

artnet



Installation view of "Dorothy Iannone: Lioness," at the New Museum



Dorothy Iannone
I Am Whoever You Want Me to Be
1970
Courtesy Anton Kern Gallery and Air de Paris



Dorothy Iannone
I Begin to Feel Free
1970
Courtesy the artist



Dorothy Iannone
I Was Thinking of You III
1975/2006
Courtesy Anton Kern Gallery and Air de Paris



Dorothy Iannone
The Icelandic Saga (detail)
1978
Courtesy Anton Kern Gallery and Air de Paris

SEE HER ROAR by Ilka Scobie

Honoring the past and embracing the future she was filled with love for everyone.

-- Icelandic Saga

"I had an overwhelming reason to change my life completely, being in love was the first and only thing," Dorothy Iannone told me on the phone from her Berlin home. Four decades ago, this grand passion propelled the self-taught American artist Dorothy Iannone (b. 1933) to create an expatriate life with her lover, the influential Swiss-German avant-garde artist Dieter Roth (1930-1998). Documenting their love affair, Dorothy took Dieter as her inspiration and muse. "The two of us became the stars of my work," Iannone said. Now, her highly personal and poetic artwork is the subject of concurrent shows at the New Museum and Anton Kern Gallery in Chelsea.

Since the early 1960s, the Boston-born Iannone has made intensely intimate and original paintings, drawings, figures and mixed media pieces. New Museum curator Jarrett Gregory, inspired by seeing Dorothy's work in the 2006 Whitney Biennial, put together a beautiful, if small, show of Iannone's work from the '60s and '70s, including several of her signature erotic paintings, a video sarcophagi, several diorama-like displays of cut-out figures and her iconic 1976 book *The Icelandic Saga*. "Dorothy is a liberated human being and makes work from her heart, which gives her practice an immediacy that is uncommon and refreshing," Gregory said.

With her first husband James Upham, Dorothy lived in the bohemian West Village and traveled extensively to Africa, Turkey and the Far East. In 1961, she successfully sued the U.S. government to allow importation of Henry Miller's then banned books. In 1968, she met Dieter Roth in Iceland, which ended her marriage. Her documentation of her love affair uses lots of specific detail, down to the exotic and delicious cocktail menu she brought on board.

Another page is Dorothy's *FlyAway List* from June 29, 1967, which includes paying a bill at the 8th Street Bookshop and buying spices for the recipes she brings to Iceland. The black-and-white panel's intricate borders and individualized calligraphy reflect a magic symbolism, an entirely original blend of medieval manuscript and Indian miniatures.

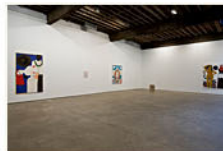
Included in the New Museum show are Iannone's early "People Series," painted wooden figurines depicting Charlie Chaplin, a pugilistic Norman Mailer, bare-breasted geishas and Jackie Kennedy. Genitals hang casually from trousers, erections exaggerated. These early figurines embody Iannone's lifelong celebration of sexuality as integral to life. For "Access All Areas," an upcoming group show at Galerie Max Hetzler in Berlin, Iannone is again devising cut-out figures. "Somehow I got the wish to make more cut-outs, with the text integrated, maybe at the bottom," Iannone said. "The scenes are mostly from films I have seen over the years."

Iannone's large paintings depict her and Roth in formally sensual unions, inspired by great romances, such as Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra*. Female and male are portrayed as equal adventurers. A reduced and powerful palette highlights tribal details, while referencing an early Pop sensibility. The African motif appears as a trio of ebony and gold shields in *I Begin To Feel Free* (1970), and again via balanced tribal decorations in *I Am Whoever You Want Me To Be* (1970). Both couples depict a pelted Roth balanced by Dorothy's armless Pop figure. Her colors and free mix of image and text remain as international as they are contemporary.

Another New Museum jewel is the painted video box, *I Was Thinking of You*, a work whose vid was shot in 1975 while the work was painted in 2006. We see the young, flashing-eyed Iannone in grainy black-and-white beauty as she masturbates to orgasm -- an experiment similar to Carolee Schneemann's and Vito Acconci's groundbreaking works. A love poem embellishes the box sides, one side in English, the other in French, inscribed in Dorothy's enchanting calligraphy.



Installation view of Dorothy Iannone's *The Icelandic Saga* (1978) at the New Museum



Installation view of Dorothy Iannone at Anton Kern Gallery



Dorothy Iannone
On the Continuing Journey
2009
Anton Kern Gallery



Dorothy Iannone
Tickles My Fancy
2009
Anton Kern Gallery



Dorothy Iannone
Metaphor
2009
Anton Kern Gallery



Dorothy Iannone, Berlin, 2009
Photo by Jason Schmidt

At the Anton Kern Gallery are nine more works, including paintings made from earlier sketches. Later pieces like *On the Continuing Journey*, with its erotic mandala, are suffused with Buddhist equanimity and reflect a spiritual synchronicity. Her imagery, consistent in detail and line, has grown more refined in her present work. Breasts which ended in bulls-eye nipples now feature decorative corollas. Opulently adorned surfaces are reflective of an expanded consciousness.

Male and female equality remains constant. Two works from 2009 embody a psychedelic energy. *Tickles My Fancy*, a gouache-and-ink on board, features extravagant adornment illustrative of an expanded consciousness, as does *Metaphor*, with its silken bondage cord and tattooed text, reading "sometimes you must also submit." Instead of the usual autobiographical raven tresses, this odalisque is blonde and buxom.

Dorothy's gentle, hypnotic voice echoes through the gallery, the sound of the audio CD included in the 1972 piece *Dinner Box*. The painted box is crowded with a haunting cast of revelers. Iannone, who has been censored and under-appreciated in her native America, is enjoying a renewed interest and enthusiastic appreciation of her profoundly personal vision.

New Museum curator Massimiliano Gioni calls her "our great lady of irreverence." Dorothy studied literature, but says that "I just wanted to make art. I just kept doing it. I was doing what I wanted to do." Her years abroad and life in Berlin, she says, felt natural. "I was very often in America when my mother was alive. America was always a part of my life." She continued, "Berlin was really the most possible place in Germany. It was always an outsider place. Now Berlin has a new charm. It's become a world city. I get to see my friends quite a bit. Everyone comes here."

Iannone's future plans include attending the annual meeting of the Dieter Roth Foundation this November at the Staats Galerie Museum in Stuttgart. "Everyone at the academy has been asked to bring something personal that Dieter gave them, all the pieces he made for his friends over the years."

"Unfortunately I might not be there. I have to work very intensely again for the Peres Project show in Los Angeles. They have a rather large gallery. So many of my works are now in New York, and will continue to be there for a while. I'm hoping I will be in New York in late September, after the Berlin show, so I can see the show in the New Museum. I love New York, as always."

Dorothy Iannone pioneered sexual celebration, while transcending artistic and cultural dictates. Inspired passion ignites her work. The title of the New Museum show, "Dorothy Iannone: Lioness," takes the pet name Dieter Roth bestowed upon this amazing woman.

"Dorothy Iannone: Lioness," July 22-Oct. 18, 2009, at the New Museum, 235 Bowery, New York, N.Y. 10002.

"Dorothy Iannone," June 25-Aug. 21, 2009, at Anton Kern Gallery, 532 West 20th Street, New York, N.Y. 10011.

ILKA SCOBIE is a poet.