

## OVERDUIN AND KITE

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PRESS RELEASE

Guy de Cointet

December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007 - January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2008

Opening reception: Wednesday, December 19<sup>th</sup>, 6-8pm

Overduin and Kite presents an exhibition of works by French artist Guy de Cointet (1934-1983). Cointet lived and worked in Los Angeles from 1968-1983 and was an influential figure to his contemporaries as well as to generations of LA artists that followed. The exhibition features a selection of Cointet's drawings and paintings from 1971-1983, including works from the performance "The Paintings of Sophie Rummel."

Cointet was born in Paris in 1934. His father was a military general and the family traveled widely. One of the most formative periods for the young Cointet was the time he spent in North Africa. After living briefly in Paris again, Cointet moved to New York in 1965 where he met Viva, the actress known for her roles in a number of Warhol's films. Through Viva, Cointet met the artist Larry Bell and in 1968 Cointet moved to Los Angeles to work in Bell's studio. Cointet remained in Los Angeles until his untimely death in 1983.

Cointet created cryptically encoded books, drawings, and paintings as well as plays that used sculptural props to engage with his coded texts. Cointet's early drawings and books examine language at the level of the letter, transforming alphabets into elementary glyphic systems. Rather than immediate textual understanding, the viewer is held in a state of deciphering. However, translation is not the point. The codes exist for their own sake as abstraction, not purely at the service of narrative. The poetic titles of Cointet's drawings offer a window into the text's subject, but in the end the desire to extract meaning from a work of art becomes the subject itself. There is also an engagement with structuralism in Cointet's reexamination of the relationship of form to meaning in language, both as an image and a system. Although Cointet's work lies within the tradition of conceptual word art, its true precedent is found in the work of Raymond Roussel, Tristan Tzara, and Andre Breton, among others.

Cointet's performances came out of his desire to elucidate the texts of his drawings and books. Cointet's third book, "Espahor ledet ko uluner!" was the basis for his first performance—the infamous "lecture" by midget actor Billy Barty. Held at Jean Milant's Cirrus Gallery in 1973, Barty performed before a blackboard speaking on the "meaning" of Cointet's ciphered text. In 1974, Viva performed Cointet's "The Paintings of Sophie Rummel" in which she read a text that appeared on a series of 12 paintings consisting of red letters and numbers taken from license plates and phone numbers. The meaning of her words, though seemingly nonsensical, was implied through her intonations and expressions, as she gesticulated and pointed to certain numbers or letters on the canvases.

In the performances that followed, elaborate colorful props filled the stage. The actors interact with the sculptural props revealing their symbolic

function as if driving a sort of narrative. The paintings and other stage elements prompt or aide dialogue that consisted of found texts taken from such disparate sources as dime store novels, overheard conversations, Classical poetry, 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophical treatises, or movies and TV soap operas. Over time, the performances grew more complex pulling in other traditional elements of theatre. In "Ethiopia," a collaboration with Bob Wilhite, the sculptural props were used as musical instruments, each capable of emitting a different sound. Eric Orr created the lighting design in Cointet's final play, "Five Sisters." Rather than acting merely as devices to hold the audience in the world of the play, the music and lighting were pushed to the forefront and readily acknowledged and interacted with by the actors.

Earlier this year, the Tate Modern presented Guy de Cointet's play "Tell Me" (1979) and in 2006, the Centre Régional d'Art Contemporain de Sète presented Cointet's work in the exhibition "Making words with things." In 2004, Marie de Brugerolle curated a retrospective of Cointet's work at the Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain (MAMCO) Genève. His work was also recently included in "Los Angeles 1955-1985" at the Centre Pompidou, Paris. The estate of Guy de Cointet is represented by Air de Paris.

For more information, please contact Lisa Overduin or Kristina Kite. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday 10am to 5pm and by appointment.