

Valeria Napoleone



contemporary  
art society

## PRESS RELEASE

**Important early film by “the mother of all feminist artists\*”  
Mary Kelly donated to Brighton Art Gallery through the  
Valeria Napoleone XX Contemporary Art Society Scheme**

**VN XX CAS encourages debate on the gender imbalance in UK  
museum collections**

The film and an In-Conversation with Mary Kelly; Jenny Lund, Curator of Fine Art at the Brighton Museum & Art Gallery; and Valeria Napoleone, hosted by Caroline Douglas, Director of the Contemporary Art Society will be available to view online from midday on 6 May 2020 as part of the #CASatHome series.

An important early film by Mary Kelly, *Antepartum*, 1973, has been acquired for the Royal Pavilion & Museums, Brighton & Hove's Fine Art Collection through the **Valeria Napoleone XX Contemporary Art Society** (VNXXCAS) initiative. The museum is receiving the work through this scheme after making a strong case for addressing the representation of women artists within their existing collections. To allow viewing during the lockdown, the Contemporary Art Society will be screening *Antepartum* on their website as part of its #CASatHome series for 72 hours from midday on 6 May 2020 to midday on 9 May. The film will be accompanied by the pre-recorded In-Conversation with the artist.

Mary Kelly was renowned early in her career for introducing feminist concerns into the male-dominated conceptual art world in the 1970s and *Antepartum* forms a prologue to her iconic *Post-Partum Document*, 1973-79. This six-year project saw Kelly, influenced by psychoanalytic theory, explore and document the mother-child relationship.

Composed of a black and white single close-up shot, *Antepartum* portrays a pregnant stomach at full term. Action is minimal – the woman's abdomen rises and falls with each breath and the baby's foetal movements are at times visible under the surface of the skin. The short film is projected as a continuous loop which enables viewers to feel they are watching a pregnancy in real-time.

Inspired by contemporary experimental filmmaking, Kelly refuses narrative and encourages the viewer to understand the image as a material two-dimensional visual presence rather than a representational component of a larger story. Such an aesthetic reflects earlier durational film-works such as Andy Warhol's iconic films *Sleep* and *Empire* (1964). However, Kelly uses the film to communicate a female experience that lies outside of conventional narrative language and makes visible what was invisible in the art world at the time. She encourages a re-thinking of conventional concepts of what constitute 'creativity' and 'productivity'. The 'objective' disengaged view of the camera revealing only the abdomen focuses attention on the bodily experience, whilst resisting an essentialist reading.

**Valeria Napoleone XX Contemporary Art Society** (VN XX CAS) is a joint initiative of philanthropist Valeria Napoleone and the Contemporary Art Society. The scheme purchases and donates a significant work by a living female artist each year to a UK museum that has made a strong case for addressing the representation of female artists within their existing collections. Past acquisitions have included work by Bernie Searle for Manchester Art Gallery, Martine Syms for Leeds Art Gallery and Aliza Nisenbaum for Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery.

**Mary Kelly**, Artist said: *"I am delighted that 'Antepartum' has been acquired by the Brighton Museum and Art Gallery. England was the birthplace of my career as an artist and it is especially fitting that the very first work in my extended project on the mother/child relationship should be available to audiences there. I am grateful to the Contemporary Art Society for their enthusiastic support and to Valeria Napoleone for her important patronage of women artists."*

**Caroline Douglas**, Director, Contemporary Art Society, said: *"The importance of Mary Kelly's short film 'Antepartum' is in direct contrast to its apparent simplicity. Its repeating 90-second cycle is mesmerising - it is at once a deeply personal expression of the primary experience of pregnancy, a political statement about the marginalisation of the female in public life, and a powerful example of the experimental film making that was taking place at the time. It is a radical intervention in the art history of the nude, and a milestone in empowerment of women artists."*

*"I'm pleased that this acquisition will throw a spotlight onto the role of female artists in the early development of moving image, and that this particular work of Kelly's can now be understood in relation to her ground-breaking 'Post-Partum Document'."*

**Cllr Alan Robins**, Chair of the Tourism, Equalities, Communities & Culture Committee of Brighton & Hove City Council said; *"We are very thankful to Valeria Napoleone and the Contemporary Art Society for their support. Mary Kelly's film Antepartum will comment on and enhance the museum's existing film and painting collection including its many historical depictions of women. The Valeria Napoleone XX Contemporary Art Society award proves a milestone in RPM's efforts to diversify its collection and increase its representation of women artists."*

**Valeria Napoleone** said: *"The mission of VN XX CAS is to create a more balanced representation of female artists in our museums, so to bring such a remarkable masterpiece in the genre of conceptual and feminist art to Brighton was particularly exciting. This acquisition highlights Kelly's central interest to illuminate the complexity of social inequalities and brings women's experience to the forefront of conceptual work, focusing on feminism, psychoanalytic nuances, domestic labour, mother and child subjectivities - concepts rarely discussed in the 1970s. This powerful and lucid picture of the unborn baby's movements increases the attention of the viewer to the invisible, both physical and metaphysical: the relationship between mother and child."*

To celebrate the acquisition of *Antepartum*, the film and an In-Conversation with Mary Kelly; Jenny Lund, Curator of Fine Art at the Brighton Museum & Art Gallery; and Valeria Napoleone, hosted by Caroline Douglas, Director of the Contemporary Art Society will be available to view **online** from midday on 6 May 2020.

**For more information or to join the talk please contact:**

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**Notes to Editors:**

\*The Guardian, “10,000 revolutions: meet Mary Kelly, the mother of all feminist artists”, 18 May 2015.

## 1. ABOUT CONTEMPORARY ART SOCIETY

The Contemporary Art Society champions the collecting of outstanding contemporary art and craft in the UK. Since 1910 the charity has donated thousands of works by living artists to museums, from Picasso, Bacon, Hepworth and Moore in their day, through to the influential artists of our times. Sitting at the heart of cultural life in the UK, the Contemporary Art Society brokers philanthropic support for the benefit of museums and their audiences across the entire country. Their work ensures that the story of art continues to be told now and for future generations. [www.contemporaryartsociety.org](http://www.contemporaryartsociety.org)

## 2. ABOUT MARY KELLY

Mary Kelly (b. 1941, Iowa, USA) addresses themes of sexuality, identity and the impact of historical events on everyday lives through her project-based practice. *Post-Partum Document* (1973-79), marked Kelly's rise to prominence and caused media outrage when first shown at ICA, London in 1976. The project is the first of a number of large-scale narrative installations, including *Interim* (1984-89), *Gloria Patri* (1992) and *The Ballad of Kastriot Rexhepi* (2001), that have come to define Kelly's practice. In her early career, she contributed to collaborative films including *Nightcleaners* (with Berwick Street Film Collective, 1975) and *Women and Work* (with Margaret Harrison and Kay Fido Hunt, 1975), and Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen's *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977).

Kelly's work has been the subject of major exhibitions at ICA, London (1976 and 1993); New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (1990); Generali Foundation, Vienna (1998); Center for Contemporary Art, Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw (2008); Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2010) and Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester (2011). She was represented in the 1991 and 2004 Whitney Biennials, Whitney Museum, New York; documenta 12, Kassel, 2007; the 2008 Biennale of Sydney and the 2019 Desert X Biennale. Her work is held in the collections of TATE; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles and Moderna Museet, Stockholm, amongst others. Kelly received the Guggenheim Fellowship in 2015 and her archive was acquired by the Getty Research Institute in 2017. She is currently Judge Widney Professor at the Roski School of Art and Design, University of Southern California.

## 3. ABOUT BRIGHTON MUSEUM & ART GALLERY

Brighton Museum & Art Gallery, part of Brighton & Hove City Council, is one of Britain's oldest public museums. Located in the Royal Pavilion Estate at the heart of the city's cultural quarter, its collections showcase arts and crafts from across the world and history from Ancient Egypt to modern Brighton. [www.brightonmuseums.org.uk](http://www.brightonmuseums.org.uk)

## 4. ABOUT VALERIA NAPOLEONE

Valeria Napoleone is an art collector and patron to a number of arts organisations. A Trustee of the Contemporary Art Society and Head of the Development Committee at Studio Voltaire, Napoleone also sits on the board of the Institute of Fine Arts in NYC and is a member of the NYU President's Global Council. In addition to **Valeria Napoleone XX Contemporary Art Society**, Napoleone runs **Valeria Napoleone XX SculptureCenter** as a collaborative project that supports the production of a major artwork in a selected exhibition every 12 to 18 months at the New York-based non-profit space dedicated to contemporary sculpture. The first artist to be supported under this scheme, Anthea Hamilton, was nominated for the 2016 Turner Prize for the resulting exhibition.

Valeria Napoleone received a BA from New York University's Journalism School and an MA in Art Gallery Administration at the Fashion Institute of Technology, NYC. Her collection focuses on female contemporary artists working internationally. Forming an exceptionally close bond with artists, Napoleone has supported many of today's most acclaimed artists at pivotal moments in their careers.

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**Donating great art to museums since 1910**

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