



THE ART NEWSPAPER

Annabel Keenan

3 December 2024

Late Dutch maverick artist Jacqueline de Jong honoured in first US solo show

The artist died in June this year after more than 60 years creating work that was both political and colourful



Flottant devant les yeux (floating before the eyes, 1981) was from a series of paintings inspired by *Série Noire*, a French detective fiction imprint launched in 1945, whose books De Jong read when she lived in Paris in the 1950s
Photo: Gert Jan van Rooij

With *Jacqueline de Jong: Vicious Circles*, NSU Art Museum in Fort Lauderdale presents the first solo show in the US devoted to the avant-garde Dutch artist who died in June at the age of 85. Featuring paintings, sculptures, works on paper and magazines from De Jong's over-six-decade career, the show explores her interest in war, protest, humour and eroticism, as well as her involvement with European avant-garde movements, including the Situationist International and Cobra.

"The decision to have the exhibition was self-evident," says Ariella Wolens, the exhibition's curator. "Jacqueline de Jong's art and life are intrinsically linked to our museum and its mission. We hold the largest collection of art

outside Europe related to Cobra.” The post-war avant-garde art movement (1948-51) had great influence on De Jong’s career. According to Wolens, although De Jong resisted categorising herself as a member of Cobra, her work reflects its principles: “spontaneity, play, borderless collaboration, cross-disciplinary practice, the key symbolism of the human-animal, a total embrace of colour and total political and creative freedom”, Wolens says. “This ethos runs throughout Jacqueline’s work and was critical to her early formation as an artist. She is essential to understanding the afterlife of the movement.”

Abstraction to figuration

The exhibition includes De Jong’s early abstract explorations of colour seen in *Doomsnight (Doomsday)* of 1962 all the way to more figurative, harrowing scenes of the war in Ukraine in *Mariupol* (2022). De Jong often featured current events like the space race, a moment in the Cold War characterised by both the wonder of outer space and fear of nuclear devastation. The exhibition’s title draws inspiration from one such work, *Cosmonautical Vicious Circle (The Most Confused Souls Find Themselves One Morning Conditioned by a Little Gravity)* of 1966, part of a series exploring the tensions of the time called *Private Lives of Cosmonauts*.

For several years, De Jong was romantically involved with the Danish painter Asger Jorn, a leader of Cobra and co-founder of the Situationist International. She became part of the latter group, but was expelled after a disagreement with the founding member Guy Debord, leading De Jong to create *The Situationist Times*, a pioneering experimental publication that featured collaborations between artists, writers and poets. *Vicious Circles* features several examples of the magazine, including some from the museum’s collection.

Although she worked prolifically from the 1960s, De Jong has only seen broad recognition in recent years—after Yale University’s Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library acquired the artist’s papers in 2012.

A later revival of interest

“Jacqueline’s reckoning in Europe only happened over the last ten years, and she fought for that; she was always her strongest advocate,” Wolens says. Included in the revival of interest in De Jong’s work was a 2019 solo show at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. “Jacqueline said there were many galleries that showed artists whose work was wholly in line with hers, but they did not look at the work of women and would not consider showing them,” Wolens says. “We are fortunate that our museum’s rich and deeply eclectic collection gives us a reason and responsibility to do something about this historical oversight.”

While De Jong died before having the chance to see her first US solo show, she worked closely with the museum for nearly four years planning the exhibition. “Jacqueline is part of this epidemic of women artists who have had to wait until they are at the end of their lives to be critically recognised,” Wolens says. “The world is still in the process of playing catch-up and working to acknowledge the cultural contributions of individuals who have been historically marginalised.”

- *Jacqueline de Jong: Vicious Circles*, NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, until 4 May 2025