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Dorothy Iannone, 2002. Photo: © Rolf Walter.

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## DOROTHY IANNONE (1933–2022)

Dorothy Iannone, whose busy, vibrant, erotic works enraged censors of the 1960s and '70s, died on December 26 at the age of eighty-nine. Her death in Berlin, where she had long been based, was confirmed by the French gallery Air de Paris, which represents her. A contemporary of the similarly concerned Pauline Boty and Nikki de Saint Phalle, Iannone depicted female sexuality in a bold graphic style that drew from Japanese woodcuts, Greek vase painting, and visual themes from various Eastern religions. Among

the most memorable of her works are those illustrating her torrid years-long affair with Swiss German Conceptualist Dieter Roth. “[Iannone] skillfully blends imagery and text, beauty and truth,” asserted French Fluxus artist Robert Filliou in the early 1970s. “She is a freedom fighter, and a forceful and dedicated artist. Her aim is no less than human liberation.”

Iannone was born in Boston in 1933. Her father died when she was two, and she was raised by her mother. In 1958, after obtaining her BA in literature from Boston University and while a grad student at Brandeis University, she married artist James Upham and moved to New York with him. Shortly thereafter, she taught herself to paint, exhibiting at the Stryke Gallery, which the couple ran. Iannone’s wide reading and traveling informed her work, which was largely themed around erotic love and often depicted her enjoying intercourse. On meeting Roth during a 1967 trip to Reykjavík, Iannone split with Upham and took the Swiss painter as her lover and muse. One of her best-known works, the series “An Icelandic Saga” of 1978–86, details the fiery first months of their affair; Roth would star in many of her works, including those depicting the lovestruck pair in the roles of various fabled couples throughout history.

Iannone’s subject matter and stark depictions of sexuality were met with resistance during the early years of her six-decade-long career. In 1969, the Kunsthalle Bern asked Iannone to cover the genitals of figures in a work slated to appear in a group show at the Swiss institution. Iannone refused; Roth, who was also included in the exhibition, pulled out in protest; and curator Harald Szeemann quit the museum. “When my work was not censored outright, it was either mildly ridiculed, or described as folkloric, or just ignored,” Iannone told *Modern Painters* in 2009. That same year, she received her first major institutional show in the US at the age of seventy-five, at New York’s New Museum, as her oeuvre was gradually rediscovered.

“That Iannone’s work is finding a kind of traction today is remarkable, for if the kind of real arousal that [Anaïs] Nin called for so long ago seems increasingly hard to imagine, it is important to remember the more insidious ways in which censorship continues apace (via repressions of history, for instance) or, more worryingly, the ways in which far-reaching work on the topic of sexuality (largely by women) is neutered,” wrote Johanna Burton reviewing the show for Artforum. “Iannone refutes such maneuvers with some of her own: In *Metaphor*, 2009, a big-breasted blonde leans over a young man, whom she has bent over a table, his cock hanging down. SOMETIMES YOU MUST ALSO SUBMIT reads the text on her belly. Both figures gaze out at us, wearing huge grins.”

“I like communicating my being,” Iannone told Maurizio Cattelan, who interviewed her for *Flash Art* in 2015. “I never know at the beginning what a work will look like at the end. The moment something is finished, I experience a feeling of satisfaction, but this passes very quickly. The journey is all.”

**ALL IMAGES**