

Cuchi WHITE (1930 – 2013)

Cuchi White, born Katherine Ann White, was an American photographer known internationally for her work in color produced as and from the 1970s. When, after a break between 1958 and 1974, she returned to photography she was very attracted by what was known as *trompe-l'œil* but not yet known as "Street Art", with which she loved mixing their close precursors in the churches and palaces. In 1949, she met her future husband, Paolo Boni, a young Italian painter, in a sculptor's studio in Florence, they moved to Paris in 1954, where they lived together for the rest of their lives, in go between with their house and artist's studio in Vallauris south of France.

Their daughter Carla was born in 1958.

Cuchi White photographic interests always swung between these two worlds, the old and contemporary, which she brought together at times, and she was always fascinated by the magic of old art which had drawn her like a magnet as soon as she arrived in Europe. The incongruous aspect of reality, the tricks vision plays became her favorite subjects. She gives us access to this world, which exists alongside visible reality, by telling more stories enriched by classic cultural references or simply by highlighting the upheavals which occur when one era intrudes upon another: false windows, sculptures, interiors of museums, castles and churches, doll collections, accumulations of objects but also industrial sites, items which are incongruous or unexpected, the play on light and shade which transforms places and streets.

She produced a book on the *trompe l'œil*, another on the sublime villas on the Côte d'Azur and a third on the perched villages on the Franco-Italian Riviera. Beginning in the Nineties, she completed a striking series on houses built to resemble ships, no doubt inspired by the transatlantic liners on which she travelled between United States and Europe. Several exhibitions were devoted to this work, *Navirland* (The land of ships) and *Demeures en Partance* (Homes ready to sail). For the national heritage in France she worked with a number of museums and took photographs of the Durance river and, in Brittany, of the *sentiers des douaniers* (the paths used by the customs officers).

Since her first exhibition at the Galerie Arena in 1980 at the *Rencontres internationales de la photographie* in Arles, France, (since renamed *Rencontres de la photographie*), and her work with the Réattu museum in the same town, she regularly attended this event. She was often with her Italian friends and photographers such as Giovanna Calvenzi, Gabriele Basilico, Luigi Ghirri, Mimmo Jodice and so many others. She shared those friendships all the more easily given that her husband, the artist Paolo Boni, was Italian and a large portion of their work, and many of the exhibitions of one or the other, took place in Italy. In 1984, Cuchi took part of an innovative and significant milestone in contemporary photography, the *Viaggio in Italia* (Travelling in Italy) with nineteen other photographers¹, project initiated by the photographer Luigi Ghirri. In 2012 was her last exhibition in Paris at the gallery In situ, where Fabienne Leclerc chose to show photographs of *trompe l'oeil* from the book *L'Œil ébloui* which preface was written by her friend the French writer Georges Perec.

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Her first black-and-white photographs show that Cuchi White already had an excellent sense of framing and composition. As a teenager, she was an intern with the photographer of the Cleveland Museum of Arts. When she was fourteen, on her trips to New York, she soaked up the liberating atmosphere of the city with its exhibitions and museums which nurtured her abiding passion for art. In 1947 the Edward Weston exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York made such a strong impression on her that she travelled to Point Lobos to meet the photographer himself. At Weyhe's art bookstore on Lexington Avenue she bought copies of *Camera Work*, Dorothy Norman's *Stieglitz Memorial Portfolio* and Paul Strand's *Time in New England*. Cuchi was a student at the very progressive Bennington University in Vermont where, amongst others, Max Salvadori, Erich Fromm and Martha Graham taught and in 1951 the university awarded her a degree of Bachelor of Arts. When she arrived in Italy in 1952, the roman newspaper *Il Mondo* di Pannuzio bought fifty of her photographs for publishing.

As a great admirer of André Kertész, Edward Weston and Paul Strand, in 1948 she took part in one of the last exhibitions of the *Photo League* called *This is the Photo League* with photographs of broken statues taken around the sculpture workshop at her university.

New York was the American city closest to the heart of the young photographer Katherine Ann White who was born in Cleveland in 1930 and who later became known as Cuchi White. She availed of every opportunity to wander about the city armed with her 13 x 18 large-format view and Rolleiflex 6 x 6 cameras. Her favorite subjects were street life and its very special atmosphere. These pictures are stamped with the pursuit of humanist and social aspects, a pursuit which aims to show the multiracial reality of the city. A deep poetic fascination for urban places and architecture emerged at this time and continued, from the 1970s onwards, to infuse her work in color with a lively imaginative element.

Following a life-threatening accident in June 1997, Cuchi stopped taking photographs, just before she had begun working on superimposition of double images and on a series on accumulation in baroque interiors. "La Cuchi" as her friends used to call her with her amazing laugh which was so communicative and her outspokenness who blithely mixed French, Italian and English, left us at the autumn of 2013.

Carla Boni
Paris, February 2018

Selected shows

1948 : « This is the photo league », New York.

1970 : Intercamera, Prague

1975 : Galerie Nadar, Paris

1976

Galleria Il Diaframma, Milan

Artefiera, Bologna

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1979

Galleria Civica, Modena
Alternative Center For International Art, New York

1980

Palazzo del ridotto, Cesena
Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Bologna
Galleria Il Milione, Milano
Galerie Arena, Arles

1981

Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Bologna
Galerie Le sténopé, Nice
Il diagramma, Milan

1982

Palazzo Fortuny, Venezia
Calcografia Nazionale, Roma

1983

Galleria dell'Immagine, Rimini
Galleria Civica, Modena
Forum Stadtpark, Graz
Exposition itinérante organisée par le Ministère de la Culture, Institut
culturel français, New York

1984

Studio 10, Naples
Galleria Dryphoto, Prato
Palazzo dei Diamanti, Ferrara
Perspektief, Rotterdam

1985

Cuchi White, La vita finta : Da Caserta a Las Vegas, Artepresente,
Palazzo reale, Caserte, (cat exp)
Biblioteca Malatestiana, Cesena

1986

Cuchi White, *Mémoires Arlésiennes*, Musée Reattu, Arles.
Tour Eiffel, Paris

1987

Libreria Agorà, Torino.
Galerie Faber, Wien.
Fondazione Corrente, Milano.
Fondation nationale de la Photographie, Lyon
Galerie municipale Renoir, Nice
Hors, cadres, figures -photographies, with Jerry Uelsmann, Patrick
Bailly -Maître-Grand, Alain Fleischer and Yves d'Ans, Musée Réattu,
Arles. (cat exp)

1988

Dipartimento di Storia e Critica delle Arti, Università di Venezia
Suomen Valokuvataiteen Museo, Finlandia

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1989

Galerie DB-S, Antwerpen
Dipartimento di Storia e Critica delle Arti, Università di Venezia
Biblioteca Civica, Rubiera
Palazzo Fortuny, Venezia
Museo Alinari, Firenze
Galleria Rondanini, Roma
Grand Palais, Paris
Musée de Cavailon, Cavailon
Studio Marangoni, Firenze
Centre national d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou

1990

Musée Nièpce, Chalon sur Saône
Associazione Culturale Italo-Francese, Bologna
Centre culturel, Compiègne
Caserta-Versailles, avec Luigi Ghirri

1991

Palazzo Isimbardi, Milano
Haus der Architektur, Graz
Navirland, Paris

1993

La Durance, with Gabriele Basilico
Muri di Carta, Padiglione Italia, Biennale di Venezia

1994

Associazione Italo-Francese, Bari
Neapolis Metropolis G7, Napoli

1995

Associazione Culturale Italo-Francese, Bologna

1996

Navirland - demeures en partance, Musée de la Mer, Cannes

1998

Paolo Barbaro, *La Terra Percorsa - Storia, Arte, Conoscenza*, 3^e edizione
convento di S. Maria in Gonzaga.

2003

Histoires de vies, histoires d'objets, Museon Arlaten, Arles.

2007

Demeures en partance et Trompe l'Œil, Chapelle Saint Yves, Orangerie du
Thabor et Hotel de ville, Rennes.

2011

Viaggi: Italia, 1949-1953, Galleria Bel Vedere, Milano

2012

Galerie In situ / Fabienne Leclerc, Paris

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