

Andrew Kreps  
Gallery

22 Cortlandt Alley,  
New York, NY 10013

Tue–Sat, 10 am–6 pm  
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# Corita Kent

## *heroes and sheroes*

July 8 - August 13, 2021

Opening Reception:

Thursday, July 8, 4 - 7pm

Andrew Kreps Gallery is pleased to announce *heroes and sheroes*, an exhibition of artworks by Corita Kent at 22 Cortlandt Alley. Centered on Kent's series of the same title made between 1968 and 1969, the exhibition marks the first time *heroes and sheroes* has been exhibited in New York in its entirety.

In the summer of 1965, following the Watts Uprising in Los Angeles, Kent reproduced the front page of the *Los Angeles Times* within her work *my people*. While in previous years, Kent had appropriated text from consumer and mass culture, *my people* is the first example of Kent using appropriation as a direct response to the socially charged events of her time. The paper's headlines were rotated and partially obscured by a swath of red, in which Kent handwrote a text attributed to Maurice Ouellet, a priest and civil rights activist who participated in the Selma to Montgomery marches earlier that year. Ouellet's words form a rebuttal to the paper's racially charged headlines describing the Uprising as a "Blood Hungry Mob." In response, Ouellet's quote reads: "Youth is a time of rebellion. Rather than squelch the rebellion, we might better enlist the rebels to join that greatest rebel of his time-Christ himself."

In the years following, Kent continued to create singular compositions, in which bold and colorful text promoted messages of faith, acceptance, and love. Simultaneously, Kent rose to national prominence as a public figure - she was named Los Angeles Times Woman of the Year in 1966 and featured on the December cover of *Newsweek* in 1967. With this exposure came increased scrutiny of Kent's outspokenness as the conservative Archdiocese of Los Angeles mounted intense pressure on both Kent and her order, the Immaculate Heart of Mary, over the changes they were making under the directives of Vatican II. In the summer of 1968, Kent would take a sabbatical from Immaculate Heart College, subsequently leaving the order and seeking dispensation from her vows.

This would mark a key turning point in Kent's work, as she began *heroes and sheroes* later that same year. Reflecting on the social and political movements of the time, much like *my people* before it, *heroes and sheroes* demonstrates not only Kent's advocacy but also her acute awareness of how these events were framed and disseminated through mass

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media. Collaging images appropriated from newspapers and magazines with poetry, song lyrics, quotations from figures within the religious left (such as Daniel Berrigan and the Catonsville Nine), and Kent's own writings, *heroes and sheroes* addresses issues such as the civil rights, labor, and anti-war movements, nuclear disarmament, and the political assassinations that defined the 1960s. Works like *the cry that will be heard* reflect the urgency of the moment, imploring the viewer to "give a damn about your fellow man." Other works, notably *american sampler*, position themselves as acerbic critique. Utilizing the colors red, white, and blue, Kent riffs on the tradition of the "sampler", a piece of embroidery used to demonstrate a variety of needlework techniques. Here, Kent's sampler repeats the words AMERICAN, ASSASSINATION, VIOLENCE, and VIETNAM in stacked lines that resemble the stripes of the flag, using shifts in color to highlight different combinations of words such as SIN, I, and NATION. Prompting the viewer to consider their own individual and moral responsibility, the work's last line poses the question "WHY" next to the answer: "WHY NOT?"

Filling the main gallery at 22 Cortlandt Alley, the twenty-nine prints comprising *heroes and sheroes* reflect the enduring spirit that gave rise to Kent's nickname—"Joyous Revolutionary." The series simultaneously highlights the potential of new life, a belief in the power of collective action, and the joy that exists in the everyday. Shying away from optimism, Kent instead emphasized the importance of hope in works like *a passion for the possible*, employing the image of an energetic crowd of demonstrators, arms extended upwards in peace signs. Positioned above the photograph is a text from activist and clergyman William Sloane Coffin, which still resonates over fifty years after its making: "... hope demands that we take a dim view of the present because we hold a bright view of the future; and HOPE AROUSES AS NOTHING ELSE CAN AROUSE A PASSION FOR THE POSSIBLE."

Corita Kent (1918–1986) was an artist, educator, and advocate for social justice. Earlier this year, Los Angeles City Council voted unanimously to designate Kent's former studio at 5518 Franklin Avenue as a Historic-Cultural Monument. Kent's work is held in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Brooklyn Museum; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; SFMOMA, San Francisco; National Gallery of Art, Washington DC; Ludwig Museum, Cologne; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; mumok, Vienna; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Frac Ile-de-France, Paris; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, among others. Notable exhibitions include: *Corita Kent: Get With The Action*, Ditchling Museum of Art+Craft (2019); *Corita Kent and the Language of Pop*, Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge (2015); *Someday is Now*, Tang Museum, Saratoga Springs, NY (2013); *People Like Us: Prints from the 1960s by Sister Corita*, Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2007).

This exhibition was organized in collaboration with the Corita Art Center, Los Angeles.