

Mary Ellen Carroll
1963 (Outtakes, Aftermaths, and Assassinations)

In 1996, while living in Berlin “after the wall came down,” I started to consider making a work as time, as politic, as object: ultimately, a theater piece as an opera. The subject began as an era and ended as a year, 1963. This year in particular was of interest (and not 1968) because it was when the political process and policy was writ large to the global public as a material, to be considered through sequential imaging and transmittal through the media and namely, television. It is also worth noting that there are numerous quotes from leading civil rights leaders and political and cultural figures that Carroll collected that reference the year, including Baldwin, Friedan, Hansberry, Kennedy, King and Plath. For example, James Baldwin in his essay *A Talk to Teachers* wrote, “It was a deliberate policy hammered into place in order to make money from black flesh. And now, in 1963, because we have never faced this fact, we are in intolerable trouble.”

Last year I was awarded the Berlin Prize and spent seven months at the American Academy in Berlin. I brought the research I started in 1996 in addition to more material collected over the twenty years since. I thought that I would shoot a film. Once I began shooting, though, I realized it was the wrong medium for a body of work meant to become an opera. What I set out to do conceptually in the film was too abstract, and was not working structurally; approaching “a *Sans Soleil* pastiche,” never a good idea in my opinion. It was failing in its completion, though not in its singularity. But what then? I did not want the work to strictly be photos, or writing, as the temporal was a part of the work—given that the structure was, still, the year 1963.

I made the decision for the material to be imaged and as an object as the political—hence the decision to paint. I did not want to commit to film as painting and “I Am Painting,” but for the materiality of painting to disappear, wherein the style or manner is intentionally schematic, but also conveys the image in a very subjective manner. There was also a requirement for the work to be schematic and to maintain a certain flatness, similar to how Wagner envisioned his *gesamtkunstwerk* and the staging and sets for his operas. I started to leave the dinners at the American Academy with the linen from the extended evenings on the Wannsee that included the fellows and other invited speakers and guests from the singer/performer Peaches to the political scientist Francis Fukuyama.

When I was asked in an interview at the Academy about the series and the process, I said, “I went to the hardware store, name Bauhaus, (of course) and purchased pigments and every color of their matte paint that they had in stock. The paint specialist did not recommend the paint to be used on linen. I didn’t listen. I also expected to get bored with the process and quit and go back to editing the film. I didn’t.”

I drew up an index of 1963 based on a variety of image-based sources in the media that included television and film and print—newspapers in the U.S. and international press as well as magazines and the candid photo or amateur photograph. There are specific

topics: technology, economics, politics, religion, art, sports, film, music, etc. These were then organized as to who was represented in terms of gender, race, culture, etc. (In the majority of the media in 1963, there is obviously a lack of images of women and anyone of color, but what is most striking is that the numbers are not significantly different from today. The other half of the work *1963* is the index itself, a comparison between 1963 and 2016 that has a series of writings that detail the similarities). Hence, the selection of what is being represented is a representation, what could be construed as a correction, in effect.

There were 365 days in 1963 and 365 images will be realized. More than one hundred have been made up to this point. For the initial painting, when I executed the work of Kennedy's motorcade in Berlin, I realized why Andy, Luc, and Elizabeth have done all those portraits of celebrities. It is automatic painting, familiar as subject yet distanced as object. The reputation of the U.S. was at an all-time low in '62 and '63; hence the reason JFK did his tour of Europe and the expanded motorcade route with more stops to improve the country's image and relations. I revisited the Bretton Woods agreements and my notes from 1996 and the restructuring that took place. I also looked into more detail about the car from the motorcade and the use of the convertible, which turned out to be the same model that was driven in Dallas and in which JFK was assassinated. This was also a reason to represent it when it first appeared as a form factor for diplomacy in Berlin rather than Dallas, and it was the first painting I executed and is now in a private collection in New York.

For the exhibition at Redling Fine Art, six works will be presented from the series, *1963* that were realized in Berlin. The works are indexed under the subjects of aftermath, altering perception, and assassination.

Mary Ellen Carroll
MEC, studios
Berlin, 2016



Mary Ellen Carroll
04.307.11.03.63: Madame Nhu in Los Angeles, 2016
51 x 48 inches
Matte enamel on linen
MEC16001



Mary Ellen Carroll

01.176.06.26.63: Motorcade with Kennedy-Brandt-Adenauer, 2016

Matte enamel on linen

Private Collection, New York