

Galerie Francesca Pia

Hollis Frampton

March 27 – June 5, 2021

Opening: Saturday, March 27, 2021

Hollis Frampton (1936-1984) is considered an icon of the postwar US avant-garde. He is best known for his groundbreaking experimental films, which significantly contributed to the development of the medium.

In the 1950s, Frampton began his literary activities as a writer and poet in the circle associated with Ezra Pound. He made his first photographic works in the early 1960s, in which he captured street scenes and made portraits of artist friends such as Carl Andre, Frank Stella, and James Rosenquist. Inspired by language and literature as contextual and conceptual reference points, in the 1960s, Frampton increasingly became interested in the medium of film, exploring its visual and temporal structure and its concepts of linearity and fragmentation. Frampton understood the medium as a stringing together of images that can be arranged in various ways. This vast and open potential intrinsic to film represented a philosophical question for Frampton; accordingly, scientific and mathematical concepts often characterized the structure of his films.

Although the films and his brilliant theoretical texts received much attention, his work as a photographer, sculptor, poet, as well as a pioneer in the field of digital media, remained comparatively unknown. Frampton laconically subsumed the multifaceted nature of these secondary artistic activities as “other work.” Photography, however, remained a constant in his artistic work, as it not only preceded his films, but was also the subject of some of his most important works, including the 1971 film *Nostalgia*.

The exhibition at Galerie Francesca Pia centers around two late photographic series in which Frampton delves into the question of temporality in the photographic image and the relationship between image and text.

Two years before his untimely death in 1984, Frampton created his last major photographic series, *ADSVMS ABSVMS*, dedicated to the memory of his father. Each of the 14 photographs in the series depicts either an animal or a plant that has been mummified, dried, decayed, and decomposed by time and natural processes of transformation. The visual composition of the images harkens back to the early days of photography when the medium was primarily used for scientific documentation and archiving. At the same time, the objects pinned to a dark background evoke associations with the private archives of collectors of rarities and curiosities. Frampton assigns a brief description to each photograph, including the Latin name of the species, anecdotes about the motifs, and a description of where they were found. Frampton exposes a conceptual tension between image and text, fact and speculation, prompting him to question the representational form of photography. As indexical signs of the living, the photographs duplicate the attempt to transfer the dried living beings into a pictorial infinity. In doing so, Frampton not only creates a metaphor for the photographic process itself, but also exposes its morbidity. The title of the series highlights these two facets of temporality inherent in all photography: *ADSVMS ABSVMS* can be loosely translated as ‘We are here / We are not here.’

The exhibition also includes part of the series *Rites of Passage* (1983/84), executed as a collaboration with his wife, the photographer Marion Faller (1941-2014). The title of the original 20-part series refers to a book published in 1908 in which the anthropologist Arnold van Gennep explores the rites of passage in the lives of those living in primitive

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societies. Van Gennep regards both the initiation rites of childhood, betrothal and marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, and going off to war as transitional situations and metaphorical deaths. Each transition requires a preparatory period of mourning as the individual separates from his or her former self to adopt a new identity, which corresponds to his or her external social role.¹ Faller and Frampton materialized their exploration of this text as a series of black and white photographs, each depicting a wedding cake with a clichéd symbol of such life stages. The series can be understood as an enigmatic caricature of the simplistic construction of biographical narratives as recounted through the stringing together of socially traditional moments in our lives.

The last room of the exhibition includes an original black and white print of the iconic 'Spaghetti' motif. The photograph was a commission Frampton shot for James Rosenquist as a model for a painting. The motif can be found in Rosenquist's large-scale work *F-111* (1964/-65), which now hangs in the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

A display case also contains selected documents and photographs related to the works in the exhibition.

Hollis Frampton's photographic work is in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Hollis Frampton's film archive is housed at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and at Harvard University, Cambridge.

¹ Gail Sheehy, *Pathfinders*, 1981.