Review: Jacqueline de Jong: The Ultimate Kiss


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As it has come down to us, the popular history of the Situationist International (SI) has generally revolved around a few men. Guy Debord is front and center, with Raoul Vaneigem serving as the SI's poetic spirit. Constant Nieuwenhuys and Asger Jorn make appearances, and the spectre of Isidore Isou flitters about from time to time. In fact, outside of Michèle Bernstein (who was married to Debord for a time), women are largely absent from most Situationist histories. Dutch artist Jacqueline de Jong is one whose absence has been curious. Despite having co-edited (initially with Noël Arnaud, noted "pataphysician" and later member of Oulipo) and published one of the better SI magazines, The Situationist Times (or perhaps because of it, given how the magazine was castigated by the Debord clique as "vacuous" in one of the many spats that peppered the SI's history), de Jong only appears sporadically in some of the major SI anthologies available in English. No matter, it would seem, as de Jong has been an active presence on the international art scene for well over sixty years.

Jacqueline de Jong: The Ultimate Kiss offers up a well-deserved, comprehensive overview of Jong's work. The monograph is separated into a number of different sections, each dealing with a topical or formal concern. The editors trace her career, beginning with her expressionist-tinged, Situationist-era work of the 1960s, through pop-inspired works, graphic and illustrative work, and concluding with her work from the 2000s onward where she experiments with potatoes as sculptural objects (or are they subjects?). Alongside this are essays exploring different elements...
of de Jong's work, as well as an interview with de Jong herself where she discusses her work in various contemporary socio-political contexts.

Throughout this book, one is greeted with an incredibly imaginative, wildly diverse œuvre. It is a work that is tied closely to various strands of the post-World War II European "avant-garde," especially in its search for the liberatory potential of the imagination. Indeed, while the Situationist project might very well be in the rear-view mirror at this point, what de Jong's work demonstrates, quite energetically, is that the Situationist spirit is alive and well.

This profusely illustrated monograph would be most welcome in collections focusing on contemporary art, contemporary art by women, as well as collections dedicated to the intersections of art and politics. It is suitable for both undergraduate and graduate collections.