Wild Honey Meets Togetherman</i> , 1978, video, 1 min 10 sec | 10 <i>Canelo</i> , 2008–16, video, 16 min |

Level 2



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|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1 Cinema showing <i>Pink Slip</i> , 1983, video, 7 min
<i>Silk</i> , 1977, video, 1 min 15 sec | 7 <i>Snow Whites</i> , 1981, prints |
| 2 <i>Meltdown</i> , 1982, video, 1 min 15 sec | a #1 – HD |
| 3 <i>Ionesco in Hollywood</i> , 2012, video, 9 min 15 sec | b #2 – Mary |
| 4 <i>Hansel and Gretel House</i> , 2015, print | c #3 – Rosanna |
| | d #4 – Natasha |
| | e #5 – Ilene |
| | f #6 – Deb |
| | g #7 – Bai-fang |
| | h <i>the Dwarf</i> – Stuart |

An interview with Hildegarde Duane, by Fatima Hellberg and Steven Cairns

Your background is in Art History. How did your art making practice begin and what was your relationship with the Long Beach Museum of Art (LBMA) in the 1970s where you made your early video works?

My art practice began, probably by reading novels. After I stopped working in Art History, I spent several years writing screenplays in Hollywood. When none were produced, I decided to do it myself. Knowing LBMA curator David Ross from when I curated a show from the People's Republic of China there, I started using the video production facility at the Museum. I had a lot of story ideas, there was a lot of communication between artists, and video was being produced apace.

The facilities at LBMA were free. And it was a dynamic scene. They also usually exhibited the work somehow. All the technical help was free, too, equipment, edit, studio, the works. You couldn't do it at home like now. This is where barriers broke down. It was about access. For a brief period, you could get it out via local cable. My work was shown on the Museum's cable channel and in various LBMA traveling video exhibitions, and I directed and edited other projects for the museum.

How were the feminist issues you are concerned with related to the production environments you were in then and now? Are there any connections between the art world and Hollywood?

As far as I know the issues keep going round. Statistically maybe it is better for women and other minorities in Hollywood, but everyone agrees there's a long way to go. Progress seems to take a long time. The video *Pink Slip* (1983) touches upon how hard it is for a woman executive to run things, still largely true. I think the business side of Hollywood will collect art, but generally won't collaborate with artists, although creative Hollywood sometimes loves to cross the line. There are a few artists who have crossed into Hollywood, but it comes down to if they believe you can make money. And even though *Pink Slip* was an artist's satire of the industry's striving and cold-heartedness, I wanted a true Hollywood element (comedian Harold Ramis). So it's an homage to mixing the real with the fake which is kind of the essence of Hollywood.

Could you say a few words about how the writing in your photo stories and blog has evolved and how this relates to your practice beginning “by reading novels”?

I have always been drawn to story. Most novels have it, fairy tales are compelling. That developed into screenwriting and certain avenues of photography. Those photos carried the weight along with short notations. I might have a concept that I was working out, or something I had observed that I wanted to amplify. I would set out to create something. It all changes as you're doing it, so you can't really predict. More recently I have just been putting myself into a situation and seeing what will emerge.

How has your practice changed in line with the possibilities and opportunities available to you?

My practice has become more insular. I like the blog – hildegarden.wordpress.com – because I can just do it, not depend on anybody to make it happen, and at my own pace and discovery. I am working on a book and continue with the photo stories. The *MITN (Meaning In The Neighborhood)* piece, which exists on my blog, stretches over 10 years and is basically an extended walk. Like some of the artists whose practice involves walking, or the long-distance walking meditations of Tibetan monks, this work happens in the revelations that come from being on foot with a dog.

Do you consider the entertainment industry, movies, television, magazines, and newspapers to be an influence on your work?

All of those influence many, many people. I'm just pointing out certain things: questions about the nature of glamour. The Hollywood image as a cultural ideal. The tension between living like a normal person and projecting that image. Who has the power or access to shape the narrative... My work wants to subvert the original purpose of the image (selling/business), into an anti-message, as in the moody film noir tale *G.U.N.* (1997). This work may or may not be truly noir, but is transformed and layered when exhibited, taking on a new political/cultural reference and time signature.

Many of your works reference the gendered relationships between men and women. What is your intended message in works like the photo/text piece *Seven Snow Whites* (1981) or the video *Pink Slip* for example?

The message could be said to be persuasion through humour and glamour. In *Seven Snow Whites* the club, usually the men's club, is now of the woman. Role reversal. Then the idea of the outsider, who could be either. The ingroup, the outgroup. So I think it invites reflection. The mixed ethnicity of the gang, the local LA look, a female hierarchy (created by a woman, me). *Pink Slip* is a more playful look at this. The *double entendre* of the pink slip, both lingerie and slang for being fired. Here the man and woman have equal power sexually, but she has lost (fired) in the old boys' Hollywood, and he is the outsider (literally). Artistically, everyone in the project was a good friend and enjoyed being part of a lighthearted, satirical, porno-spoof, shot on the weekend in an office at the Long Beach Museum.

Could you say a few things about collaboration, and how the support networks of LBMA and wider network of friends, family, and colleagues play a role in your work on and off screen?

“Collaboration is fraught with many peaks and valleys” would describe David Lamelas and me. Yet we have jointly directed, produced, edited and performed in nine videos and installations in every decade from the 1970s to the present. With artist Ilene Segalove, it was easier as she was my camera person and actor, and I was her photo model. We had clearly defined roles during a creative flowering in Los Angeles. David and I were both totally committed to making it work out in the long run, so it has to this day.

LBMA was hugely important in the 70s and 80s. Artists could get support and exposure. It was very free-wheeling. The kind of energy that is present in the birth of something. Curator David Ross was a galvanizing resource for a community of artists, and you could actually have a conference on the beach. In tandem I used friends, family, and other artists in my videos and photos and shot locations at friends' places around LA.

Your work has a very specific take on the gaze, introducing a female gaze into scenarios where this perspective would be perceived as off. What is your take on the gaze in a film like *Ionesco in Hollywood* (2012)?

I would say it is about throwing off and moving beyond the circumscription of your psyche by the patriarch. The liberation of standing on your own, the commitment to doing more and better. Ultimately I think this is beyond gender and even culture. *Ionesco in Hollywood* speaks about silence, and how hard it is to speak: we see it through the lens of a young woman suppressed by a revered elder. And because it is forbidden, speaking is an act of rebellion and freedom. Art's redeeming power.

How do you use romance and glamour alongside humour in your work?

I am looking for the arresting image: attitude, intent, reflection. Romance or glamor is a knife to cut through to the passion or agony behind the veil. Once you have that it carries the story along. I think comedy is the most persuasive way to be critical (as well as insightful and fun). It can be black (*G.U.N.*), bubbly (*Pink Slip*), apocalyptic (*Meltdown*), but it's moving you towards something, revelling in the morality play that is life. This attitude has shaped my method.

The power of female friendship, or perhaps, more specifically, the "power of girlfriends" is captured with tenderness and irreverence in many of your works.

This power is an appreciation of what isolates a group and binds it together, the beauty therein, and understanding that you can find joy and support and comfort in this female commonality. In *Juliet's Girlfriends* (2003) the statues are like the three stages of woman, faithfully waiting off in a forgotten corner, bearing witness and support.

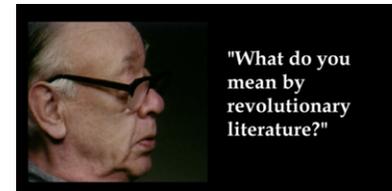
Synopses of four works

7 Snow Whites, 1981, prints



A story of sisterhood and insiders & outsiders. Duane is interested in the semiotics of clothing and here the lens is 'fierce fashion.' A multi-culti girl gang is at war with the pale Blondes. It could be seen as a metaphor for our times, but that's just the setting. Another kind of other, a man, wants to join in – we don't know why. The girl gang accepts him, and they complete the (reverse) paradigm: Seven Snow Whites and a Dwarf.

Ionesco in Hollywood, 2012, video



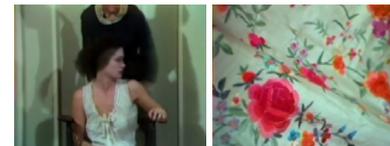
An examination of the past, a rare confessional, underground verite and a plea for healing and creativity. Duane's interview with celebrated Romanian playwright Eugene Ionesco unfolds in a small theatre in Hollywood where issues of heroes and failures, patriarchy and puppets, and time passing are captured on tape.

Pink Slip,* 1983, video



A romp in an office. Duane directs herself, comedian Harold Ramis, and frequent collaborator Ilene Segalove in the music and dance of one day in the life of a female Hollywood executive. In a world of sex and power it asks the question: who gets the 'pink slip'?

Goat to Woolf, 1978,
two-channel video installation



A sombre look at family, destiny, life and death, and love and literature told by voices from the world of Virginia Woolf. Spoken by Duane's friends, family, and artists, the dialogue is structured around questions from a fictional Doctor and quotations from literature of the time. The multi-screen installation virtually places the viewer inside Virginia's body and thoughts.

* a colloquial term for being fired

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Curated by Steven Cairns,
Hildegarde Duane,
and Fatima Hellberg

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Hildegarde Duane lives and works in Los Angeles. Her work has been exhibited internationally since the mid-seventies and is held in collections including Museum of Modern Art, New York; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid and Guggenheim Museum, New York. She is a recipient of the Woodrow Wilson Fellowship and a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, among others.



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