

White Columns

GORDON MATTA-CLARK:

NYC GRAFFITI ARCHIVE 1972/3

March 20 – May 10, 2025

Opening Reception: Thursday, March 20, 2025. 6–8pm.

Participating artists:

Gordon Matta-Clark, ALL JIVE 161, A TRAIN, BAMA, CAY 161, CHARMIN 65, CLIFF 159, COCO 144, DEAD LEG 167, DYNAMITE 161, FRANK 207, FUTURA 2000, GRAPE 897, HONDO I, HULK 62, IRON MIKE, JAMAR I, JESTER I, JOE 182, K-55, KILLER 1, KING KOOL 143, LAVA I & II, LAZAR, LEE 163rd, Michael Lawrence, MICO, MIKE 171, MOSES 147, Moses Ros / SAL 161, PHASE 2, PIPER 1, PISTOL 1, RAY B 954, RIFF 170, ROCKY 184, SAVAGE, SEX 143, SHASTA 62/EARL – Earle Augustus, SILVER TIPS, SJK 171, SKI-168, SLIM 1, SNAKE 1, SPANKY 132, S.PAT 169, SPIN, STAFF 161, STAY HIGH 149, STITCH 1, SUPER KOOL 223, SUPER STRUT, TAKI 183, TOPCAT 126, TRACY 168, T-REX 131, WICKED GARY and Chris FREEDOM Pape.

White Columns is pleased to present **GORDON MATTA-CLARK: NYC GRAFFITI ARCHIVE 1972/3**, curated by Roger Gastman of BEYOND THE STREETS and Jessamyn Fiore, co-director of the Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark.

From 1972 to 1973, Gordon Matta-Clark captured over 2,000 photographs of the beginnings of the graffiti art movement in New York City. Displaying a selection of the artist's photographs from this period, the exhibition presents these alongside early, original artworks by writers and artists immortalized within Matta-Clark's images including: SNAKE 1, SJK 171, LEE 163rd, WICKED GARY, TRACY 168, STAY HIGH 149, and FUTURA 2000 (amongst many others.) This exhibition expands upon BEYOND THE STREETS's 2024 presentation *EXHIBITION 011: GRAFFITI ARCHIVE 1972/73* at Control Gallery in Los Angeles with an accompanying presentation of original photographic works by Matta-Clark, including hand-painted prints and one of the artist's scroll-like *Graffiti Photoglyphs*. **GORDON MATTA-CLARK: NYC GRAFFITI ARCHIVE 1972/3** is the first time in over twenty years that Matta-

Clark's artwork has been at White Columns, and will be the second time a *Graffiti Photoglyph* has been presented at the gallery, following an original presentation in a group exhibition at 112 Greene Street in 1973.

Gordon Matta-Clark (1943-1978) was a prolific artist and lifelong New Yorker, as well as a central figure of the downtown New York art scene in the 1970s. In the fall of 1970 Matta-Clark, with a group of fellow artists, co-founded an artist-run alternative art space at a former rag factory in Soho called 112 Greene Street (which would later be renamed White Columns in 1980.) Writing about the founding of 112 Greene Street, Fiore has said: "The raw architecture of this building was the creative catalyst for a multi-disciplinary artistic community looking to free artmaking from the pristine white cube and traditional commercial gallery system. It was a space where they could collaborate and experiment in making bold, often ephemeral, site-specific installation and performance that changed the course of contemporary art history."

Not long after the founding of 112 Greene Street, a remarkable transformation began to take place across the city as ordinary graffiti turned into a burgeoning art form. In the summer of 1972 Matta-Clark began to photograph the city's exploding graffiti scene. While mainstream culture was initially hostile towards graffiti and its authors, Matta-Clark recognized the artistic merit of graffiti long before the medium became the subject of gallery shows and museum retrospectives, viewing it as a kind of people's art movement that aligned with his own interests in socially engaged and site-specific artworks that directly incorporated or existed alongside the architecture of the city. He was one of a limited number of forward-thinking individuals who appreciated the importance of this rapidly evolving artistic movement, and his documentation of those early years of graffiti, by some accounts, even predates the now-ubiquitous tendency among graffiti writers' (most of whom were teenagers at the time) to document their work.

Matta-Clark's prescient embrace of graffiti as an art form in its own right reflects his lifelong interest in the relation between art and public space. As Caleb Neelon notes, "The graffiti that Matta-Clark found was fresh and full of adolescent fun and creativity. In the period between 1971 and 1974 graffiti went from being an occasional 'I was here' marking to a fully fleshed-out artistic game with internal rules, ranking and levels of mastery... In 1973, when Matta-Clark took this suite of images, the one-upmanship was in full play as so many of the standard hallmarks of graffiti pieces (3D letters, painted arrows, connections between the letters) were all in communal use." Expanding on this idea in his foreword to the accompanying exhibition catalogue, Carlo McCormick writes, "Before even *Wild Style*, Matta-Clark saw this new geometry in the visual language of teenagers robbed of identity and future, crossing the

bounds of public space, collective community, asemic writing, and fuck-you semiotics. His photographs of what would become the global language of youth in its still-nascent form are but a fragment of his oeuvre that speak to its greater influence on his art.”

Matta-Clark’s vast photographic archive of this time found its way into his own artistic practice, best demonstrated by the impressive *Graffiti Photoglyphs*. First exhibited at White Columns (then called 112 Greene St.) in 1973, the work took the form of a “long row of photographs of graffiti-decorated subway trains [attached] to the outside wall of a building visible through the rear windows of the gallery. The viewers had to traverse the rear of the space, looking out the windows as if they were watching a subway train passing through a station.” [1] The black-and-white photographs that comprised *Graffiti Photoglyph* were punctuated by hand-coloring done by Matta-Clark. Just as street artists were inscribing upon the architecture of the city, so did Matta-Clark inscribe upon their inscriptions, adding his own layer to the increasingly palimpsest-like surfaces of the city.

Presenting archival photographs by Gordon Matta-Clark alongside paintings and drawings by some of the most prolific graffiti writers of the era, **GORDON MATTA-CLARK: NYC GRAFFITI ARCHIVE 1972/3** traces the story of a city through the unlikely entwinement of early street art with the evolving practice of a major conceptual artist. As McCormick observes, “The deconstructive power of graffiti—relatively new then to the cityscape but rather something of an ancient voice thoroughly anti-modern against the soulless moneyed International Style of architecture that had transformed Matta-Clark’s native city from a place of homes and neighborhoods to a corporate shrine of steel and concrete—was the lifeblood of the New York he loved and the antidote to all the changes he saw effecting it.”

[1] Description taken from Rosemary Mayer, *Arts Magazine*, November 1973, pg. 63.

White Columns would like to thank Roger Gastman/BEYOND THE STREETS and Jessamyn Fiore for their enthusiasm in realizing the White Columns iteration of this exhibition. We would like to additionally thank David Zwirner gallery for their support of **GORDON MATTA-CLARK: NYC GRAFFITI ARCHIVE 1972/3**.

Born in New York City in 1943, **Gordon Matta-Clark** studied architecture and graduated from Cornell University in 1968, returning to his native New York City the following year. Combining his activist concerns with his artistic production, he helped establish alternative spaces such as 112 Greene Street and FOOD restaurant in SoHo and engaged with peer artists and non-artists in collaboration that aimed to improve their surroundings. In the 1970s, Matta-Clark experimented across various media and began

staging monumental interventions and smaller-scale installations in the charged city landscape, bringing attention to New York's failing social policies, displaced people, and abandoned spaces. Gordon Matta-Clark died from cancer in 1978 at the age of 35. In 2007, *Gordon Matta-Clark: You Are the Measure* was the first full-scale retrospective organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, which traveled to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. In 2017-2020, Matta-Clark's work was the focus of a critically acclaimed traveling exhibition, *Gordon Matta-Clark: Anarchitect*, that was on view at The Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York; Jeu de Paume, Paris; Kumu Art Museum, Tallinn, Estonia; and the Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts.

Roger Gastman is a curator, writer, archivist and collector whose work is focused on elevating and historicizing the ongoing graffiti art movement. Gastman is the producer of the 2010 Academy Award-nominated film, *Exit Through the Gift Shop*, co-curator of *Art in the Streets* (2011) at the MoCA in Los Angeles, and director of the SHOWTIME documentary *Rolling Like Thunder* (2021), a plunge into the underground world of freight train graffiti culture. In 2018 Gastman founded BEYOND THE STREETS, an organization that presents large scale exhibitions and educational programs on graffiti and street art.

Jessamyn Fiore is a curator and co-director of the Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark. Exhibitions curated include *112 Greene Street: The Early Years (1970–1974)* at David Zwirner in New York (2011), which led to her editing the critically acclaimed, eponymous catalogue, published by David Zwirner and Radius Books (2012) and she co-curated (with Sergio Bessa) *Gordon Matta-Clark: Anarchitect* at the Bronx Museum of the Arts (2017); the exhibition subsequently toured to Jeu de Paume, Paris, France (2018); Kumu Kunstmuuseum, Tallinn, Estonia (2019); and the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University, Waltham, MA, (2019).

For further information about this exhibition contact: violet@whitecolumns.org

Gallery hours: Tuesday – Saturday, 11am to 6pm.