

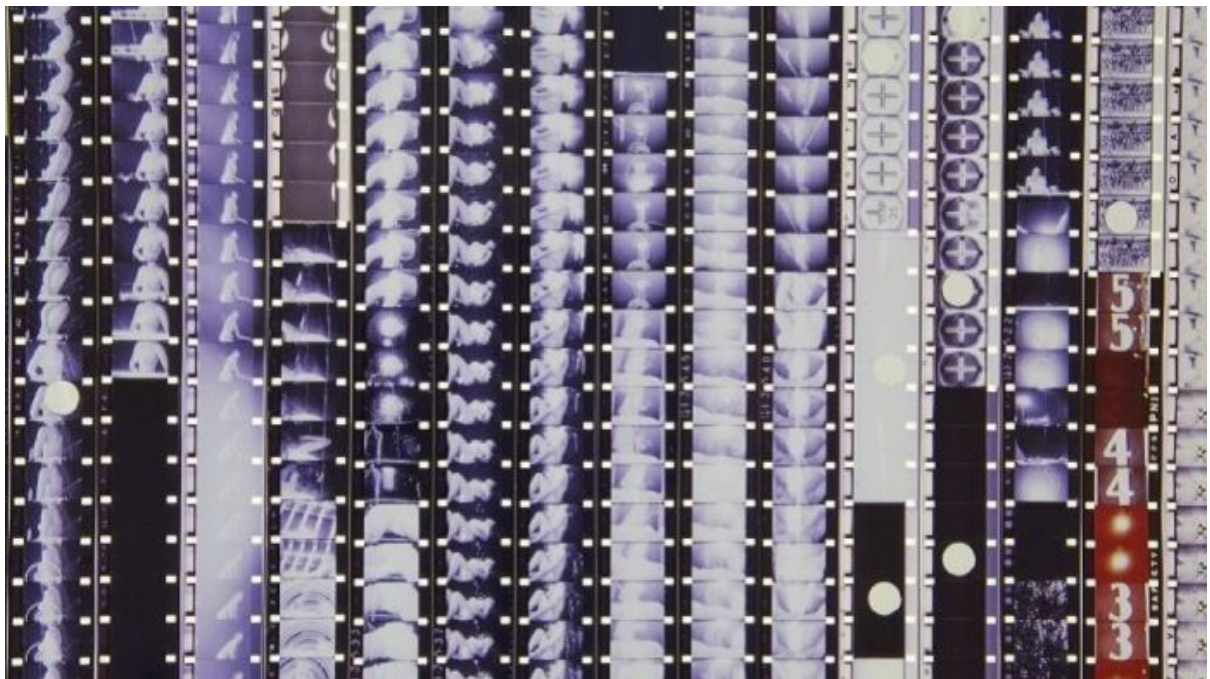
THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Ticca, Elio. 'American Gothic. Bruce Conner in Madrid'. *Artibune*. 6 March 2017

Artibune

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Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid - up to 22 May 2017. Organized by the museum in Madrid and SFMoMA of San Francisco, "Bruce Conner. It's All True "is a comprehensive retrospective on the career of one of American artists active from the postwar period to the new millennium, the most important and eclectic, but less known to the public. An excellent opportunity to rediscover it.



Bruce Conner. It's All True. Exhibition view at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid. Pictures of the Reina Sofía Museum. Courtesy Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid

He was an artist in his own time as well as alternative, almost heretical, than the dominant features of much contemporary art to him (Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns, Claes Oldenburg). On the art scene in San Francisco in the fifties, close to inspiration and themes to the Beat Generation, Bruce Conner (McPherson, 1933 - San Francisco, 2008) has been hailed as one of the first American artists to work with installations and readymade, and is counted among the American video artists underground, while preserving its own uniqueness difficult inclusion in certain artistic groups, such as Pop Art and Fluxus; closer to poetry, to artists close to his generation, such as spouses Kienholz and Paul McCarthy .

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The exhibition in Madrid presents more than two hundred and fifty works on paper, films, works on canvas, sculptures, made by an artist who was able to observe the soul of the late twentieth century in disenchanted and merciless way, playful and meditative. Conner noted now the stars and stripes at various levels: from foreign policy to mass media communication, the countercultural movements consumerism innervating every aspect of daily life. All we are trying to innovate methodologies and artistic storytelling. In gargantuan way: not the preference of a medium (such as Jackson Pollock and Jasper Johns with painting, Richard Serra and Claes Oldenburg sculpture), the artist has had a Midas touch for painting and assemblage, video and drawing, music and collages, up to Body Art and performances.

ASSEMBLAGE

The assemblages are, in the Conner production of objects whose purpose is self-destruction for aging: altars made of wax, buttons, bags, feathers, wrapped in nylon stockings. The powder is invited to settle in order to accelerate the decay of matter: the work is destined to disappear. Anti-artistic choices, dear to Marcel Duchamp (*Dust Breeding* , 1920) and Jean Tinguely (*Homage to New York*, 1960), combined with a sensitivity close to Jean Dubuffet and Kurt Schwitters . At the Reina Sofia is exposed, between sets of the Fifties and Sixties, *Child* (1959), a next assemblage, for intensity, Francis Bacon ; and *The Bride* (1960), next to sensitivity and poignancy to Max Ernst. Works that Conner produces up to 1964, when more actively works with film film: another way to make collages. Obtained by combining frames from different movies, video works, together with the works on paper, will become the main focus during the following decades.



Bruce Conner. *It's All True*. Exhibition view at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid. Pictures of the Reina Sofía Museum. Courtesy Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid

CUT

Conner is close to the American underground film scene for visual choices and methodological practice (direct intervention on the film, to Stan Brakhage ; attention for a libertarian and liberating eroticism, the Jack Smith), focusing on the representation of the human figure, and in particular the female , with

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the next aesthetic choices to those of Andy Warhol ; but more akin, stylistically, to artists such as Carolee Schneemann or Lynda Benglis (*Breakaway* , 1966). The observation of liberation from Puritan costumes Fifties living with an interest in cultural memory, with strength less ambiguous than many pop artists: in *Report* (1963-67), the Kennedy assassination is told from the chamber and from the live television speaker, but censored in the most dramatic moment. The assassination moment gives way to a hallucinatory collage, made of white and blacks frames. The visual experimentation goes along with that sound: in *Crossroads* (1976), the serene melodic music of Terry Riley accompanies a video of atomic explosions, shots taken from the US Army experiments in the Bikini Islands (1946). More videos like *America is Waiting* and *Mea Culpa* (1981), will be video tributes to musicians like Brian Eno and David Byrne .

WORKS ON PAPER

Observed as outcomes of a meditation practice or obsessive, constructed with meticulous precision, the works on paper oscillate between rigor and figurative representation determined by the case (the series *Constellations* , the seventies and eighties); abstraction and figuration (*Untitled, Embryo, Yin Yang* and *Mandala* sixties); graphemes and decorativeness (the *Inkblot Drawing* of the Seventies, similar to Rorschach drawings, used in psychology test); as well as photographic realism (*Burning Bright* , 1996). Among Eastern influences and modernist abstraction, Conner also experiments with different frames with silver salts, using himself as a figurative object: like Robert Rauschenberg and David Hammons , but with decidedly mystical references (*Sound of One Hand Angel* , 1974).



Bruce Conner; *Bombhead*, 1989. Courtesy Conner Family Trust, San Francisco and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid

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COLLAGE

Influenced by collage protosurrealist of Max Ernst , in particular from the series *La Femme 100 têtes* , Conner will work collage mixed from Victorian age prints, following the same procedure and sources of Ernst; but favoring free symbolic associations and esoteric references. The erotic and dramatic, typical of the surrealist series, gives way to an unreal atmosphere and desecrating. Start from the late fifties, often included in the assemblage, the various series of collage artist will remain private work, almost unknown to the people closest to him; to be disclosed in the form of publication in 1973.

PHOTOGRAPHER UNDERGROUND

The artist's interest in the paradoxes of American society in the aftermath of the experiments with motion picture film in the sixties, re-emerges in the late seventies, with the meeting of the underground music scene of the West Coast; Conner will work as a photographer for the newspaper *Punk Search and Destroy* , portraying the active bands in a San Francisco club, the Mabuhay. The Beat Generation, the countercultural movement of the sixties, and punk: several photographs on display testify to the burning interest Conner for a final of youthful rebellion expression on American soil.

Esoteric, realism, modernism, anti-art: the artist crosses several current and constant of his century, looking at the past and imagining the future. *A Movie* (1958), a mix of erotic sequences, movie scenes and daily life, is hailed as a video clip on MTV before his time, in advance of twenty-three. Like many marginal artists than the art scene, by choice or by circumstances, Conner deserves greater disclosure; the exhibition at the Reina Sofia is an opportunity to discover another face of American art, traits more shadowy, as equally worthy of attention.

<http://www.artribune.com/arti-visive/2017/03/mostra-bruce-conner-museo-reina-sofia-madrid/>