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Artist:Â Eleonore KochVenue:Â Mendes Wood DM, New YorkExhibition Title:A The Essential PainterDate: November 24, 2020 â€“ January 16, 2021Click here to view slideshowFull gallery of images, press release and link available after the jump.Images:Images courtesy of Mendes Wood DM, New YorkPress Release:Mendes Wood DM, New York and Modern Art, London are proud to present two concurrent exhibitions devoted to German-Brazilian painter Eleonore Koch (1926-2018). The exhibitions bring together a group of works produced from the start of Kochâ€™s London period in the late 1960s to paintings executed after her return to SÃ£o Paulo, in the 1990s.Eleonore Koch is one of the most singular figures to have emerged in Brazilian art in the second half of the 20th century. She stands out as someone whose work doesn't easily fit into any of the dominant artistic currents of her time and place, having stubbornly pursued her own pictorial language with remarkable discipline and coherence over more than four decades. During her lifetime – and beyond – her name has been persistently associated with Alfredo Volpi (1896-1988), a painter celebrated as one of the greatest modern masters in Brazil with whom she studied for a period of three years in the early 1950s. According to her own accounts, the â€˜lessonsâ€™ consisted more in observing the way he worked and experiencing his studio routine rather than receiving any type of structured academic training. Most importantly, with Volpi she learned the artisanal and quite traditional technique of egg tempera that she would hitherto embrace.The fact that Koch continued developing and refining her practice way beyond the early 1950s, having spent great part of this period away from the Brazilian context, did not preclude critics to insist in a hurried and possibly ill-intended but regrettable limiting epithet â€˜Volpiâ€™s only disciple†™ whenever commenting on her work. Apart from the differences in background and trajectory, it must be noted that Koch also studied under many other artists including Yolanda Mohalyi (1909-1978) and Elisabeth Nobiling (1902-1975). It is only roughly over the past ten years that Kochâ€™s work has started to gain the overdue recognition it deserves. This is not to say that she has been completely under the radar of the art world. In fact, she had the support of a few but important allies – such as collectors Theon Spanudis (1915-1986) and Ladi Biezus, as well as curator and critic Lourival Gomes Machado (1917-1967) –Â and although not as celebrated as some of her contemporaries, she seemed to have always been highly aware of the value and importance of her work.Born in Berlin in 1926, Koch moved with her family – mother Adelheid, father Ernst and sister Esther – to SÃ£o Paulo aged ten, in 1936. In 1949, she went to Paris to study art, returning in 1951. In 1960, she moved to Rio de Janeiro and over the decade she traveled to Greece, London and the US. During this period, she exhibited her work regularly in Brazil, although she also held a series of jobs – bookseller, set designer, secretary to influential physicist and occasional art critic Mario Schenberg -, not yet being able to make a living from her art. In 1968 she ath in 2018.This was an unusual trajectory for a Brazilian artist at the time, as most artists who could afford to study abroad r n Koch arrived in the ‘swinging Londonâ€™ of the 1960s for what would become a twenty year period she was 42 ye point – and would continue to be -, completely devoted to her work. Furthermore, in 1968 the political situation in Bra AI-5 (Institution Act n. 5), a decree that suspended constitutional rights and resulted in the institutionalization of torture by th elt she had exhausted her professional possibilities in Brazil at a time when political prospects in the homeland were bleak. galleries that would exhibit her work, eventually being invited by Mercury Gallery to take part in their summer show. The g exclusivity contract to acquire her work. Suddenly, there was a concrete opportunity for professional development. The agr r for the Scotland Yard. Brazilian art critic Paulo VenÃ¢ncio Filho recalls her telling him about â€˜the peculiar cases she witn e peculiar was to be painter working for the British police!â€™In the two decades spent in the UK, Kochâ€™s work wasÂ obell & Franks Fine Art (1978), andÂ Barbican Art Gallery (1983).The two concurrent exhibitions presented at Mende from the start of Kochâ€™s London period in the late 1960s to paintings executed after her return to SÃ£o Paulo, in the 19 finement and in-depth development of pictorial aspects that were already central to Kochâ€™s work: the reduction of figures acquire a special vibrancy and luminosity through the treatment of the pictorial surface. She was, after all, already a matur circuit combined with the fact that she was now a stranger in a foreign city provoked a shift in perception, sharpening he egan to work on a new series of paintings depicting views of Regentâ€™s Park where she focuses on the architectural time she used photography as a basis for preliminary studies in charcoal or tempera on paper, a method that helped her s feature the garden to St Johnâ€™s Lodge, with the three steps leading to the parkâ€™s Circular Garden flanked by two sh etrical structure of these elements, but the sense of symmetry is somehow disturbed by the addition of solitary vertical details and by her typical treatment of the surface that brings all compositional elements to a single plane. In one of the versions of this painting, a flagpole is placed on the left side of the image, in another she includes the partial outline of a statue of Hylas and the Nymph just off-center. The steps reinforce the horizontality of the composition, creating an imaginary line that cuts across the whole length of the canvas. At the same time, these steps are enveloped by wide empty spaces, giving the impression that they are almost floating into space. As in all of Kochâ€™s works, the human figure is completely absent from the park series and the compositions are invariably characterized by an economy of elements with clearly demarcated zones of color that evoke different moods. Another recurrent theme during her self-exile years are the marine landscapes in which a section of a deserted pier, a buoy or flag appear amid the vast emptiness of the sky and the sea.Several commentators have drawn comparisons between Kochâ€™s work and Italian metaphysical painting, pointing to the eerie atmosphere of these worlds devoid of human life. Later, upon her move to London, her singular use of color and figuration were associated to contemporary British peers such as David Hockney and Patrick Caulfield. Although it is not clear if she had any particular interest in the emerging Pop Art movement, she does mention Hockneyâ€™s name in some of the letters exchanged with Theon Spanudis during her time in London.Â In another anecdote told to Paulo VenÃ¢ncio Filho, Koch mentioned that once she had a gallery show on the same street where Hockney was also exhibiting. She left him a note commenting on the coincidence of this proximity and inviting him to see her show. Hockney replied with another note: â€˜It will be a pleasure to see yours, but I havenâ€™t seen mine yetâ€™.Â Art historian Fernanda Pitta, who worked closely with Koch as curator of the 2009 exhibition Eleonore Koch: Ordered World â€” the last before her death -, states that Hockney was the British artist she admired the most, suggesting that she â€˜shares with him a keen understanding of the importance of emptiness in the construction of the pictorial space’.Besides landscape painting, Kochâ€™s strict repertoire only includedÂ paintings of interiors featuring mundane objects that donâ€™t appear to have any symbolic value: a blotter, a piece of crumbled paper, a chair, a vase, a peeled orange. At the same time, these objects have been singled out from a multiplicity of others and carefully reduced into synthetic forms that seem to have been sifted through a process of mental distillation which only allows the essential to remain.Â The result is far from â€˜primitiveâ€™ or â€˜simplisticâ€™: images that are captured by the eye are submitted to an intense process of analytical deconstruction by the mind; only to be put together again by the hand, at which point they become infused with subjectivity. For Theon Spanudis, this slow mental process reveals Kochâ€™s ability to make everyday objects sacred: â€˜Against our profane tendency to use everything as objects for immediate consumption she regains the sacred dimension of the simple object. The ample sensitive spacesÂ (which are not the empty dead spaces of mathematicians and scientists) are part and parcel of her intention to re-socialize the object lost in the constant flux of mechanical consumption. A secret poetry emanates from her colors, objects, strange configurations and ample and humane spaces.(â€¦) The objects in the seemingly figurative painting of Eleonor Koch are as much subjective as objective beings, fusing these two worlds in a new kind of existence.â€™Kochâ€™s characteristic rigorous and disciplined methodology in the treatment of form is definitively mirrored in her use of color. Photographs taken at her studio in SÃ£o Paulo some ten years ago show how obsessively she stored and categorized hundreds of small glass pigment containers in a cabinet. The numerous sketchbooks she kept feature several studies for paintings of the same motif rendered in slightly different color combinations every time, often accompanied by handwritten names of the selected pigments and possible options for further variations. These patient and precise exercises to test the effect of adjacent colors on one another, as well as determining which element will advance or recede in pictorial space, are reminiscent of Albersâ€™ celebrated series Homage to Square. In Kochâ€™s work, color and being are inseparable.In an interview published in 1985, when asked about the reasons for relocating to London, Koch stated that she had never achieved anything in Brazil: â€˜I was rejected in three editions of the SÃ£o Paulo Biennale and only managed to be accepted in the fourth because Volpi was a jury member and fought for meâ€™. Although this may not be entirely true, it is certainly fair to say that she had achieved much less than she deserved. By the end of the 1960s, the solitude Koch experienced in Britain was becoming unbearable. In 1989 she decided to finally return to SÃ£o Paulo, where she passed away in 2018. Over the past decade, Eleonore Koch has slowly started to gain overdue recognition in Brazil. In the UK, itâ€™s been almost 40 years since her work was last publicly exhibited at a group show at the Barbican Art Gallery and it is believed that most of the paintings in McAlpineâ€™s collection were lost during an IRA bomb attack to his Hampshire home in 1996. This two simultaneous exhibitions at Modern Art in London and Mendes Wood DM in New York are therefore a wonderful opportunity to present Kochâ€™s distinctive work to new audiences in both cities.By Kiki Mazzucchelli, 2020Link: Eleonor Koch at Mendes Wood DMArtist:Â Eleonore KochVenue:

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