

TRIPOLI GALLERY

June 7th, 2018

Press Release

Tripoli Gallery Southampton
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Southampton, NY 11968

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Hours: 11 – 6; closed Tues.; Sunday 12 – 5pm



Keith Sonnier

Pope Joan 23, 2017

marker on graph paper

11 x 8.5 inches (28 x 21.5 cm)

Keith Sonnier: *Tragedy and Comedy*

June 29 – July 29, 2018

Opening reception: Saturday, June 30, 4 – 6 pm

Southampton, NY – Tripoli Gallery is pleased to present its second solo exhibition with Keith Sonnier, *Tragedy and Comedy*. Curated around 40 new drawings and accompanied by related sculptures, *Tragedy and Comedy* will be on view from June 29th through July 29th, 2018. We invite you to the opening reception on Saturday, June 30th from 4 to 6 pm, at 30a Jobs Lane, Southampton, NY, coinciding with his opening at the Parrish Art Museum.

Tragedy and Comedy illustrates the artist's continued creative process during a period of personal health challenges. During this past year, Sonnier produced six new series of drawings, *Pope Joan*, *Long Horn*, *Corrugated Twist*, *Floating Grid*, *Electrical Charge* and lastly, inspiring the title of this exhibition, *Tragedy and Comedy*. Always a prolific draftsman, Sonnier's works on paper provide a look into his process and the relationship between the two and three-dimensional aspects of his work.

The act of drawing is essential to Sonnier's ability to maintain his creative momentum. Sonnier was inspired by reading the "airport" novel about Saint Joan, the first female pope who was also a healer and consequently titled a series of drawings, *Pope Joan*. The artist's approach to line and shape varies with his subjects from the cattle-like figures in the *Long Horn* drawings to the energetic lines in his *Corrugated Twist* series.

The drawings are accompanied by four African masks, *Hodo*, *Monsieur Pierre*, *Mr. Smith*, and *Red Smile*, as well as an original plaster cast referencing an elephant head, *Blue Flocked Pachyderm*. All are transformed by the velvety covering of solid color flocking. A playful take on his early conceptual use of industrial and ephemeral materials, these works recall Sonnier's application of flocking (tiny rayon fiber particles infused with raw pigments), albeit this time on solid and recognizable objects. In the late sixties, Sonnier combined flocking and latex to produce the seminal, ephemeral work (*Flocked Series*), which is now widely recognized as belonging to one of the most important periods in contemporary American art.

Lastly, a selection of recent light sculptures, *Electrical Charge C*, *Floating Grid B*, *Floating Grid H*, and *Triple Loop Exercise B* will be on view. The interconnection of line and color in many of Sonnier's drawings suggests the design and structure of his light sculptures; neon tubes that bend and intertwine to explore the effect of light in real space. As Sonnier's drawings inform the expression of their sculptural counterparts, this exhibition provides a further view into the artist's process.

For press inquiries or further information, please contact info@tripoligallery.com or call 631.377.3715.

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Keith Sonnier (b. 1941, Mamou, LA) radically reinvented sculpture in the late 1960s. After graduating with a B.A. from the University of Southwestern Louisiana, Lafayette in 1963, he went on to receive an M.F.A. from Rutgers University in 1966. Employing unconventional materials, Sonnier, along with his contemporaries, Eva Hesse, Barry Le Va, Bruce Nauman, Richard Serra, Joel Shapiro, Richard Tuttle, and Jackie Winsor, called all previous conceptions of sculpture into question. Sonnier experimented with a wide range of materials and in 1968 began working with neon, which quickly became a defining element of his work.

Sonnier has been the subject of more than 130 solo exhibitions and has participated in more than 360 group exhibitions throughout his career. Recent solo exhibitions include *Keith Sonnier: Three Neons / Three Decades* at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut in 2017, as well as *Keith Sonnier: Ebo River and Early Works* at Pace Gallery in New York City in 2016. Sonnier's work has also been shown in solo exhibitions at Galerie Forsblom, Helsinki, Finland (2016); Whitechapel Gallery, London (2016); Maccarone Gallery, New York and Los Angeles (2015-2016); Häusler Contemporary, Munich (2015). In 2015, Sonnier had a major exhibition of his neon sculptures titled *Light Works* at MAMAC (Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art) in Nice, France.

Notable past exhibitions include *Projects: Keith Sonnier* (1971) at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Documenta 5, Kassel (1972); the Venice Biennale (1972, 1982); *Keith Sonnier: Porte Vue* (1979) at Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; *Keith Sonnier: Neon* (1989) at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; and the Whitney Museum of American Art's *1970 Annual Exhibition: Contemporary American Sculpture*, Biennial Exhibitions (1973, 1977), and *The New Sculpture 1965–1975: Between Geometry and Gesture* (1990) which later traveled to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles.

Sonnier's architectural neon installations in public spaces have earned him wide acclaim in an international context. More than 20 important public commissions by the artist have been realized since 1981. Included among these commissions is Lichtweg (or Lightway) at the New International Airport, Munich (1989-1992), a permanent installation that spans the 1,000 meter walkway of moving sidewalks, linking terminals and orienting passengers in a pathway of light. Additional installations include: Kansas City International Airport (2006); Munich Re Headquarters in Munich (2002); Pfarrexpositur St. Franziskus, Roman Catholic Church, Steyr, Austria (2002); Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center, Washington D.C. (1998); Bureau of the Census, Bowie, Maryland (1997); and the Miami International Airport (1996).

In 2013, Sonnier received the Arts and Letters Award in Art presented by the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Sonnier is a two-time recipient of the National Endowment for the Arts Grant (1975, 1981), and was awarded the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship in 1974. Also in 1974, he was awarded first prize at the 9th International Biennial Exhibition of Prints at the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo.

Sonnier's work can be found in numerous public and private collections worldwide, including the Frankel Foundation, Bloomfield, Michigan; The Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates; Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo; Kaiser Wilhelm Museum, Krefeld, Germany; Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, Vaduz; Kunstverein St. Gallen, Switzerland; Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona; Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld, Germany; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; New Orleans Museum of Art; Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; Sprengel Museum, Hannover; Städtisches Museum Abteiberg Mönchengladbach, Germany; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

This year Sonnier's work will be featured locally in two long-term exhibitions: *Keith Sonnier: Until Today*, on view at the Parrish Art Museum in Water Mill from July 1, 2018 to January 27, 2019, and an installation first shown in 1970, *Dis Play II*, opens July 1, 2018 at The Dan Flavin Art Institute in Bridgehampton and will remain on view through May 26th, 2019. An internationally esteemed artist, Sonnier is also an essential figure in the arts on the East End, maintaining a home and studio in Bridgehampton. Sonnier has shown with Tripoli Gallery since 2012, beginning with the *Thanksgiving Collective 2012: Modern Salon*, and followed by the group exhibitions, *Water* (2013) and *A Walk...* (2015). Most recently, Sonnier exhibited in the *12th Annual Thanksgiving Collective: Year-Round* in 2016, an exhibition dedicated to artists living and working on the East End. *Tragedy and Comedy* is Sonnier's second solo exhibition with Tripoli Gallery following *Elliptical Transmissions* in 2014. Sonnier currently lives and works in Bridgehampton/Sagaponack, New York.