

*(Cherry and Martin archive - Cherry and Martin is now Philip Martin Gallery.)*

## **Lew Thomas**

Structural(ism) and Photography

March 22 – April 26, 2014

Lew Thomas tirelessly investigated the relationship between word and image, prefiguring in some sense developments later associated with Pictures. Cherry and Martin's exhibition focuses on Thomas's work between 1971-1978. These pieces appeared in his landmark book, *Structural(ism) and Photography* (1978). Described by David Levi Strauss as a kind of "pedagogical sketchbook," the publication of *Structural(ism) and Photography* marks an important moment in the history of expanded photographic practice in the United States.

The earliest piece in Cherry and Martin's exhibition, "BLACK & WHITE (1971)," consists of "two 11 x 14 inch prints mounted side-by-side with the word 'WHITE' centered on a black surface and the word 'BLACK' centered on a white surface." As Thomas notes in 1971-72, "The production of these prints indicated that I could execute an idea photographically without the stimulus of a pictorial object. I did not need to go somewhere to take a photograph. In fact all the content I would ever need for photography was already with me. To progress I needed structure. 'BLACK & WHITE' is the structure on which all subsequent work is built."

Writing in 1980, critic Robert Morgan suggested that, "one might instinctively regard such a reductionist gesture in photography as typical of the conceptual art produced in the late sixties;" however, "for Thomas, this direct photographic gesture was the beginning of a new outlook on the craft." "TIME EQUALS 36 EXPOSURES" (1971), for example, made immediately after "BLACK & WHITE," is equally specific. Thomas explains, "Irrelevant details complicating the subject ... were eliminated until I had reduced the process to a camera, a roll of film and a lab clock. When the work was completed ... it was not dependent on hidden messages for its depth of meaning. It was physical and opaque, its object being nothing more than the systematic exploration of the photographic process and its corresponding structure."

"THROWING-NIKOMAT" (1973) integrates "the act of photography with the images photographed," and the complicated "9 PERSPECTIVES" (1972)—which appeared in curator John Szarkowski's landmark 1978 MoMA exhibition "Mirrors and Windows"—as well as works like "ARITHMETICAL PORTRAIT" (1972) and "VACUUM" (1975) explore spaces of "multiple and constructed perspectives." By the mid-70s, Thomas had established a body of photographs breaking apart photographic representation into such categories as "Construction," "Collage," "Frame," "Format/Field," "Casual/Reflective," and "Words & Images," and was beginning work on his "Reproductions of Reproductions" series, which included—as image—the letters and art reviews Thomas had written, the various installation shots he had taken of shows by himself and others, and his own professional CV—"BIBLIOGRAPHY" (1977).

Lew Thomas played a vital role through keen and avid support for other artists. He curated the monumental "Photography and Language" exhibition at San Francisco's La Mamele in 1976 and the retrospective "Photographs and Words" at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1981. "Photographs and Words" included several artists associated with NFS, such as Lutz Bacher, Peter D'Agostino, Hal Fischer, Donna-Lee Phillips, Sam Samore and Thomas himself.

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NFS titles co-edited by Thomas and Phillips, such as *Photography and Language* (1976), *Eros and Photography* (1977), *Still Photography: The Problematic Model* (1981), sought to promote an open platform to the diverse vantage points of conceptual artists and conceptual photographers alike, each of whom worked with photographs for their own reasons: Dennis Adams, John Baldessari, Ellen Brooks, Jack Butler, JoAnn Callis, Robert Cumming, John Gutmann, Robert Heinecken, Douglas Huebler, Meyer Hirsch, Steve Kahn, Barbara Kruger, Fred Lonidier, Mike Mandel and Larry Sultan, Muntadas, Al Nodal, Bart Parker, Joyce Neimanas, Allan Sekula, Cindy Sherman and many others.

Thomas's work is included in the collections of such museums as Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona (Tucson, AZ); Henry Art Gallery (Seattle, WA); High Museum (Atlanta, GA); Menil Collection (Houston, TX); Museum of Fine Arts (Houston, TX); Museum of Modern Art (New York, NY); New Orleans Museum of Art (New Orleans, LA); Princeton University Art Museum (Princeton, NJ); Santa Barbara Museum of Art (Santa Barbara, CA); Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, University of California (Berkeley, CA); and Walt Disney Development Company (Los Angeles, CA).

Philip Martin Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 11am-6pm and by appointment. For further information and images please contact the gallery at +310-559-0100 or [info@philipmartingallery.com](mailto:info@philipmartingallery.com).

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