LILIANE LIJN'S MAGICAL MECHANISMS SPAN SCIENCE AND SURREALISM

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When Liliane Lijn moved to Paris in 1958, she found herself at the tables of the storied Surrealist cafés. By then, she remembered years later, they had become "kind of boring." André Breton, whose 1924 manifesto had launched the movement, had since "banished all the most interesting people." The Nazis had, too.

Lijn was 19 years old when she arrived on the scene, so few in the cafés really listened to her ideas. Still, there was lots to absorb. Lijn would eventually become known for her kinetic sculptures and works traversing science and art, but everything she made for the next half-century owed to her brushes with Surrealism. All her works begin with drawings, evidence of her belief in the Surrealist tradition of doodling and automatic writing as ways to tap into the subconscious.

Drawings from these Paris years open *Liliane Lijn: Arise Alive*, a retrospective on view at mumok in Vienna through May 4. The show was organized in collaboration with Haus der Kunst in Munich, and will travel to Tate St Ives—a moment of recognition long overdue for the artist, who was born in New York and, now in her 80s, is based in London.

The show takes its title from one of Lijn's *Poem Machines* (1962–68), for which she stenciled words onto cones and then set them spinning on turntables. The text appears to move more slowly near the bottom, since the cone is wider and the letters have a greater distance to travel. *Arise Alive* (1965) swirls the words "arise" and "alive," which are tricky to parse as they spin. "Alive" is how Lijn would often say she wanted her work to feel; this is partly why she makes them move.

How did Lijn take the leap from Surrealism or science? It may seem an unlikely or even disturbing path. But transport yourself back to the early 20th century: at the same time that senseless World Wars were prompting Surrealists to lose faith in rationality, quantum physics came around, too, showing us yet another way in which common sense is good for little.

Quantum physics inspired Lijn's magnum opus, *Liquid Reflections* (1968). She made this kinetic sculpture wanting to explore how light could behave simultaneously as both a particle and a wave—a phenomenon famously impossible to observe. So Lijn set two pairs of acrylic marbles against two opposing forces. First, she placed them on turntables outfitted with a hollow concave disc containing viscous liquid. Then, she lit them dramatically and let them spin.

About those competing forces: the rotating tables produce centripetal force, pushing the balls to the periphery. Meanwhile, centrifugal force beckons the balls to the dip in the concave disc's center. But this is no didactic or technical illustration: it's delightful and mesmerizing. Each ball behaves differently, gets tugged in different ways. It is even tempting to personify the balls as they relate unpredictably: they dance, circle one another, and snuggle up; then one spins away with purpose as the other stays put. It's a sort of soap opera starring marbles.

Lijn would return to conical forms, which she came to see as signifying the cones of ash symbolizing the Greek goddess Hestia, throughout her career. She saw such cones after moving to Greece, while married to the kinetic artist Takis. One series of *Light Koans* (1968–2008) is laced in glowing loops, lines that dance hypnotically as the cones spin. "I want the Goddess to live again through my work," Lijn said in 1987. For Lijn, spirituality and science are both mysteries inviting wonder. She reduces such enigmas to their fundamental forms, making them more comprehensible and easier to appreciate, all without diminishing the inexplicable awe.

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