

CHOLET – NEW YORK

François Morellet
with
Ellsworth Kelly
Sol LeWitt
Fred Sandback
&
Frank Stella

Curator: Béatrice Gross

April 27 – June, 16, 2017

“Cholet–New York” is accessible from Tuesday to Saturday from 11:00 am to 7:00 pm, at the 47 rue Saint-André des arts and at the 6 rue du Pont de Lodi, Paris 6.

For further information, please contact Jessy Mansuy-Leydier, Marie-Sophie Eiché, or Emma-Charlotte Gobry-Laurencin, by phone: +33 1 56 24 03 63 or by email: galerie@kamelmennour.com

For his upcoming exhibition, Kamel Mennour is proud to pay homage to François Morellet (1926–2016), placing one of the gallery’s leading, historically significant artists in dialogue with four major figures of American minimal and conceptual art.

An improbable, certainly under-appreciated—when not altogether overlooked—axis of postwar geometric abstraction, “Cholet–New York” could almost be taken for another prank by François Morellet, a ‘rigorous joker’ according to Mo Gourmelon, ‘freak child of Mondrian and Picabia’ in the self-taught artist’s own words. Morellet remained very attached to his place of birth. Though he travelled widely, frequently visiting the world’s art capitals, he spent most of his time in Cholet. For a while, this hindered, or at least slowed down, the international exposure of his work. Or perhaps it was his indefatigable taste for frivolity and derision that kept the most Dadaist of French conceptual artists relatively separate from the official art history of the 1950s and 60s.

And yet Morellet adopted very early on attitudes similar to those of Kelly (1923–2015) and Sandback (1943–2003), with whom he became friends, as well as LeWitt (1928–2007) and Stella (born 1936), who knew at least a few of Morellet’s works when they were starting out on their careers. Morellet shared with such precursors from a New York that had replaced Paris as the epicentre of Western art an interest for systematicity, neutrality, and formal economy, as well as a taste for seriality, the ‘all-over’, and anti-composition.

Inversely, the echoes and exchanges uniting Cholet and New York were nourished by many, varied sources that François Morellet was always happy to evoke: from the concrete art of Switzerland (via Brazil) and Russian Suprematism, to Arab-Muslim decorative traditions in Spain, Pacific Islands bark cloths, Late German Baroque, etc. Morellet insisted that, not having gone to art school, his education was made ‘from one love to the next’, and his paintings ‘from one influence to the next.’

What is even more troubling, is that Morellet at times seems to anticipate explorations generally attributed to artists from the other side of the Atlantic. Striking analogies between some of his early works (such as *Du jaune au violet*, 1956, or his body of work made up of grids begun in the same decade) and the lines and concentric, monochromatic, or color-graded squares of Frank Stella on the one hand, or Sol LeWitt’s *ACG (Arcs, Circles & Grids)* series on the other, pose the delicate question of Morellet’s possible precedence. Would it not be preferable to see in these admittedly perplexing similitudes a case of pseudo-morphism, as Yve-Alain Bois suggests, where each artist’s approach conserves its own singularity however much it may resemble another’s? In any case, aside from the old arguments over a supposed transatlantic divide, there is no doubt today that François Morellet thoroughly deserves his place as a pioneer among pioneers.

François Morellet was born, lived and worked for most of his life in Cholet. Internationally renowned since the 1970s, author of numerous private and public commissions in France and abroad, Morellet's work has been shown at the Centre Georges-Pompidou, the Musée d'Orsay, the Galerie nationale du Jeu de Paume, the Musée d'art moderne et contemporain de Strasbourg, the Consortium de Dijon, the Bozar/Palais des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles, S.M.A.K. in Ghent, the MAMCO, Musée d'art moderne et contemporain de Genève, documenta in Kassel, the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, the Staatliche Kunsthalle in Baden-Baden, Modern Art Oxford, Brooklyn Museum in New York, Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo (New York), the Center for the Fine Arts in Miami, and MoMA in New York.

A monumental neon installation will be presented at Art Basel Unlimited in June 2017. An original solo exhibition will be presented in the United States at the The Dia Art Foundation (New York) in October 2017.

Ellsworth Kelly was born in 1923 in Newburgh (USA) and died in 2015 in Spencertown (USA).

Sol LeWitt was born in 1928 in Hartford (USA) and died in 2007 in New York (USA).

Fred Sandback was born in 1943 in Bronxville (USA) and died in 2003 in New York (USA).

Frank Stella was born in 1936 in Malden (USA), he lives and works in New York (USA).

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Béatrice Gross is an independent curator and critic and is based in New York and Paris. Béatrice Gross is currently preparing a major exhibition of the work of François Morellet at the Dia Art Foundation (New York). She is also editorial and curatorial consultant for *Mémoire Universelle* (Brussels), a multidisciplinary project for an experimental and subjective thematic encyclopedia.

Béatrice Gross has organised numerous exhibitions of minimal and conceptual art: *Drawing Dialogues: Selections from the Sol LeWitt Collection* at the Drawing Center (New York), *Double Eye Poke. Lynda Benglis, Dan Flavin, Sol LeWitt, Bruce Nauman* at the galerie kamel mennour (Paris, 2015), as well as *Sol LeWitt. Dessins muraux de 1968 à 2007* (2012-13) and *Sol LeWitt collectionneur. Un artiste et ses artistes* (2013), at the Centre Pompidou-Metz, and *Sol LeWitt. Colors* at the M-Museum Leuven (2012). She was chief editor of the monograph, *Sol LeWitt* (Editions du Centre Pompidou-Metz, 2012-13), and from 2013 to 2015 chief editor of the *Sol LeWitt Wall Drawings Catalogue Raisonné* (Artifex Press, New York).