

KEITH SONNIER

Cat Doucet Drawings

Opening: **Thursday 1 October 2020, 11am - 8pm**

2 October to 18 December 2020

Galleria Fumagalli presents the second solo exhibition by American artist Keith Sonnier, from Friday 2 October to Friday 18 December, 2020.

The show – organized in collaboration with the artist before his passing (18 July, Southampton NY) – brings together a selection of small and large-format drawings from the "Cat Doucet" series, made in the mid-nineties, which demonstrate the artist's creative process.

Internationally renowned for his sculptural oeuvre, Keith Sonnier is part of that generation of artists who – since the 1960s – have questioned the categories and media of traditional art, experimenting with industrial materials such as felt, latex, glass flocking, plastic and incandescent bulbs instead. By 1968 he had introduced neon, bending and intertwining the tubes to form light designs in space, characterized by strong emotional content and by references to popular culture, following a very personal post-minimalism view.

The exhibition presents a selection of drawings from the "Cat Doucet" series made in 1995-1996 and inspired by the legendary sheriff and politician Cat Doucet of Saint Landry Parish, Louisiana. Sonnier's father remembers that, for his re-election campaign in 1952, Cat Doucet crossed the whole county in a station wagon with four large speakers mounted on the roof along with a cut-out figure of a cartoonish cat. Sonnier immortalizes him by tracing stylized and sinuous graphic signs that evoke female shoulders and hips (Doucet was said to be a womanizer), and even cat's ears and sheriff's hats, recalling the exuberant character travelling through the territory around Saint Landry, from the swamps of the Atchafalaya Basin, to the areas inhabited by the Okaloussa Indians, to Ouachita Parish (as stated by the works' titles). In a continuous play between childhood memories and early television advertisements, the vaguely anthropomorphic conformations translate music and the sheriff's amplified voice into fluorescent images.

The series is one of Sonnier's most evocative. Born in Grand Mamou, Louisiana to a family of French-Acadian origins and raised in a community in which the traditions of the French settlers' descendants, merged with those of African and Native-Americans, all of which combined to form an exceptional cultural, linguistic and architectural environment.

Keith Sonnier considers drawing on paper to be an essential phase in order to obtain an actual simulation of the work, especially in the realization of his light sculptures. Using pencils, graphite and markers, he draws playful and sensual forms capable of transmitting light and colour to the paper sheet as neon radiates them into space. Moreover, through the study on paper, he shows his interest in media and techniques capable of giving a multi-sensory experience of the work. The large-format drawings "Quachita", "Okaloussa" and "Atchafalaya" are made with flocking that provides the coloured line with a velvet effect and, therefore, an immediate tactile value.

Biography

Keith Sonnier (Mamou, Louisiana, 1941 – Southampton, New York, 2020) was a pioneer of minimalism, post-minimalism, performing art, as well as sculptor of light and videomaker. Born into a family of French-Acadian origins and used to speaking patois, at the age of 20 he left for Paris where he started painting. In 1963 he graduated with a B.A. from the University of Southwestern Louisiana, Lafayette, and in 1966 he received a Master of Fine Arts from Rutgers University. Keith Sonnier radically reinvented sculpture in the late 1960s, along with his contemporaries Eva Hesse, Barry Le Va, Bruce Nauman, Richard Serra, Joel Shapiro, Richard Tuttle and Jackie Winsor (whom he married). After the early works made with unconventional and recycled materials, Sonnier introduced incandescent light and then neon in 1968. He often worked in series, continuing them over the years and also involving them in large architectural interventions. For instance, from the well-known “Ba-O-Ba” series he derived the temporary installation for the exterior of Mies van der Rohe's Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin in 2002. More than 130 solo exhibitions have been dedicated to the artist, among the most recent in institutions: "Keith Sonnier: Catching the light: sending and receiving" at the Kunstmuseum St. Gallen (2019); "Keith Sonnier. Until Today" at the Parrish Art Museum in Water Mill, New York (2018) travelled to the New Orleans Museum of Art (2019); "Keith Sonnier: Dis-Play II" at the DIA/Dan Flavin Institute in Bridgehampton (2018); "Keith Sonnier: Light Works, 1968–70" at the Whitechapel Gallery in London (2016); "Keith Sonnier: Early Neon" at the Hall Art Foundation's Galleries in Reading, Vermont (2015); "Keith Sonnier: Light Works" at the MAMAC in Nice. Sonnier took part in more than 360 group exhibitions throughout his career, including: "When Attitudes Become Form", Kunsthalle Bern (1969); "Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials", The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1969); "Information", MoMA, New York (1970); Documenta 5, Kassel (1972); Venice Biennale (1972, 1982); "Whitney Museum of American Art's 1970 Annual Exhibition: Contemporary American Sculpture", Biennial Exhibitions (1973, 1977). Since February 2018, his work has been represented in Italy by Galleria Fumagalli in Milan which organized his first solo show “Light Works, 1968 to 2017” in the very same year.

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