

Curated by Barbara Ess
Organized by Peggy Ahwesh

Works and contributions by:

Barbara Ess
Dan Graham
Daniella Dooling
Glenn Branca
Heidi Schlatter
Laura Battle
Les LeVeque
Maximilian Goldfarb
Mieko Meguro
Radio/Guitar

THE

The Secret Life of Objects is a group exhibition that Barbara Ess was in the process of curating when she died unexpectedly March 4, 2021. In tribute to her artistic vision, the gallery along with Peggy Ahwesh, a close friend and collaborator of Ess, has organized the exhibition in Ess' honor. Works by ten artists are on view, including key pieces by Ess as well as her avant garde music project with Ahwesh, "Radio/Guitar." *The Secret Life of Objects* is a meaningful way to keep Barbara Ess' voice and influence present in our midst as well as honor her life-long pursuit of questioning and manifesting the unknown and the unseen.

The exhibition focuses on the hidden meaning behind objects and the nostalgia they evoke— either serving as surfaces for our sentimental projections or becoming mediators of different realities such as fetishes, heirlooms and cult objects. Ess was equally fascinated by the idea of panpsychism, or the view that all things have minds. Considering the spiritually-charged or the spiritual ether (a material substance believed to exist between the earth and astral plane) in the wake of Ess' passing promotes open-ended answers to our most existential questions.

Works on view involve mediumship—such as Daniella Dooling's explorations of her grandmother's channeled communications with the supernatural world—and collaborations with the past, as in Laura Battle's drawings made on found ledger paper salvaged from an old drugstore fire in Hudson, New York. Other works, such as Heidi Schlatter's barricades invoke the commodity as an apparatus of meaning-making. The exhibition also presents work by Dan Graham, an early collector of Ess' photography, and Glenn Branca, an experimental musician who was an important partner to Ess personally, musically, and artistically for more than 20 years.

Ess' world circulated around her intimate, artistic life—with the starting point for many of her works being her own body as both self and other. She kept her activities close to home, her materials and objects close at hand, and friends close to her heart—the radical subjectivity of a generative and uncompromising artist. The chosen artists for *The Secret Life of Objects* were some of her closest friends in the final decade of her life and she enjoyed a camaraderie of creative principles with each of them. In the studio visits she did with the artists, Ess was invigorated by the energy and power made manifest in the material objects they created and the dynamic triangulation between the artist, the object, and herself as a sacred circuit of friendship and creative thought.

September 7—October 9, 2021

OF
OBJECTS



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Barbara Ess (1944-2021) was an American musician and artist who worked primarily with photography, video, and sound. In the late 1970s and 1980s Ess was a member of early No Wave bands The Static, Y Pants, Disband, and Ultra Vulva and produced the publication Just Another Asshole with Glenn Branca. In 2001, Ess collaborated with experimental filmmaker Peggy Ahwesh on the album Radio/Guitar for Thurston Moore's Ecstatic Peace label.

Barbara Ess had numerous solo exhibitions of her work throughout the United States and Europe, including retrospectives at the Queens Museum, NY, the Center for Fine Arts, Miami, FL and the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA. Other selected solo exhibitions were held at Magenta Plains, New York, NY; 3A Gallery, New York, NY; Thierry Goldberg, New York, NY; Incident Report, Hudson, NY; Wallspace, New York, NY; Moore College of Art, Philadelphia PA; Curt Marcus Gallery, New York, NY; Faggionato Fine Arts, London, UK; Frederick Giroux Gallery, Paris, France; Michael Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles, CA; Stills Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland; Fundacion La Caixa, Barcelona, Spain; Galeria Espanola La Maquina, Madrid, Spain; Interim Art, London, England; Ghilaine Hussenot, Paris, France and Johnen+Schottle, Cologne, among others.

Her photographs have been included in group exhibitions at institutions including the Tang Museum, Saratoga Springs, NY; New Museum of Contemporary Art, NY; Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD; Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton, NJ; Middlebury College Museum of Art, Middlebury, VT; Southeast Museum of Photography, Daytona Beach, FL; Contemporary Art Center, Cincinnati, OH; Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK; and National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, Japan. Barbara Ess has been the subject of cover stories in Artforum and Art in America and a monograph of her work, I Am Not This Body, was published by Aperture in 2001. Her work is in numerous permanent collections, including The Art Institute of Chicago, The Whitney Museum of American Art, Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, The National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, The Carnegie Museum of Art, The Walker Art Center, Pompidou Center/Musee d'Art Moderne, and Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, TX.