

PAULA COOPER GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Claes Oldenburg & Coosje van Bruggen ***There is no such thing as a perfect lamb chop***

243A Worth Avenue, Palm Beach, FL
December 5, 2020 – January 9, 2021

PALM BEACH, FL—An exhibition of work by Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen titled “There is no such thing as a perfect lamb chop”¹ marks the inauguration of Paula Cooper Gallery’s new seasonal pop-up at 243A Worth Avenue opening on Saturday, December 5, 2020. The couple first began their working partnership in 1976 and, over the course of the next three decades, produced an extensive body of drawings, sculptures, and public commissions. The presentation at Paula Cooper Gallery includes examples from these important collaborative years, as well as works by Oldenburg made before their meeting and after van Bruggen’s passing in 2009.

In celebration of the vibrant life of Palm Beach and the surrounding area, “There is no such thing as a perfect lamb chop” presents a selection of drawings and sculptures by Oldenburg and van Bruggen, with a focus on their representations of food, sport, music, and other articles of pleasure. These striking images reinvent quotidian objects, using line and form to playfully merge natural elements with the irreverent and the fantastical. In the duo’s 2007 pastel drawing, an anthropomorphized shuttlecock performs a feat of superhuman acrobatics across the rotunda of the Guggenheim Museum. Elsewhere, Oldenburg’s canvas-and-resin tomatoes farcies entice and charm viewers with their luscious hue and supple surfaces. In the catalogue for his 1969 exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art in New York, art historian Barbara Rose wrote: “It is his execution, his ability to make form live and to imbue it with a palpable vitality and sense of movement, that distinguishes Oldenburg’s genius [...] In his art, the distortion of form, its infinite metamorphoses, becomes a metaphor for the search for truth, an endless pursuit through the labyrinth of illusion. His prime values as an artist are elusiveness, mystery, ambiguity, and multivalence.”

Many of the works on view relate to realized monumental public sculptures by the artists, including the exhibition’s earliest pieces: studies of the mass-produced typewriter eraser. Oldenburg considered the eraser to be a “fine anti-heroic object” and in 1970 he began to make sketches of its form, set in imagined landscapes or personified as ‘Medusa’ or as a ‘Big Guy.’ A large-scale version measuring over eighteen feet high is installed at the entrance of the Norton Museum of Art in West Palm Beach. Imbued with human-like qualities, the object tilts forward as if it were exuberantly speeding away—its bristles blown back like strands of hair. In another work, a drawing from 1988, the couple depicts a broken plate out of which orange slices and expressively cut peels appear to tumble and bounce off the ground, as if caught in stop-motion. This anti-hierarchical form was their proposal for a public commission in Metro-Dade Open Space Park in Miami—a response to the eclectic architecture of the site where the finished sculpture still stands today.

¹ A statement by Claes Oldenburg from his interview with Barbara Rose in *Interview Magazine* (December 8, 2015).

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Claes Oldenburg was born in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1929. He attended Yale University (1946–1950) as well as The Art Institute of Chicago before moving to New York City in 1956. The artist had his first one-person exhibition at the Judson Gallery, New York, in 1959 followed by shows at the Moderna Museet, Stockholm (1966) and the Museum of Modern Art, New York (1969). “Claes Oldenburg: An Anthology” opened at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. in 1995 and traveled to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Kunst-und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn; and the Hayward Gallery, London. In 2002 the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York held a major exhibit of Oldenburg’s drawings; the same year, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York featured a selection of Oldenburg and van Bruggen’s sculptures on the roof of the museum. “Claes Oldenburg: The Sixties” opened at the Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien in 2012 and traveled to the Museum Ludwig, Cologne; the Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Oldenburg has been honored with numerous awards including the Wolf Prize in Arts (1989) and the National Medal of Arts (2000). He lives and works in New York City.

Coosje van Bruggen was born in Groningen, the Netherlands in 1942. She received a master’s degree in art history from the University of Groningen. From 1967 to 1971 she worked in the curatorial department of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and was co-editor of the Sonsbeek 71 catalogue. Van Bruggen was a member of the selection committee for Documenta 7 in Kassel, Germany (1982), a contributor to *Artforum* (1983–88) and Senior Critic in the Department of Sculpture at Yale University School of Art (1996–97). She has also authored books on Claes Oldenburg’s early work as well as on John Baldessari, Hanne Darboven, Bruce Nauman and the architect Frank O. Gehry. Van Bruggen’s first collaboration with Claes Oldenburg was in 1976 on *Trowel I* located in the sculpture garden of the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo, the Netherlands. In 1978 van Bruggen moved to New York, where she continued to work with Oldenburg, creating large-scale, site-specific works in urban settings. Their collaboration has extended to include smaller-scale park and garden sculptures as well as indoor installations. Van Bruggen passed away in Los Angeles in 2009.

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