

Institute of
Contemporary
University Art
of Pennsylvania

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**First U.S. Museum Retrospective of Influential Artist Ree Morton in Over Three Decades
Opens Fall 2018 at the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania**

*Survey Features Over 40 Works, Including Rarely Seen Seminal Installations, Shedding Light on
Morton's Short but Prolific Career*

Philadelphia, PA, March 7, 2018 – Opening on September 14, 2018, the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania (ICA) will present the first major retrospective in the U.S. in nearly forty years of pioneering artist Ree Morton (1936 – 1977). Spanning the last decade of her artistic production before her untimely death, ***Ree Morton: The Plant That Heals May Also Poison*** (on view until December 24) will feature her most significant work, comprising over 40 drawings, sculptures, paintings, and installations. Steeped in autobiographical references and memories, the exhibition provides a unique opportunity to connect to a ground-breaking artist whose radical infusion of narrative, color, craft, theatrical imagery, and humour expanded the boundaries of the post-minimalist movement she was rooted in, influencing younger generations of artists and forging a feminist legacy. In advance of the exhibition, artists, curators, and scholars will gather for ***“Using the Self to Imagine the World”***—a two-day symposium taking place at ICA on March 16 and 17 dedicated to reexamining Morton’s enduring impact.

“This exhibition marks the first time in generations that audiences in Philadelphia and from across the U.S. will have an opportunity to experience the captivating and innovative work of Ree Morton. This city formed an integral role in shaping and developing Morton’s practice and career, first as a student and then as a teacher at the Philadelphia College of Art, and ICA was an early and avid supporter of Morton, creating a collaborative relationship that included commissioning and exhibiting her work in the early 70s,” said Amy Sadao, Director of ICA. *“The Plant That Heals May Also Poison* reflects our commitment to illuminating the pioneering work of underrecognized artists whose work merit reappraisal and placing them within a new, contemporary context.”

Defying easy categorization over the course of her short artistic career, Ree Morton spent several years in Philadelphia after earning an MFA in 1970 from the Tyler School of Art at the age of thirty-three before moving to New York. She split her time between teaching classes at the Philadelphia College of Art and exhibiting alongside artists such as Gordon Matta-Clark, Scott Burton, Jacqueline Winsor, Bill Bollinger, and Barbara Zucker, trying to make her own way as an artist. Her unique style quickly earned her critical acclaim and comparisons to other post-minimalist artists, such as Lynda Benglis and Eva Hesse. In the fall of 1975 Morton relocated to San Diego for a one-year visiting position at the University of California, where the development of the personal content of her work was increasingly influenced by the local feminist movement. Shortly after, Morton moved to Chicago, where she cultivated a reputation as both a leading practitioner and teacher before her tragic death in a car accident in 1977. Distinctive regional elements woven into her pieces, such as *Bozeman, Montana* (1974) and the *Regional Pieces* (1976), act as tactile representations of the strong connections she formed to different locations and cities throughout her lifetime.

“This survey marks an important moment to appreciate and understand the work of Ree Morton, who has been widely recognized as ‘an artist’s artist’ and whose impact on contemporary

practitioners has directly influenced the work of many, despite her lack of greater public renown” said Kate Kraczon, the Laporte Associate Curator at ICA. “I first uncovered Ree’s direct connection to ICA while reviewing archives from the ICA’s 1973 *Made in Philadelphia* exhibition in preparation for the museum’s landmark 50th anniversary exhibition. I’ve been studying Ree’s work closely in the half-decade since.”

The Plant That Heals May Also Poison will invoke the playfulness and multidimensional elements of Ree’s work, presenting a range of seminal pieces that capture her exploration of themes of love, domesticity, childhood, and maternity, and her unexpected experimentation with textures, man-made and natural materials, signs, and symbols, revealing her ingenious transitions between post-minimalism and the decorative. Additionally, the exhibition highlights a notable change in her work—the incorporation of words and personal narratives, as well as her discovery of celastic—a fabric that could be shaped when treated with solvent and hardened when dry, which allowed her to fully embrace the decorative in her work.

Exhibition highlights include:

- ***Sister Perpetua’s Lie*** (1973) – A sculptural installation that was commissioned and exhibited by ICA in 1973 and inspired by Raymond Roussel’s experimental 1932 novel ‘*Impressions of Africa*.’
- ***Souvenir Piece*** (1973) – A deeply personal installation work that uses graphic and tactile elements to evoke the memories of a summer Morton spent with her children in Newfoundland. Split into two sections after it was originally exhibited in the 1970s, this show reunites the work for the first time in decades.
- ***The Plant That Heals May Also Poison*** (1974) – This key piece will be positioned at the opening of the gallery and exhibited on vivid and carefully constructed animal-patterned wallpaper that evokes Morton’s original display.
- ***Signs of Love*** (1976) – An expansive, sentimental, and sprawling multi-media display that marks her increasing affinity for the decorative.
- ***Manipulations of the Organic*** (1977) – Morton’s final completed work before her untimely death. The piece demonstrates a renewed interest in returning to a more minimalist aesthetic seen earlier in her career and was inspired by Louis H. Sullivan’s 19th-century writings on decoration.

The inaugural Sotheby’s Prize recently awarded *Ree Morton: The Plant That Heals May Also Poison* a commendation out of 92 entries from institutions in 15 different countries.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated publication with a scholarly essay by the curator, commissioned texts, and a biography of the artist, marking the first comprehensive catalogue on Ree Morton produced by a U.S. institution since her show at the New Museum in 1980.

The Plant That Heals May Also Poison is organized by ICA and will be curated by Kate Kraczon, the Laporte Associate Curator. This exhibition will be the inaugural show supported by an endowed curatorial fund founded by Daniel W. Dietrich, II that enables ambitious curatorial projects and programming.

ABOUT REE MORTON SYMPOSIUM

On March 16 and 17, *Using the Self to Imagine the World* places a spotlight on the life and practice of Ree Morton, with participants including Tang Museum Director Ian Berry; artist Nayland Blake; art historian Sabine Folie; Alexander and Bonin Gallery Director Kathryn Gile; Founder and Principal of Art Agency, Partners, and Chairman of Sotheby’s Fine Art Division Allan Schwartzman; and Director of Exhibitions at the University of the Arts, Philadelphia Sid Sachs. Free and open to the public, the

symposium is organized by Kate Kraczon, Laporte Associate Curator; Lauren Downing, Curatorial Assistant; and Tausif Noor, Spiegel Wilks Curatorial Fellow, all at the Institute of Contemporary Art. A full program and additional information can be found here:

<http://icaphila.org/programs/9078/using-the-self-to-imagine-the-world-conversations-on-ree-morton>.

ABOUT REE MORTON

Ree Morton's (b. 1936, Ossining, New York) oeuvre spanned the eras of minimalism, post-minimalism, and pattern and decoration, offering a new perspective that was influenced by and reflected the poignant and significant moments in her personal life and her exposure to different artistic movements, ground-breaking contemporary practitioners, and different regional elements. She exhibited major works during her lifetime at Artists Space, New York; the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York as well as Bykert and Droll/Kolbert Galleries. Her works are included in numerous museum collections in the United States and Europe. A posthumous retrospective of her work was organized by the New Museum, New York in 1980 and traveled to several U.S. museums. In 1999, the University of Vermont, Burlington organized an exhibition of her sketchbooks and published a facsimile of selected pages. A survey exhibition and an extensive monograph of Morton's work was organized by the Generali Foundation, Vienna in 2008 and an exhibition of her drawings and related paintings and sculpture was presented at the Drawing Center, New York in 2009. In 2015, her work was the subject of a survey at The Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid. In the Fall of 2016, Alexander and Bonin held a solo exhibition of her work.

ABOUT KATE KRACZON

Laporte Associate Curator Kate Kraczon joined the ICA in 2008 from the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. Recent and upcoming projects include the forthcoming survey dedicated to Ree Morton; the first U.S. solo exhibition of work by Suki Seokyeong Kang (opening at ICA on April 27, 2018); the first museum exhibition of the work of Becky Suss; as well as a survey of Angel Nevarez and Valerie Tevere's collaborative practice (2016). Kraczon worked with Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme on the first North American presentation of *The Incidental Insurgents* at ICA (2015), and commissioned the major video installation *Easternsports* (2014) by Alex Da Corte and Jayson Musson. In 2014 she oversaw the museum's 50th anniversary exhibition, which included commissioned projects by Elisabeth Subrin and Linda Yun, as well as Mary Ellen Carroll, Simon Kim, and Bryan Zanisnik with the Philadelphia non-profit Recycled Artist in Residency (RAIR) and their co-founder, artist William Dufala. Previous ICA shows include Karla Black's first major museum exhibition in the United States (2013); *First Among Equals* (2012, co-curated with Alex Klein); *One is the loneliest number* (2011); *Summer Studio with Anthony Campuzano* (2010); *Touch Sensitive: Anthony Campuzano* (2009); and *Asking Not Telling* (2009). She has overseen ICA's annual juried video exhibition, *Open Video Call*, since 2008.

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

The Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania is a non-collecting institution presenting exhibitions at the forefront of contemporary practice and culture that challenge audiences to think in new ways. The ICA is free for all to engage and connect with the art of our time. Since its founding in 1963, ICA has served as a laboratory for the new, introducing and supporting the production of urgent and important contemporary art, beginning with ICA's inaugural show of paintings by Abstract Expressionist Clyfford Still, followed by the first museum show of works by Andy Warhol in 1965. Throughout its history, ICA has been instrumental in identifying and developing many promising artists before they attained prominence within the international art world, some of whom include—in addition to Warhol—Laurie Anderson, Richard Artschwager, Vija

Celmins, Karen Kilimnik, Barry Le Va, Glenn Ligon, Robert Mapplethorpe, Agnes Martin, Pepón Osorio, Tavares Strachan, and Cy Twombly.

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