

ROTATION 3

**THE COMFORT
OF STRANGERS**

Organized by
Cecilia Alemani

July 31 –
September 5

The Comfort of Strangers is an exhibition conceived as a conversation piece, a dialogue between unfamiliar faces and old, forgotten friends. It is not a thematic show but rather a show constructed on elective affinities and secret sympathies—a gathering of strangers who both comfort and disturb each other.

Focusing on the practices of four artists based in New York, the exhibition sets against each other works from the 1960s to the '80s, combining figuration with abstraction, monumentality with fragility, reluctance with exuberance.

Borrowing its title from a novel by British writer Ian McEwan, *The Comfort of Strangers* imagines unusual connections between different art works and distant art worlds, revealing an inherent sense of violence hidden under the surface of familiarity.

Executed in the '70s as an evolution of his early expressionist canvases, Jack Whitten's paintings reveal hidden geometrical shapes that emerge from an abstract, almost molecular surface. Realized by layering different strata of acrylic paint, which is then treated with a large squeegee, these works freeze the artist's physical gestures in distant, mechanical forms, while still preserving a lyrical aura.

The lush portraits of 94-year-old Sylvia Sleigh depict friends and acquaintances of the artist in everyday poses, seated in chairs or standing in a garden. Reinterpreting traditional modes of portraiture through a saturated palette of flowery colors, Sleigh turns common people into symbols of a remote, devoted veneration.

Judith Bernstein's large-scale charcoal drawings from the mid-1970s often intertwine controversial imagery with a political stand. With harsh signs and aggressive icons, the artist combines mechanics and sexuality to compose intricate diagrams of our desires.

Leslie Thornton's lifetime epic *Peggy and Fred in Hell*, which she started in the mid-1980s and has only recently finished, is an otherworldly account of the life of two children conveyed through their imaginary adventures and the unsettling behaviors they enact as adults. Pervaded by an eerie atmosphere, *Peggy and Fred in Hell* animates the exhibition with a surreal soundtrack.

Jack Whitten
Sorcerer's Apprentice
1974
acrylic on canvas
88 ¼ x 50 ½"
courtesy Alexander
Gray Associates,
New York

Sylvia Sleigh
Annunciation
1975
oil on canvas
90 x 52"
courtesy the artist
and I-20 Gallery,
New York

Sylvia Sleigh
*Paul Rosano in
Jacobsen Chair*
1971
oil on canvas
52 x 56"
courtesy the artist
and I-20 Gallery,
New York

