

historical references that directly addressed divisive issues such as the supposedly anti-Spanish attitudes held by Republicans. Goya's work was also appropriated, in this case to represent Republican violence. Basilio draws a broad contrast between the Republican use of images for their persuasive powers and those used by Franco's supporters as part of a cohesive apparatus of social control. Witness, for example, the 200,000 posters that the Francoists ordered for the 1939 occupation campaigns in Madrid and southern Spain.⁴

The quality of printing greatly improved during the period with multi-colour offset lithographs becoming common, indicating the degree of investment in printing infrastructure to promote political ends (fig. ##4). Dionisio Ridruejo, head of Franco's propaganda department, appears to have spearheaded these improvements. The Nationalists' manipulation of visual propaganda was more concerted than that of the Republicans: they forged narratives of national identity and rewrote history to suit their own agenda. One effective vehicle was government-sponsored exhibitions, which presented the war as a new crusade, blending religious ritual with political propaganda.

The final chapter acts as a codicil to the book's historical focus, examining the work of five contemporary artists, all of whom tackle questions of historical memory, interpreting the conflict in light of current debates about the legacy of war and dictatorship. It is an unusual way to end a study of this kind, but one that works well: the issues

of propaganda, interpretation and memory addressed here are still very much contested. Many, for instance, feel that the injustices of the Civil War and the dictatorship have not been properly confronted since Spain's transition to democracy in 1975.

My criticisms are trivial. Basilio's writing occasionally tends toward an earnest dissertation; the description of her methodology, for example, is probably unnecessary. More problematic is the lack of images. It is frustrating to read descriptions of posters and their iconography with no reproduction to refer to. This was no doubt a financial matter and not the author's choice. The book also raises further questions that Basilio might be encouraged to follow up on in future work. Were the artists who made popular political imagery conscious of the need for it to be preserved? Were posters deliberately retained as a permanent record, as they were at the Taller de Gráfica Popular, an artist's print collective with broadly similar political ends founded in Mexico in 1937? What is the survival rate of such material against evidence for its production? More might be said about the main presses, particularly their economics. Also of potential interest would be the relationship between different art forms, categories and reception. As it stands, however, this thorough and thought-provoking book is an important contribution to the debate about visual representation and its efficacy in the context of war, not only in Spain, but in Europe during the violent first half of the twentieth century.

4. For parallel study, see V. Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political*

Posters under Lenin and Stalin, Berkeley, CA, 1997.

Corita Kent

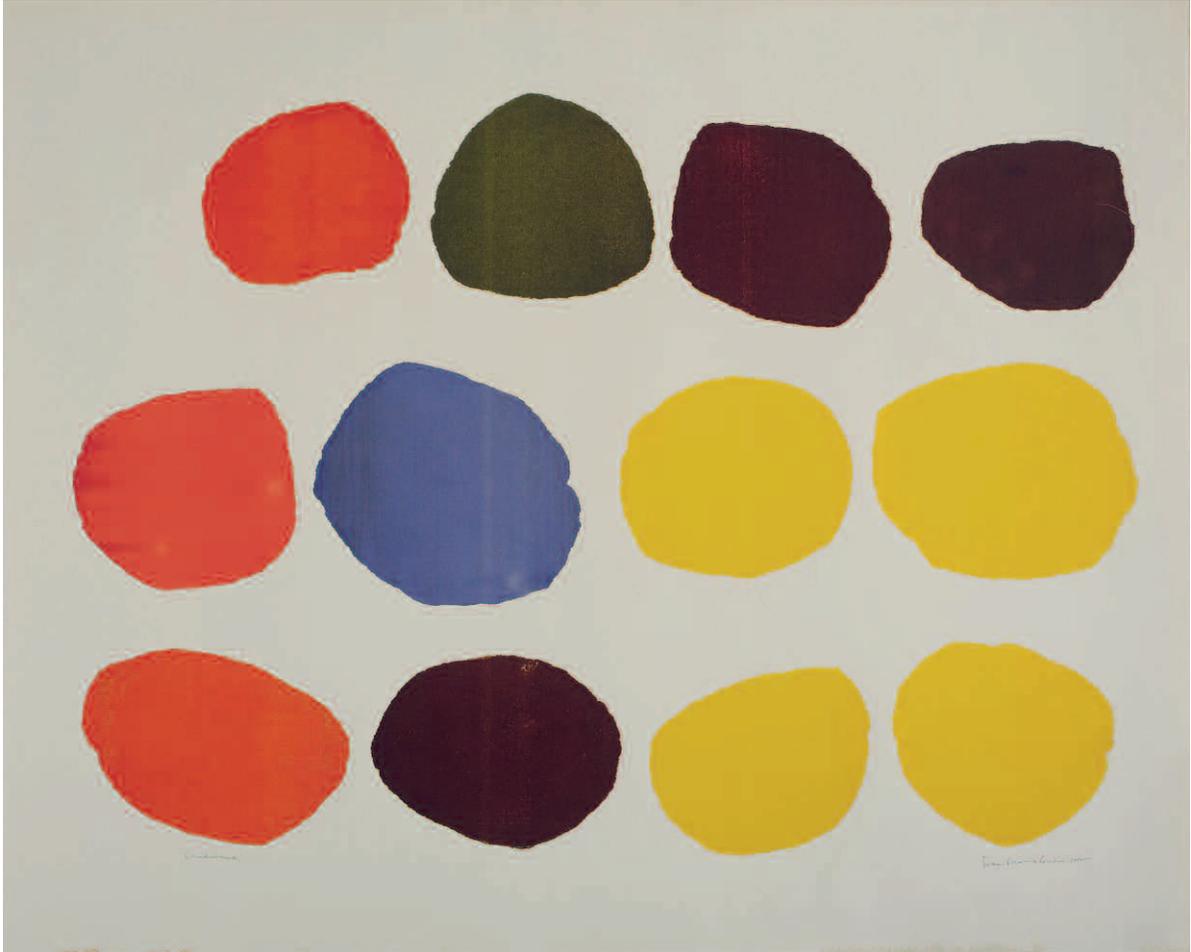
Roni Feinstein

Someday is Now: The Art of Corita Kent, edited by Ian Berry and Michael Duncan, contributions by Cynthia Burlingham, Alexandra Carrera and Megan Hyde, exhibition catalogue, New York, The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery, Skidmore College, 19 January–28 July 2013; Cleveland, Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland, 6 June–14 September 2014; Pittsburgh, The Andy Warhol Museum, 31 January–18 April 2015; Pasadena, Pasadena Museum of California Art, 14 June–11 October 2015, New York, Prestel Publishing, 2013, 254 pp., 300 ill., \$49.95.

Corita Kent and the Language of Pop, edited by Susan Dackerman, with contributions by Julia Bryan-Wilson, Richard

Meyer and Jennifer L. Roberts, exhibition catalogue, Cambridge, MA, Harvard Art Museums, 3 September 2015–3 January 2016; San Antonio, San Antonio Museum of Art, 13 February–8 May 2016, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2015, 340 pp., 285 ill., \$50.

In the 1960s, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The Saturday Evening Post* and other popular media outlets recognized Corita Kent (1918–86) – a Roman Catholic nun who made radical art – as a rare and newsworthy phenomenon. Kent, however, went largely unnoticed by the art establishment and might have passed into obscurity had not a number of international galleries and museums, picked up her screenprints from the year 2000. Interest in Kent has continued to in-



1. Corita Kent, *Wonderbread*, 1962, lithograph, ##**dimensions** (Los Angeles, Corita Art Center).

crease and in the last few years two major museum exhibitions with profusely illustrated catalogues have traversed the United States. *Someday is Now: The Art of Corita Kent* accompanied the first full-scale retrospective devoted to Kent's career, which extended from the early 1950s to the late 1980s. The volume focused on Kent's singular identity as an artist-nun, noting her changing interests and involvements over time and how she was perceived by those around her. *Corita Kent and the Language of Pop*, published two years later, argued that Kent should be recognized as an artist fundamentally aligned with Pop Art. The Harvard Art Museums, which hosted this exhibition, have vast resources pertaining to Kent: they acquired the screenprints in 2008, and the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America is the repository of Kent's papers. Both the exhibition and catalogue focused on Kent's artistic production between 1964 and 1969, which drew on the

consumer landscape, and they juxtaposed her screenprints with work by Andy Warhol (1928–87), Claes Oldenburg (b. 1929), Roy Lichtenstein (1923–97), Ed Ruscha (b. 1937) and others conventionally associated with Pop. While its in-depth analysis of Kent's prints makes this catalogue an invaluable resource, its identification of Kent as a Pop artist remains open to debate.

The artist was born Frances Elizabeth Kent in Fort Dodge, Iowa. When she was five, her family moved to Los Angeles and at the age of eighteen she joined the Roman Catholic order of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Hollywood and assumed the name of Sister Mary Corita. In the late 1940s she began teaching in the art department at Immaculate Heart College and in 1951 received a master's degree in art history from the University of Southern California. That same year, she began to make colourful screenprints on religious subjects and soon interspersed



2. Corita Kent, *That They May Have Life*, 1964, screenprint (© Courtesy of the Corita Art Center, Immaculate Heart Community, Los Angeles).

fragments of biblical texts and inspirational phrases among the images. Her choice of the silkscreen medium was motivated by the desire to make large quantities of inexpensive prints on a small budget that would widely disseminate the Word of God. With few exceptions, these early prints were unremarkable and her art might have remained equally so but for two events of the early 1960s, which both catalogues explore in detail.

In 1962, Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council (also known as Vatican II) called for reforms to Catholicism to make it more relevant to the contemporary world. Mass could be conducted in languages other than Latin, and progressive nuns, like those at the Immaculate Heart of Mary, who welcomed Church revitalization, were able to forgo wearing their habits in public and to drop 'Sister' from their titles so as to invite a closer connection with their followers. Kent tended to sign her prints '*Sister Mary Corita IHM*' (Immaculate Heart of Mary) through 1966; in 1967, she generally signed them simply '*Corita*'. At the same time, Pop Art was beginning to be shown at galleries and museums in and around Los Angeles, and this became the second momentous event in

Kent's artistic development. In addition to the exhibition of Warhol's *Campbell's Soup* images at the Ferus Gallery in July 1962, the exhibitions 'New Paintings of Common Objects' opened at the Pasadena Museum of Art (now the Norton Simon Museum) in September 1962 and 'My Country 'Tis of Thee' at the Dwan Gallery in Brentwood, in November of that year. Shortly after viewing Warhol's exhibition, Kent executed her first print based on a consumer product, *Wonderbread*, of 1962, in which the dots found on the brand's packaging were transformed into a dozen ragged-edged circles, and together with the print's title were used to evoke the wafer of the Eucharist (fig. ##1). By 1964 Kent had developed her characteristic mode of working, in which written words and more specifically the parlance of contemporary advertising were integrated into brightly coloured graphic designs.

Kent found in product logos and advertising a vehicle through which to articulate the aspirations of Vatican II and to update the Scripture into a language relevant to the modern world. Most of her prints of the mid-1960s featured two different linguistic modes. The first was drawn from consumer culture and was produced by means

of stencils derived from her tracings of ads and products that she had photographed in supermarkets and on billboards. Kent rarely used the logos and slogans as found, but flipped, reversed, cropped, folded and layered them, thereby animating and enhancing the typographical richness of the words and phrases that dominated her pictorial fields. Sharing these fields, smaller in scale and handwritten by the artist directly on the screens (using a glue-based assist), were passages of text drawn from sources ranging from theosophy, historical commentary, literature, poetry and philosophy, to popular music and more. In *That They May Have Life*, of 1964 (fig. ##2), a version of the Wonder Bread package is again seen, together with the large, printed phrase 'ENRICHED BREAD' that appears on the product's label. Below, inscribed in circles, is a statement from a Kentucky miner's wife about her children's hunger and a quote from Gandhi: 'There are so many hungry people that God cannot appear to them except in the form of bread'. Many of Kent's prints – as well as the annual Mary's Day pageants she staged at Immaculate Heart College – took as their theme the need for the Church to provide both physical and spiritual sustenance, feeding the hungry being among her primary concerns.

Civil rights and the Vietnam War were central issues as well. In *Someday is Now*, of 1964 (fig. ##3), a fragment of the name of the California-based supermarket chain Safeway, written in bold black and white, meets a colourful striped pattern along its right edge. Inscribed in white on an orange ground is a quote from the US Pavilion of the 1964–65 New York's World's Fair declaring, *America's experience is that social concern itself is inevitable. Responsibility for one another is what we mean when we say we are one nation under God*. Below, also in white on a red ground, are the opening lines of Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream' speech of August 1963. In *Yellow Submarine*, of 1967 (fig. ##4), printed in the red and yellow colours of the Vietnamese flag, VIETNAM is written upside down and backwards and the slogan MAKE LOVE NOT WAR appears, as does a lyric from the eponymous Beatles song that begins, 'And our friends are all aboard ...' Kent derived the image of the submarine from a popular anti-war button of the time.

Kent's silkscreens were made in collaboration with the creative and supportive faculty and students of Immaculate Heart College's art department, which she headed from 1964 until 1967. In 1968 she left the Order, Catholicism and Los Angeles and moved to Boston, due to a crisis of



3. Corita Kent, *Someday is Now*, 1964, screenprint, 610 x 914 mm (Cambridge, MA, Harvard Arts Museum © Courtesy of the Corita Art Center, Immaculate Heart Community, Los Angeles).

faith as well as to mounting objections to her work by conservative Church factions. In Boston in the late 1960s, working for the first time with professional printers, Kent began to use photographic reproductions drawn from the mass media, among them images of the slain Robert Kennedy, of the Pope and of soldiers in Vietnam. In the early 1970s, handwritten notes on colourful abstract grounds replaced the photographic images and printed texts. After suffering from cancer for almost a decade, she died in 1986.

The catalogue *Someday is Now* aims at accessibility rather than scholarship. Although it presents a comprehensive overview of Kent's prints and a helpful compilation of transcriptions of the handwritten and often difficult-to-read texts they contain, it is not a catalogue raisonné. An introductory essay by Duncan surveys the artist's life and work and Burlingham provides a history of the screenprint medium. Several of Duncan's observations regarding Kent's use of language and place in history are particularly astute. Running through the book is a lengthy chronology that consists of personal accounts about Kent by former convent sisters, students, friends and family members, likely to be of interest only to the artist's most devoted followers. Commentaries on Kent's art and influence are offered by eighteen contemporary artists, which, while sincere and well-intentioned, are not particularly illuminating. The illustrations, however, are large, coloured, and number in the hundreds. They extend from early neo-Byzantine style prints to late abstract works with handwritten texts, the latter evoking (and apparently having influenced) the design and tone of many a saccharine greeting card of today, but all are nevertheless interesting to see (as is Kent's design for a 1985 US postage stamp in which the word LOVE appears below a patch of rainbow-coloured swipes).

In contrast to the congenial approach taken in *Someday is Now* to the artist and her work, *Corita Kent and the Language of Pop* is an all-business, scholarly tome, as is reflected in the manner in which the artist is addressed: the former calls her 'Corita' (which is how she signed her prints beginning in 1967), while the latter refers to her throughout as 'Kent'. The volume's revisionist thesis – that Kent's work produced between 1964 and 1969, roughly 400 of her 700 prints, should be understood as aligned with Pop – was introduced and initially argued by Susan Dackerman, former Curator of Prints at the Harvard Art Museums. This is followed by essays by Jennifer L. Roberts on Kent, screenprinting and language and by Richard Meyer on Kent, supermarkets and consumer goods, the most intriguing one being Julia Bryan-Wilson's examination of Kent's 1965 *Peace on Earth* Christmas window display commissioned for the IBM storefront in midtown Manhattan,

which was censored because of its overt anti-Vietnam War message. *Corita Kent and the Language of Pop* also offers a catalogue of 88 items, half of which are prints by Kent, while the other half are works in various media by leading figures in Pop, such as Warhol, Robert Indiana (b. 1928), Oldenburg and Ruscha, as well as by a few abstract artists whose clean lines and bold colours could be seen as related to hers, for example Josef Albers (1888–1976), Al Held (1928–2005), Frank Stella (b. 1936) and Bridget Riley (b. 1931). Each work is reproduced in colour and given thoughtful analysis by Dackerman or a graduate student who worked with her.

Dackerman attributes the fact that Kent was omitted from the history of Pop Art to her having been a woman (much less a nun), women having being marginalized in the context of Pop. The first major museum exhibition of female Pop artists, 'Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists, 1958–1968', was at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia in 2010 and did not include Kent among its 23 artists.¹ Dackerman also points out that more detrimental still was perhaps the fact that Kent did not produce work outside graphic media. It is interesting to consider in this context that both Gemini GEL and Tamarind Lithography Workshop, two of the major players in the so-called 'American Print Renaissance' of the 1960s, where artists commonly associated with Pop often worked, were in close geographic proximity to Immaculate Heart College, where Kent made her prints, although they occupied wholly different worlds.

Therein lies the fundamental problem with *Corita Kent and the Language of Pop*. Inserting Kent's art into the context of Pop, juxtaposing examples of her work with pieces by Oldenburg, Indiana, Warhol and others, does not foster a sense of compatibility, but instead highlights the uniqueness of Kent's enterprise. Indeed, her prints shared Pop's focus on consumerism and spoke the language of Pop in their style (bright colours, clean designs and flat patterns) and mode of production (the silkscreen medium, which is associated with commercial printing, although Kent's preoccupation with screenprints pre-dated Pop by over a decade). Kent, however, did not look to consumer goods and products so much as to the printed materials, the logos, slogans and marketing campaigns that surrounded them, usurping them to her own ends, which were to deliver messages about religious faith, human rights, social justice and the need for peace. When viewed from the vantage point of Kent's commitment, passion and complexity, her engagement with the news and politics of the day, her literary bent and openness to a wide range of sources both popular and esoteric, Pop Art, with its emotional detachment and economy of means, suffers by comparison and appears diminished, lacking in deeper meaning.

1. *Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists, 1958–1968*, edited by S. Sachs

and K. Minioudaki, New York, 2010.



4. Corita Kent, *Yellow Submarine*, 1967, screenprint, 584 x 889 mm (Cambridge, MA, Harvard Arts Museum © Courtesy of the Corita Art Center, Immaculate Heart Community, Los Angeles).

In fact, to classify Kent as a Pop artist seems too confining. It situates her work in the past and does nothing to account for the reason her art looks so fresh today and why, since the turn of the millennium, it has experienced a revival. In his introductory essay in *Someday is Now*, Duncan stated that

Corita's conceptual grasp of the communicative powers and stylistic possibilities of the printed word is nearly unparalleled, in that regard matching or surpassing achievements of renowned artists like John Heartfield, Ben Shahn, Barbara Kruger, Ed Ruscha, Jenny

Holzer, Mel Bochner, Bruce Nauman, Kay Rosen, and Richard Pettibbon.²

One might add to that list other Dadaists and the Italian Futurist poet Tommaso Filippo Marinetti (1876–1944) in the early years of the twentieth century, as well as artists working today with computer and Internet technologies, social media and online brand marketing. As Duncan wrote of Kent, 'she has been rediscovered by a new generation bred on Photoshop, grassroots activism, font-tweaking, and DIY publishing.'³ Indeed, Kent's someday is now.

2. M. Duncan, in *Someday is Now: The Art of Corita Kent*, edited by I. Berry and M. Duncan, New York, 2013, p. 10.

3. Ibid.

