

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Robert Cumming: Large Prints

February 16 – April 08, 2022

Reception: Wed., Feb. 16th, 2 – 5pm

Gallery Luisotti and Royale Projects are pleased to present their collaboration with The Robert Cumming Archive on the exhibition, Robert Cumming: Large Prints. This is the first solo gallery exhibition in over ten years to feature Cumming's fabricated photography from the 1970s and the first time this work has been seen reinterpreted at a large scale.

Having received his MFA in painting and sculpture from the University of Illinois in the late 1960s, Cumming's interest in photography took shape when he moved to Southern California in the 1970s. He arrived with a robust practice in mail art and artist's books and had meticulously documented his sculptures to submit to juried shows. Soon, these photographs became the work itself, and Cumming began to build tableaux with the express intent to capture their exquisite detail with an 8x10 view camera. These built set-ups often took the form of curious or unlikely situations, incorporating Cumming's preoccupation with the geometry of the physical world, such as in "67-Degree Body Arc Off Circle Center" (1975/2019), or a chair that hovers inches above the ground amidst a grove of ferns in "Chair Trick" (1975/2019),

From today's perspective, Cumming and many of his contemporaries—John Baldessari, Ed Ruscha, Eleanor Antin, and Cumming's former roommate and friend, William Wegman—define what was once indefinable: conceptual photography. Compared to the trenches of the 1970s New York art scene, Southern California had refreshing neutrality, with plenty of room to experiment and an eccentric culture infused by Hollywood fantasy and perpetual good weather. Yet Cumming's rigorous approach to photographic conceptualism set him apart.

Cumming studied photography as an MFA student under Art Sinsabaugh, a photography purist and modernist who shot Midwestern landscapes on enormous 12x20 negatives. Yet Cumming's interest in the medium was inspired by the rough photo-silkscreen collage of Robert Rauschenberg. It wasn't until years later that he discovered the large-format work Frederick Sommer, made with an 8x10 camera, whose photographs of hundreds of cacti against Arizona hillsides inspired him to buy his own large-format camera. "I was just beginning to get involved in manic patterns, millions of little details," he said in 1979. "Sommer didn't seem to have a lot of that romantic overload which photography had in the '50s and even into the '60s. His work probably didn't influence me directly in terms of the pictures I took, but more in my thinking in making pictures, of what camera to use." Cumming made 8x10 contact prints with the same skill and attention to detail prized by modernist photography masters like Ansel Adams, Edward Weston, and Imogene Cunningham. As one curator explained in the 1970s, Cumming was "a conceptual artist sandwiched between the support media of sculptural means and photographic ends." It's a photographic approach to conceptualism that influenced generations of artists to come.

Cumming, who passed away in December of 2021, spent almost two years toward the end of his life supervising the enlargements of his 1970s photo-based work. Many negatives were scanned and proofed using his original artist's prints as guides. The result is a curated selection of works by the artist that displays his devotion to the medium in the service of visual puns and precisionist wit. This exhibition serves as an introduction to this new iteration of Cumming's most important work.

Robert Cumming was born in 1943 in Worcester, Massachusetts, and died December 16, 2021, in Desert Hot Springs, California. His work has been widely exhibited internationally. The most recent museum survey of his photography, *Robert Cumming: The Secret Life of Objects*, opened at the George Eastman Museum and traveled to the California Museum of Photography, UC Riverside in 2019–2020. Other solo exhibitions include *Cone of Vision*, traveled to Australia and the United States to MFA, Boston, the CAM, Houston, and the MCA, San Diego, as well as over seventy additional solo shows, including *Robert Cumming: Intuitive Inventions* (Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, 1988), *Mechanical Illusions by Robert Cumming* (Whitey Museum of American Art, 1986), and *The Clutter of Happenstance* (MoMA, New York, 1998). Group shows include *Mirrors and Windows* (MoMA, New York, 1978–1982), *Fabricated to be Photographed* (SFMOMA, 1979), *State of Mind: New California Art circa 1970* (Orange County Museum of Art, 2012), and *Under the Big Black Sun: California Art 1974 -1981* (MOCA, Los Angeles, 2012). He received three National Endowment for the Arts Grants (1972, 1975, 1979) and a Guggenheim Fellowship (1981). Cumming's archive will be placed at Stanford University, CA.

The exhibition is open to the public, Wednesday through Saturday, but we request all guests please make an appointment.

For more information about the artist and the exhibition, or for the artist's complete curriculum vitae, please contact either Gallery Luisotti at (310) 600-1277 and by email at info@galleryluisotti.com or Royale Projects at (213)595-5182 and by email at info@royaleprojects.com.

Please join us at:

Royale Projects
432 Alameda St., Los Angeles, CA 90013
(Entrance on Seaton St. bet. 4th and 5th St., street parking avail.)