PRESS RELEASE

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Mass Appeal: The Art of Corita Kent
Curator: Tish Greenwood, Executive Director (CMATO)
January 27 – April 3, 2017
California Museum of Art Thousand Oaks (CMATO)

“Kent’s work borrows from popular culture, but in her hands, the meaning is re-conceptualized to raise social awareness and is a vehicle for us to connect to powerful concepts of love, power and peace”. Jasmine Delgado, art professor, CSUCI

One of California’s greatest political artists is having a resurgence. Corita Kent, best known for her iconic Love stamp was able to combine a passion for social justice with a Pop art aesthetic to great effect. In CMATO’s exhibition, Mass Appeal: The Art of Corita Kent, museum visitors will have the chance to examine Kent’s political posters, her commercially successful Love prints, and her spiritual message of rejoicing in the everyday.

Sister Mary Corita worked miracles. She turned ads into Art.

Corita Kent slogans, with many taken from advertisements, are meant to inspire and invigorate against the onslaught of mass communication. In her works, you find rallying cries for peace, tributes to civil rights activists like Martin Luther King Jr., and messages of hope and love. All issues that are relevant today as they were fifty years ago. In their recent book, Hippie Modernism, published in conjunction with The Walker Art Center’s eponymous 2015 exhibition, Lorraine Wild and David Karwan state, “Kent… took the language of commercial consumerism and transformed it into a vibrant picture of spiritual hunger and yearning for love and peace.” Kent, unlike her Pop Art contemporaries, saw an opportunity to imbue the graphic landscape with exactly what it was missing — heart.

Corita Kent, formerly known as Sister Mary Corita, taught and chaired the Art Department at Immaculate Heart of Mary College for 32 years until 1968. There, she welcomed the likes of Alfred Hitchcock, John Cage, Ray and Charles Eames into her classroom. Former students speak to Corita’s ability to transform the way they saw the world.

CMATO’s Executive Director and Curator of the exhibition, Tish Greenwood, points out, “In Corita’s serigraphs, you see an adventurous and non-conformist spirit that twists, flips and stretches our presuppositions about the world around us. Her imagination and her belief in the power of text and images to transmute the everyday into something special is remarkable.”

Juxtaposing Corita Kent’s political protest serigraphs with her love prints, the exhibition provides a platform to discuss an activist artist’s intention and effectiveness of creating art as a form of political and social protest that directly addresses cultural power structures. This exhibition highlights the role of the artist in society and
showcases the power of art to communicate complex ideologies. Museum visitors will find that Kent’s 20th Century artworks still possess the universal appeal of hope during challenging times.

Joel Kuennen, Sr. Editor at Art Slant, remarks that Corita Kent’s work is often held up as a curiosity — the nun that made Pop Art, being a common moniker. But Kent’s work was doing something wholly different. While Pop artists like Warhol, Lichtenstein, Ruscha and Hamilton were cynically turning America’s images upon themselves, stripping them of their intended meaning and thereby making the image an object, Kent saw another option. An image can convey and sustain us.

Corita Kent’s prolific use of the screen printing medium stems from her commitment to make art that was accessible in terms of affordability and visibility. It is an inherently democratic medium that allows an artist to create identical multiple original prints of the same image that can be disseminated to a large audience at minimal cost to the buyer. Kent wanted her work and its message to reach as many people as possible. This method of art making enabled her to do just that.

Kent approaches screen printing much like a collage, bringing in various graphic elements and overlapping them to achieve the desired results. The screen printing process allowed her to manipulate the orientation and placement of the text on the paper to achieve the distinct look of overlapping color and text that is evident in much of her work. Her sculptural manipulation of text implies that language has the ability to be transformative and fluid. She overlaps, rotates, and inverts text until it morphs into something entirely new. Her work is visually stunning as vibrant letterforms, logos, and slogans command our attention and demand a closer look.

Works by Corita Kent are held in many major collections including the Whitney Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

For additional information about Mass Appeal: the Art of Corita Kent, contact Tish Greenwood, Executive Director and curator of the exhibition, at (805) 405-5240 or info@cmato.org.

The California Museum of Art Thousand Oaks is a non-profit organization committed to serving diverse audiences through the exhibition, interpretation, and exploration of the fine and design arts. CMATO is committed to educating the community about the visual arts and dedicated to establishing a premier art museum that will serve Ventura County and surrounding communities. The City of Thousand Oaks is committed to supporting The California Museum of Art Thousand Oaks at the Civic Arts Plaza as part of their goal to have a vibrant arts community. The City approved the rezoning of a 2.8 acre parcel of land on the west side of the Civic Arts Plaza where the art museum will be constructed.

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