

LOMBARD FREID GALLERY



Huguette Caland

Early Works: 1970-85

October 30, 2014 – January 10, 2015

Vernissage: Thursday, October 30, 6:00 – 8:00 PM

Lombard Freid is proud to present *Early Works: 1970-85*, Huguette Caland's premiere exhibition at the gallery. Caland's career began in late 1960s Beirut, Lebanon with erotic abstract paintings and body landscapes, which she continued into the 1970s in Paris and later, Venice, California, with a series titled *Bribes de Corps* ("body fragments"). The daughter of Lebanon's first president, Bechara El Khoury, and educated at the American University of Beirut, Caland's artistic activity was a product of a cultural metamorphosis in Beirut, which had become "an uncommonly cosmopolitan gathering ground for exiled revolutionaries, artists, and intellectuals from across the Arab world," writes art critic Negar Azimi. Focusing on her abstract paintings and including a series of hand-drawn caftans, this exhibition features works which are being shown for the first time in the U.S.

The *Bribes de Corps* painting series is sensual and organic, deriving from Caland's perception of her own body and physical interactions. These sensational paintings, impudent and humorous, feature the female body as landscape, creating minimalist mountains and voids from flesh. The undulating curves of each form present indistinct and contorted limbs. A series of pencil drawings created concurrently highlight Caland's fluid line work, weaving a network of bodies and faces into an "ecstatic tangle," one body often indistinguishable from another. Azimi writes, "Orifices represent beginnings or endings or indeed both as directionality is turned on its head...Bodies are inscribed on bodies—creating delirious palimpsests—as if marking the faces that mark all the encounters of a life." The caricatured drawings reveal the candid humor of Caland's work, a playfulness evident in her entire oeuvre.

The paintings work as much to implicate the viewer, as well as the artist, in the expression of sexuality; Caland seems to imply that identities are linked inextricably to sexual impulse. While some are undisguised representations of anatomy, others are merely suggestive of sensuality. Caland explores dualities in her work, often providing a male counterpart to the female. The complementary paintings *Monsieur* and *Madame* (1980) together form an abstract diptych, a kind of dual portrait of Caland and her lover.

These works share a sensibility with Lebanese contemporaries Saliba Douaihy and Etel Adnan, but also notably with the personal expressivity of Georgia O'Keeffe and Louise Bourgeois. Bourgeois' thematic content of sexual desire and the body resonated with Caland's own practice; a connection that was inspired, no doubt, by Caland's years in France.

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In 1979, a fortuitous encounter with designer Pierre Cardin led Caland to design over 100 caftans in a special line called *Nour* (ray of light), emblazoned with her iconic lines and brazen female form; a set of six similar caftans and custom mannequins which Caland had previously made in Beirut are on view as an installation at Lombard Freid. The distinctive look of her work is mirrored in these wearable tapestries, where wide eyes and prominent mouths are splashed across the canvas, meeting in a kiss; a triangular crevasse of black thread reveals a jumble of faces and expressions, recalling her delicate pencil drawings; a tromp l'oeil version outlines a woman's nude form, mischievously proportioned to match the wearer's own body.

The breadth of Caland's work is singular; critic Peter Frank writes, "Caland does not imitate, nor even emulate, any one specific people... She alone is responsible for these startling objects, and invites us to regard them first and foremost as self-sustaining visual phenomena." Caland composes her works masterfully, striking a delicate balance between the abstract, in whimsical color, and the explicit, in unabashed self-expression.

Huguette Caland's (b. 1931, Lebanon) work is included in private and public collections across the Middle East, Europe and the US, including the Centre Pompidou, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Fondation National d'Art Contemporain, Paris, San Diego Museum of Art, Palm Springs Museum of Art, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX. She was also included in *Modernités Plurielles 1905-1970*, at the Centre Pompidou, Paris. This is her first solo show with Lombard Freid Gallery; concurrently, she is exhibiting in Prospect 3 New Orleans, curated by Franklin Sirmans.