

LISSON GALLERY

Press Release

Roy Colmer

Doors

January 17 – February 22, 2020

504 West 24th Street, New York

Opening: January 16, 6 – 8pm

Lisson Gallery is pleased to present its third exhibition of the work of Roy Colmer since announcing representation of the artist's estate in 2016. Debuting the entirety of his seminal *Doors, NYC* (1975-76) project at 504 West 24th Street, this marks the first ever comprehensive presentation of this monumental photographic project, while significant sections have previously been exhibited at PS1 and the New York Public Library. After beginning his career as a painter at the prominent Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Hamburg, Germany, Colmer abandoned the medium and his preferred method of deployment, the spraygun, just ten years after graduation, and by 1975 he worked exclusively in photography and film. *Doors, NYC* is both his most expansive and his most recognized series.

From November of 1975 to September of 1976, Colmer photographed the doors of every building, shop and restaurant he encountered, rendering his adopted hometown of New York City in a sequential but not strictly exhaustive manner – given that the occasional chain-link fence makes an appearance among the more traditional entry ways. He covered 120 intersections and streets across more than 3,000 images, all of which will be on view at Lisson, from areas ranging from Fort Washington to Wall Street and everywhere in between. While the photographs could initially be perceived as documentary in nature, recording the state of each block at a given moment without a predetermined path or objective, Colmer saw each image as part of a greater conceptual exercise. After each day's outing, he inscribed the trajectory of every journey and city block in an index – noting whether he had captured the north or south side of the street, for example, and thus the odd or even address numbers.

Much like his Conceptual contemporaries On Kawara or Hanne Darboven (whom he met in art school at Hamburg where he also first experimented with photographing a series of doors, including a photo of the door of the barn at Darboven's home), Colmer was interested in the passage of time, and how the structure which defines it is shaped by personal experience. He studied fellow English immigrant Eadweard Muybridge's investigation of time as it related to motion and motion-picture projection and was influenced by documentary photography pioneer Eugene Atget's images of Parisian shop windows, in addition to Berenice Abbott's portraits of New York City in the 1930s. The series title is derived from a line from the passage *Doors of Perception* from English poet William Blake's book *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* – "If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, Infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern."

The *Doors, NYC* series draws comparisons to the work of Hilla and Bernd Becher as well – a shared cataloguing of urban forms, frontality of form and a similar structured, serial presentation. But while the Bechers abided by a self-imposed formal system – photographing at certain times of the day and under specific lighting conditions to create stark, unemotional and sometimes melancholic portrayals of their subjects – Colmer created no guidelines for his pictures and operated his camera with a looser hand, arguably having as much in common with the conceptual as with the street photography of Lisette Model, with whom he

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studied at the New School in New York. As the viewer looks closely at his photographs, there are glimpses of not only the artist's reflection but also passers-by, sometimes not fully in the frame. Colmer deliberately chose to capture New York City as he viewed it and as Blake described – raw, unedited and imperfect, liberated from reason or order, and entirely full of possibility.

About Roy Colmer

Known primarily for his conceptual photography, film projects and colour-intensive paintings, Roy Colmer challenged the boundaries between these disciplines in order to develop a new kind of perception. Inspired by the shifting artistic cultural landscape brought about through the introduction of electronic media, Colmer connected the surfaces of his paintings to video through the use of spray techniques and a careful selection of colour, suggesting filmic effects such as movement, flicker, distortion, and as Colmer described, “feedback.” He was interested in the immediacy and versatility of the spray gesture and the ability to manipulate space and depth through colour and form, notions influenced by his Concretist mentors at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Hamburg, Germany. By the early 1970s, Colmer began to incorporate this telegenic feedback directly into his practice, increasingly working in video and film. His exploration and manipulation of electronic signals was part of a larger group of artists working in the area at the time, among them Nam June Paik and Bruce Nauman. Colmer stopped experimenting with paint entirely a few years later and focused his attention on photography and documentary projects.

Roy Colmer was born in London in 1935 and died in Los Angeles in 2014. Colmer taught photography at the New School in New York from 1987 to 1995. His paintings and video works were included in ‘High Times, Hard Times: New York Painting 1966-1975,’ a touring exhibition organised and circulated by Independent Curators International from 2006 to 2008. His work *Doors, NYC* was incorporated in Hanne Darboven’s work *Kulturgeschichte 1880–1983 (Cultural History 1880–1983)*, 1980–83, and in 2015, it was exhibited as part of ‘Greater New York’ at MoMA PS1, New York, and in ‘175 Years of Sharing Photography,’ an exhibition from the collection of the New York Public Library. Colmer was a recipient of the John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship in 1988 and received a grant from the Foundation for Contemporary Performance Art in 1990. His work is included in important collections around the world, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; New York Public Library, New York, NY, USA; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France; Brooklyn Museum, NY, USA; and John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, New York, NY, USA, amongst many others.

About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and promotes the work of more than 60 international artists across two spaces in London and two in New York as well as one in Shanghai. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, John Latham, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. It still works with many of these artists as well as others of that generation from Carmen Herrera to the renowned estates of Leon Polk Smith, Ted Stamm and Roy Colmer. In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors to the public for the first time, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie. Since 2000, the gallery has gone on to represent many more leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller, Tatsuo Miyajima and Sean Scully. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Nathalie Djurberg & Hans Berg, Ryan Gander, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes and Wael Shawky.

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