

# SPRÜTH MAGERS BERLIN LONDON

*Joseph Cornell Karen Kilimnik*

**Joseph Cornell, Karen Kilimnik**

**Sprüth Magers London June 09 - August 27 2010**

curated by Todd Levin

Sprüth Magers London is delighted to present an exhibition of work by American artists Joseph Cornell and Karen Kilimnik, displayed together for the first time. Through the use of paintings, collage and installation, the exhibition will explore the affinities between both artists who were influenced by the Romantic ballet era.

Amongst the most elusive and inventive of American artists, Joseph Cornell (1903-1972) worked exclusively in collage and is renowned for his intricate box assemblages. The artist lived with his family in Queens, New York, devoting his life to caring for his brother, who suffered from cerebral palsy. Although Cornell rarely left New York City, his works, created in isolation, transport viewers to worlds far beyond the mundane realities of his urban, terrestrial life. He often described himself as an 'armchair voyager' to earlier eras and countries, the concept of which derives from the venerable tradition of writing travel accounts for the benefit of future generations. Cornell was a compulsive and passionate collector who would gather his impressions of the 'light of other days' from postage stamps, old photographs, Victorian engravings and nineteenth century traveller guidebooks and memoirs. A pioneering preservationist, Cornell would then catalogue every item in his basement studio or, as he called it, his 'laboratory', delicately placing these nostalgic elements into richly decorative wood boxes, creating a poetic theatre of memory. Cornell's interest in the ordinary and fleeting was so elevated that he named it the 'métaphysique d'éphémère' suggesting that literal things can create an elaborate and subtle form of magic. Untitled (Grand Hotel) c.1950, perfectly encapsulates Cornell's idea of an armchair voyager. The hotel series, initiated in 1950, reflects Cornell's impressions of Europe's grand old buildings. The old-fashioned, peeling paper interior reinforces the nineteenth century atmosphere associated with such an establishment, heightening the sense that the object belongs to another time and culture.

Since an early age, Cornell was fascinated with the Romantic ballet which saw an international revival in the 1930s, providing him with the fantasy and escape that he so eagerly sought in his own life. The Romantic ballet celebrated the ideal of female beauty, downplaying the role of the male dancer and marking the rise of the ballerina as a central part of the spectacle. Captivated by the renowned ballerinas of the time, Cornell would collect delicate memorabilia associated with Marie Taglioni and her modern counterpart, Tamara Toumanova, who both featured in numerous issues of Dance Index magazine to which Cornell contributed cover designs. The artist's deep appreciation for the ballet is captured in his collage *Homage To The Romantic Ballet* (c. 1960).

Similarly, Karen Kilimnik's art rematerializes a quest for the romantic sublime. Kilimnik's preliminary study of theatre and stagecraft is apparent from her depictions of historic stages, their colour coded seating charts and researched drawings of ballerinas. The emergence of tutus and pointe foot work during the period created the mystical illusion of dancers barely touching the earth, like the ballerinas who frequently populate Kilimnik's images, illustrated in Degas painting hair ornament accessories bag world, 2004. Accompanied by music from the nineteenth century Romantic ballet, the exhibition reveals the specificity with which the artist draws upon references to this particular era. In addition to the recurring subject matter of Kilimnik's work, the artist's use of materials suggests the influence of Cornell, evident from the ephemeral glitter illuminating the installation work Paris Opera Rats, 1993 to her reference to birds, the principal characters in Cornell's Habitat series, in Chic robin's egg nest, 2005.

Both artists' frame of reference extends to the presentation of their works and the surrounding environment in which they are encountered. The organizing motif of Cornell's Hotel series is the window, which invites the viewer to consider interior and exterior views, clearly establishing the successive rounds of reality to the mystery beyond. For the exhibition, his poignant works will be respectively showcased within the midnight blue of the gallery walls, used by the artist in his collages to create impressions of the sky and which he believed to evoke contemplation of the celestial. In addition to the painted walls and, characteristic of Kilimnik's theatrical installations, the gallery will be transformed into an aesthetic context which alludes to the salon era of the nineteenth century, enabling the viewer to palpably enter into a dialogue with the past.

Karen Kilimnik was born in Philadelphia where she lives and works. The exhibition 'Intervention: Karen Kilimnik' is currently at the Belvedere in Vienna until 26 September, 2010. Recent retrospective exhibitions include 'Karen Kilimnik at the Institute of Contemporary Art', Philadelphia; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Miami and Chicago 2007/08. In 2007 her work was presented in a solo exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, which travelled to the Serpentine Gallery, London.

Joseph Cornell (1903-1972) was born in Nyack, New York. Upcoming exhibitions include the group show 'The Surreal House' at The Barbican, London, from 10 June until 12 September, 2010. Recent exhibitions include 'Museums in Miniature: works by Marcel Duchamp and Joseph Cornell' which took place in 2009 at the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego. 2007 saw a large retrospective of Cornell's work in 'Joseph Cornell: Navigating the Imagination' at the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, which then travelled to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington DC.

With thanks to The Royal Ballet School, White Lodge Museum and Ballet Resource Centre, Richmond Park, Richmond, Surrey for their kind collaboration on this exhibition: [www.royal-ballet-school.co.uk](http://www.royal-ballet-school.co.uk)

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#### Visitor Information

Address: 7A Grafton Street, London, W1S 4EJ

Opening hours: Tuesday Saturday, 10am - 6pm

Admission: Free

Nearest Tube: Green Park

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