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**EXHIBITION: ULRIKE OTTINGER: Stills 1971-1989** 

**DATES:** June 1 – July 7, 2000

David Zwirner is pleased to present an exhibition of film stills by the German independent avant-garde filmmaker Ulrike Ottinger. This exhibition is held in conjunction with a series of screenings of Ottinger's films at The Museum of Modern Art from June 9-15, (with the collaboration of Women Make Movies who are the official North American distributors), as well as an exhibition of film stills from Ottinger's epic 8-hour ethno-documentary *Taiga*, on view at the Goethe Institute, June 12-July 21.

Ottinger, who for nearly thirty years has been an important figure in the counter-cultural Berlin underground scene, is frequently identified with the New German Cinema movement of the 60s and 70s, typified by the work of Fassbinder and Herzog. Yet her work remains stubbornly idiosyncratic and independent, sharing none of that movement's preoccupation with gritty realism, Freudian character psychology, or (in Ottinger's view) a rather humorless dread of both sex and women. From her earliest experimental work onwards, Ottinger's films have gone against the grain of such prevailing avant-garde tendencies, characterized instead by a fantastic visual style, with its campy, over-the-top imagery, a disregard for traditional linear narrative, and by complex theatrical meditations on ideas of gender, sexual identity, and power. In a world of shrinking distances and ever-expanding cultural homogenization, Ottinger's films revel in the idea of difference, constantly proposing a new understanding of identity as mutable and in continual flux. Intrinsic to Ottinger's project as a maker of films is a recognition of the "other," not only within the context of the foreignness of another culture, or within a marginalized social subculture, but also within oneself. Ritualizing this desire for the alien, Ottinger's films make frequent use of the visual syntax and inner dream logic of fairy tales in order to frame her examinations of personal and social "otherness."

As an *auteur* filmmaker (typically acting as director, writer, cinematographer, editor, and art director), Ottinger's roots lie in the Surrealist cinema of Luis Buñuel; a richly flamboyant art direction; and Baroque grotesqueries of Frederico Fellini; as well as the visually absurdist allegories of late Medieval and Northern Renaissance painting, in the manner of Brueghel and Bosch. Her films have been championed in both lesbian and feminist circles, while Ottinger herself has resisted all specific ideologies and dogmas as being overly didactic and creatively limiting. Having attained a certain underground cult status, the influence of Ottinger's filmic universe has been deep and widespread in both cinematic and artistic circles, indirectly resonating through the work of contemporary artists such as Mathew Barney and Cindy Sherman.

The stills on view in the current exhibition constitute a broad overview of Ottinger's elaborate visual iconography. *Madame X: An Absolute Ruler* (1977), for example, is set on the improbable pirate ship *Orlando* (a reference to Virginia Woolf's tale of androgyny and immortality), an all-female crew, led by the domineering Madame X, roams the high seas appealing to the women of the world to escape their lives of safe monotony and join them in an existence of risk, adventure, and love. *Freak Orlando* (1981), a highly stylized, collage-like expressionist fantasy, explodes accepted definitions of so-called "freaks," (dwarves, giants, bearded ladies, Siamese twins), to include fetishists, pilgrims, "leopard-people," half-people, non-people, and all beings that are exceptions to the rule. *Johanna D'Arc of Mongolia* (1988), which like *Freak Orlando* stars the French film legend Delphine Seyrig, reveals Ottinger's growing interest in the "exotic" other, as personified by wanderers and nomads. The unusual tale, presents the story of a group of European women traveling east across Asia on the Trans-Siberian Railway, who are abducted by a roving band of Mongolian women warriors, is one part lesbian love story, one part ethnographic travelogue, one part action-adventure romp. Consistent throughout Ottinger's work is a palpable conviction in the transformative potential of the imagination, and peculiar sense for the visual ease with which reality and the fantastic can coexist.

For additional information, please contact the gallery at (212) 966-9074 or visit www.davidzwirner.com