

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Hatch, Kevin. 'Bruce Conner: It's All True'. *Artforum*, May 2016

ARTFORUM

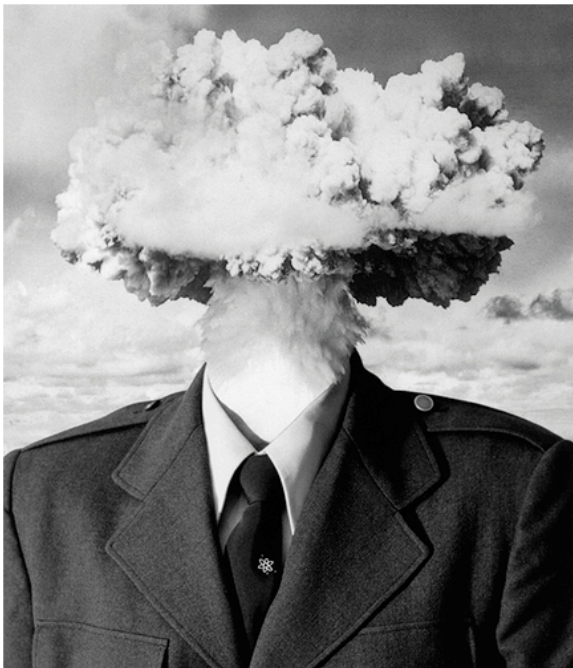
MAY 2016

"BRUCE CONNER: IT'S ALL TRUE"

Museum of Modern Art, New York

July 3–October 2

Curated by Stuart Comer, Rachel Federman, Rudolf Frieling,
Gary Garrels, and Laura Hoptman



Bruce Conner, *Bombhead*,
2002, acrylic on ink-jet print,
31 3/4 × 25 1/8". © Estate of
Bruce Conner/Artists Rights
Society (ARS), New York.

THE ARTIST AL WONG once told me a story: Bruce Conner was sitting at a friend's kitchen table in San Francisco in the early 1960s when Walter Hopps, newly named director of the Pasadena Art Museum (now the Norton Simon Museum), happened to drop by. Hopps offered Conner a one-man show on the spot; instead of answering, Conner stared mutely ahead, trembling. Hopps was nonplussed and the show never happened. Is it true? As with so many stories about Conner, the veracity of this one is lost to time; if real, however, it would mark the first in a series of planned major museum exhibitions over the decades that the artist would have had a hand in sabotaging, sometimes via direct interference but more often as a consequence of the unruly nature of his own protean output.

11 DUKE STREET, ST JAMES'S, LONDON SW1Y 6BN

TEL +44 (0)20 7925 2505 FAX +44 (0)20 7925 2506 info@thomasdane.com

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During Conner's long career, his corpus extended well beyond his better-known assemblages and films to encompass drawing and printmaking, installation *avant la lettre*, live performance, and such impossible-to-classify countercultural gestures as running for political office in his adopted hometown of San Francisco (with campaign speeches including recitations of a list of desserts and of passages from the New Testament mentioning "light")—none of which settle neatly into the staid confines of the museum. A beloved artist's artist, Conner for decades appeared destined to remain an influential but fugitive trickster figure whose insistent antagonism of museum curators had succeeded perhaps too well.

Now, nearly a decade after his death, the artist's time has apparently arrived, with "It's All True," organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and cocurated with New York's MoMA. The show will be Conner's first full retrospective and, remarkably, the artist's first solo museum exhibition in New York. The curators have used the physical fragility of much of Conner's work as a prompt to place conservation issues front and center, with great care devoted to the restoration and presentation of his landmark found-footage films. Conner's virtuosic assemblages of the 1950s and '60s have also received loving treatment, and a highlight for longtime fans will be the chance to see a restored version of the sculpture *CHILD*, 1959–60—a work that languished for many years in a state of disrepair once thought to be permanent—which recaptures much of its original macabre poignancy. Throughout, Conner's idiosyncratic sense of the theatrical, which long put him at odds with the dominant and often dogmatic modernism of his day, will be given free rein, with whole rooms given over to re-creations of some of his wilder multisensory installations. While Conner's work often fit uncomfortably in its own time, "It's All True" (accompanied by a catalogue with contributions from contemporary artist's artists Kevin Beasley and Carol Bove, among others) will place him rightfully and squarely in the now.

Travels to SF MoMA, Oct. 29, 2016–Jan. 22, 2017; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, Feb. 21–May 22, 2017.

—Kevin Hatch