

Claes & Coosje: A Duet

March 26 – May 9, 2021

Il Corso del Coltello

March 26 – July 20, 2021

540 West 25th Street
New York

Image: Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen in their studio with “Standing Collar with Bow Tie” (1992), 1992. Photo by Jesse Frohman, courtesy Trunk Archive



New York – Pace Gallery is honored to present an exhibition celebrating the collaborative spirit that animated Claes Oldenburg and the late Coosje van Bruggen’s artistic achievements and romantic partnership. Over the course of three decades, Oldenburg and van Bruggen created some of the most famous landmarks in urban and civic spaces around the world. Bringing together a selection of seminal works in sculpture spanning the full arc of their shared history—from early collaborations in the 1980s to their final works of the late 2000s—the exhibition pays homage to one of the 20th century’s most influential artistic duos, highlighting in particular van Bruggen’s vital yet underrecognized role in their collective oeuvre. In addition to sculptures, models, and drawings, the exhibition debuts the large-scale work *Dropped Bouquet* (2021), the final sculptural collaboration that Oldenburg and van Bruggen conceived together before her death in 2009. On view from March 26 – May 9, 2021 at Pace Gallery in New York, *Claes & Coosje: A Duet* sheds new light on the philosophical, aesthetic, and artistic dialogue between these two artists and the indispensable role it played on their collective creative output. Works from *Il Corso del Coltello*, presented on the 7th floor of the gallery, will remain on view through July 20, 2021.

Among the best-known artist-couples of the post-1960s era, Oldenburg and van Bruggen’s partnership was, from the beginning, a conspiracy between artist and art historian. They met in 1971, when van Bruggen was a young curator at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, and they married six years later. During the 1980s, van Bruggen soon transformed from interlocutor into full-fledged artistic collaborator and artist in her own right. From the 1970s onward, Oldenburg and van Bruggen’s ongoing debates and conversations—first around major sculptural commissions and later in their collaborative studio practice—reflected a profound intellectual exchange shaped by the sensibility of a sculptor, on the one hand, and that of a writer, on the other. The result was one of the most fruitful, impactful, and sometimes controversial collaborations in 20th century art. Today, Oldenburg and van Bruggen’s large-scale projects remain some of the most recognizable and beloved public artworks in the world.

Occupying two major galleries at Pace's 540 West 25th Street location in New York, the exhibition is anchored by *Dropped Bouquet* (2021), the realization of Oldenburg and van Bruggen's final work together. Produced at monumental scale for the first time after three years in fabrication, it evokes a garland of faux wildflowers, depicted in the midst of tumbling to the ground and frozen at the moment of impact, as if in suspended animation. Both celebratory and elegiac, flowers are a key visual motif in Oldenburg and van Bruggen's personal iconography. The exhibition also features a selection of sculptural works from some of the artists' best-known collaborations, including original artifacts, drawings, and soft sculptures from *Il Corso del Coltello* (*The Course of the Knife*), Oldenburg and van Bruggen's canonical site-specific performance project for Venice, Italy, which was commissioned, conceived, and realized together with the writer Germano Celant and the architect Frank Gehry. This ambitious event involved the creation and embarkation of a sea-worthy sculpture in the shape of a giant Swiss army knife. With oars protruding from its red-enameled hull as if from a Viking longship, the image of Oldenburg and van Bruggen's *Knife Ship* sailing the Grand Canal has become iconic, while the massive kinetic sculpture was later shown in the rotunda of the Guggenheim Museum in New York, at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, and finally at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

Such important early collaborations from the 1980s—including models for *Spitzhacke* (1982), Oldenburg and van Bruggen's contribution to *documenta 7*, and *The Entropic Library* (1989)—will be presented in dialogue with sculptural renditions of everyday objects of labor and leisure created in the 1990s and 2000s, and which range in scale from modest to monumental. From pies to garden tools, many were designed as models for large-scale installations, among them *Inverted Collar and Tie* (1993) and *Typewriter Eraser* (1998). Others, like the swirling *Collar and Bow* (2005), originally designed for Frank Gehry's Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, exist only in the form of models and drawings.

Further exhibition highlights include sculptures and models from the 1990s and 2000s, including selections from the celebrated suite of musical instruments that van Bruggen and Oldenburg created around the time of their last major solo show, *The Music Room*, which was presented at Pace Gallery in New York in 2005 and again at the Whitney Museum of American Art as part of a major exhibition of the couple's work in 2009. Also included is an important sculptural study for *Soft Shuttlecock* (1995), the monumental site-specific sculpture that Oldenburg and van Bruggen created together and suspended from the Guggenheim's rotunda on the occasion of the 1995 retrospective. The work also evokes their well-known public sculpture of monumental shuttlecocks in the garden of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City.

Internationally renowned for their collaborative artistic practice, **Claes Oldenburg** (b. 1929, Stockholm) and **Coosje van Bruggen** (b. 1942, Groningen, Netherlands; d. 2009, Los Angeles) have produced sculpture, drawings, and colossal monuments that transform familiar objects into states that imply animation and sometimes revolt. A leading voice of the Pop art movement, Oldenburg came to prominence in the New York art scene of the late 1950s and early 1960s. His seminal installations *The Street* (1960) and *The Store* (1961) launched his career, subverting art-historical and

institutional conventions while creating a backdrop for happenings and performances under the production name Ray Gun Theater. Coosje van Bruggen met Oldenburg in 1971, while working as a curator at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. After years of long-distance correspondence, the two married in 1977 and began their remarkable collaboration on large-scale sculptural projects, which reflected a vital exchange between the sensibility of a writer with that of a sculptor. Conflating notions of art and banality while challenging distinctions of “high” and “low” culture, together Oldenburg and van Bruggen staged a rigorous and poetic investigation of objecthood that lasted more than three decades.

Pace is a leading international art gallery representing some of the most influential contemporary artists and estates from the past century, holding decades-long relationships with Alexander Calder, Jean Dubuffet, Barbara Hepworth, Agnes Martin, Louise Nevelson, and Mark Rothko. Pace enjoys a unique U.S. heritage spanning East and West coasts through its early support of artists central to the Abstract Expressionist and Light and Space movements.

Since its founding by Arne Glimcher in 1960, Pace has developed a distinguished legacy as an artist-first gallery that mounts seminal historical and contemporary exhibitions. Under the current leadership of President and CEO Marc Glimcher, Pace continues to support its artists and share their visionary work with audiences worldwide by remaining at the forefront of innovation. Now in its seventh decade, the gallery advances its mission through a robust global program—comprising exhibitions, artist projects, public installations, institutional collaborations, performances, and interdisciplinary projects. Pace has a legacy in art bookmaking and has published over five hundred titles in close collaboration with artists, with a focus on original scholarship and on introducing new voices to the art historical canon. The gallery has also spearheaded exploration into the intersection of art and technology through new business models, exhibition interpretation tools, and representation of artists engaging with technology.

Today, Pace has nine locations worldwide including London, Geneva, a strong foothold in Palo Alto, and two galleries in New York—its headquarters at 540 West 25th Street, which welcomed almost 120,000 visitors and programmed 20 shows in its first six months, and an adjacent 8,000 sq. ft. exhibition space at 510 West 25th Street. Pace was one of the first international galleries to establish outposts in Asia where it operates permanent spaces in Hong Kong and Seoul. In July 2020 Pace opened a temporary gallery space in East Hampton, New York that will be programmed through October 2021. Additionally, the gallery’s seasonal exhibition space in Palm Beach will be open through spring 2021. In fall 2021, Pace will continue to expand its European presence with the opening of a larger gallery space in London.


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