

**UNDER THE SIGN OF [SIC]: STURTEVANT'S
VOLTE-FACE (SEMIOTEXT(E) / ACTIVE
AGENTS) BY BRUCE HAINLEY**



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Review

Under the Sign of [sic] is ostensibly a study of the haunting American artist Elaine Sturtevant, but what Bruce Hainley has written, really, is a poem about postwar American art and the woman who remade it in her own image by "appropriating," which is to say, reconfiguring, the distinctly male and sometimes male queer vision that informed the work of artists such as Warhol, Oldenburg, Johns, and the rest. As the first book-length monograph in English of a baffling, moving, and mysterious artist -- "I create vertigo," Sturtevant said about herself -- Hainley has written a splendid study not only of the artist's work but also of the atmosphere of change it helped foster.

(Hilton Als The New Yorker)

With prose that is at turns incisive, lively, and deliciously irreverent, this book takes risks in mirroring its artist-subject, but ultimately rewards.

(Publishers Weekly)

Writing about art is most valuable when it does just that thing that Hainley describes Sturtevant as accomplishing: the separation of "cognition from the habit of mindless recognition." As in his poetry and previous prose efforts, this is exactly the experience Hainley offers.

(Brooklyn Rail)

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Art scholars might argue that concept, not flattery, was at the root Elaine Sturtevant's work, in which she manually copied pieces by pop artists ranging from Roy Lichtenstein

to Andy Warhol, at one point inspiring Claes Oldenburg to say he wanted to kill her. Intrigued yet? "Under The Sign of [sic]: Sturtevant's Volte-Face," is a challenging and informative undertaking written by Bruce Hainley, and the first book-length monograph of her art to be released in English.

(Cool Hunting)

For a sense of Sturtevant's assertive elusiveness, read Bruce Hainley's brilliant, sinuous, interruption-riddled Under the Sign of [sic]: Sturtevant's Voltle-Face.

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Complementing the frisson of the artist's legacy is Bruce Hainley's brilliant and timely Under the Sign of [Sic] (2014), a jaw-dropping study of Sturtevant's practice in which no exegetical expense is spared.

(Artforum)

About the Author

Bruce Hainley lives and works in Los Angeles. A contributing editor at Artforum, he is the author of two books of poetry, one of which, *Foul Mouth*, was a finalist in the National Poetry Series. With John Waters, he wrote *Art -- A Sex Book*. He teaches in the MFA programs of Art Center College of Design and the Roski School of Fine Arts, University of Southern California.

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UNDER THE SIGN OF [SIC]: STURTEVANT'S VOLTE-FACE (SEMIOTEXT(E) / ACTIVE AGENTS) BY BRUCE HAINLEY PDF

Asked to sum up her artistic pursuit, the American artist Elaine Sturtevant once replied: "I create vertigo." Since the mid-1960s, Sturtevant has been using repetition to change the way art is understood. In 1965, what seemed to be a group show by then "hot" artists (Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein, George Segal, and James Rosenquist, among others) was in fact Sturtevant's first solo exhibit, every work in it created by herself.

Sturtevant would continue to make her work the work of others. The subject of major museum exhibitions throughout Europe and awarded the Golden Lion for lifetime achievement at the 54th Venice Biennale, she will have a major survey at the MoMA, New York, in 2014.

In *Under the Sign of [sic]*, Bruce Hainley unpacks the work of Sturtevant, providing the first book-length monographic study of the artist in English. Hainley draws on elusive archival materials to tackle not only Sturtevant's work but also the essential problem that it poses. Hainley examines all of Sturtevant's projects in a single year (1967); uses her Gonzalez-Torres *Untitled (Go-Go Dancing Platform)* from 1995 as a conceptual wedge to consider contemporary art's place in the world; and, finally, digs into the most occluded part of her career, from 1971 to 1973, when she created works by Michael Heizer and Walter de Maria, and had her first solo American museum exhibit.

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(Hilton Als *The New Yorker*)

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Most helpful customer reviews

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

Thrilling

By Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer

This is a totally exhilarating book of writing about art that takes many unexpected forms, asks the biggest and most important and difficult questions in fresh and urgent terms, and provides the best, most meticulous research possible on one of the slipperiest and most untrackable artists ever.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

pretty good

By Joe Omalley

This book is pretty good. And, it is well written. It has got some problems though.

You never really get a sense of who Sturtevant was, what motivates her, or what she thinks about her art. She remains pretty mysterious. That is largely because she wants to stay mysterious. But, Hainly doesn't really even speculate.

A big misstep is that the first section includes two distinct articles that alternate on opposite pages. This starts out being super confusing and ends by being merely annoying. there is no real reason for this.

The second section of the book is a fictionalized dialogue that weirdly focuses on a lot of topics that are not linked to Sturtevant's concerns like current trends in gay pornography. The dialogue is between a 50 year-old Hainley stand in (a little bit of a mary sue), a 25 year-old professional escort and 'Zombie Boy' Rick Genest. That is right this dude: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZmeELC5EGv4>

It is a common novelistic technique to fantasize about some stuff then pretend that protagonist has those same concerns. Pretty sure that Sturtevant didn't care about 'Zombie Boy' Rick Genest though.

Lots of questions:

What was Sturtevant's thinking?

What did people think about Sturtevant in the 60s?

Why was Sturtevant's art risky for those she copied?

Why were people angry with her?

What changed when she got divorced?

There are good things in the book. And, Hainley isn't slacking. He followed up what leads he could and interviewed those who would talk to him.

Lots of people say they don't remember.

There seems to be some point where she transgressed some boundary. People thinking they could slot her in one social role and her not staying there. Is something about her story still art world taboo? Maybe something about money?

Here is a more favorable review than mine that has a good summary of some of the good parts:

http://www.brooklynrail.org/2014/03/art_books/under-the-sign-of-sic-sturtevents-volte-face

"It's a fascinating read—the reactions and nonreactions to Sturtevant; a physical attack on the artist by a mob of schoolchildren, seemingly angered by the storefront; Oldenburg wanting to “kill” her in reaction to her work; a prepossessing moment in which Duchamp arrives to Relâche, views the cancellation sign, and returns to his taxi, which had been left running with his wife waiting inside."

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Fantastic. Simply fantastic

By Rachael Lamkin

Fantastic. Simply fantastic. Es

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