

NANCY HOLT: SIGHTLINES

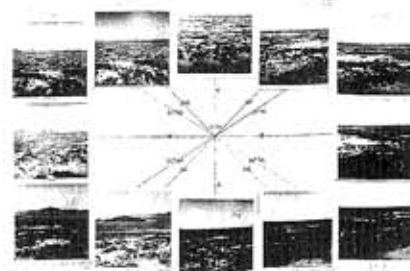
Tufts University Art Gallery • Medford, MA • artgallery.tufts.edu • Through April 1, 2012

This exhibition of photography, film, and archival documents convincingly places Nancy Holt at the center of several prominent, interconnected movements of the 1970s. A photographer, filmmaker, writer, and earthworks artist, Holt brought together diverse media to discuss space as something wholly subjective.

Located in the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah, *Sun Tunnels* (1976) is perhaps her best-known work. It consists of four massive concrete tubes, arranged on the desert floor, facing out like the points of a compass. The tunnels frame the horizon in a circle, a motif found in much of Holt's photography. Holes of varying sizes are drilled into the tunnels, arranged in the patterns of constellations. *Sun Tunnels* serves as a lens, frame, calendar, and clock, permanent and monumental, yet yielding a subjective experience. Shown through films and photographs, the work serves as the physical and metaphorical core of the exhibition.

As with many of the earthworks artists, it is easy for Holt's subtler and less object-oriented works to fall unnoticed. Curator Alena J. Williams has worked to correct this tendency, with display cases that hold archival notes, maps, transcripts, sketches, and hand-typed concrete poetry. The written and spoken word are on display here as the basis of much of Holt's practice, revealing an interest in the connection between the visual perception of space, and language as its rough articulation. This theme is carried throughout the exhibition.

The relationship between language and place is one of the fundamental issues that brought so many conceptual artists to the earthworks movement in the 1970s, a tendency brilliantly documented in *Sightlines*. Present are Holt's collaborators, subjects, friends, and contemporaries, among them Joan Jonas, Lucy Lippard, Dennis Wheeler, Carl Andre, Richard Serra, and most frequently, Robert Smithson, whom she married in 1963. Many of Holt's



Nancy Holt, Preparatory drawing of *Sun Tunnels*, 1975, pencil and twelve black-and-white photographs on paper, 14 x 20". © Nancy Holt/Licensed by VAGA, New York.

films and photographs serve as a sort of experimental travelogue of this circle.

Holt's first video, *East Coast, West Coast* (1969), was a collaboration with Smithson, shot in Joan Jonas's studio. In this satirical dialogue between two artists, Holt plays the severe, cerebral New York artist, Smithson the laid-back, intuitive L.A. artist. The piece is a funny nod to the art world, but it also shows how this group was striving to reach a rare middle point in their work, a certain balance between rigid conceptualism and raw experience.

—Evan Smith

REVIEWS: *New Hampshire*

A NEW VISION: MODERNIST PHOTOGRAPHY

Currier Museum of Art • Manchester, NH • www.currier.org • Through May 13, 2012

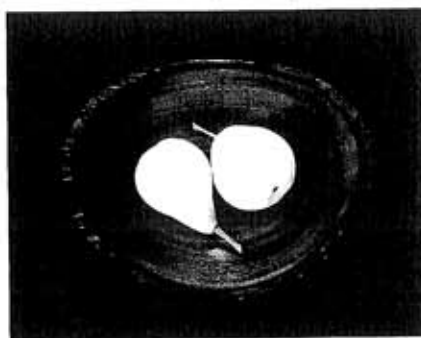
It is no coincidence that modernism exploded at the same time that photography became a fine art. In America, post-pictorial photography's unparalleled capacity to interpret the world anew challenged painting's historical mission of representing the visual. With the model of an exiled European community of artists, it propelled painting into its bold, modernist future.

A New Vision explores the transformation of photography from a documentary medium through its emergence as a fine art. The outstanding photographic eye of Lotte Jacobi (1896–1990) oversaw the formation of the Currier collection in the 1970s. Originally a student of Alfred Stieglitz in Berlin in the 1920s, she moved north following her émigré years in New York, where she had become a major practicing photographer. Her New Hampshire connection is permanent: Jacobi's papers reside in the Milne Special Collections of the University of New Hampshire.

Thematically grouped under headings such as "Machine Aesthetic" and "The Nude," this exhibition illuminatingly pairs photographs with

paintings from the museum's collection. *Columbus Avenue, Boston* (1885), by American impressionist painter Childe Hassam, provides context for the show's earliest photograph, Alfred Stieglitz's *The Terminal* (1893). While they contain similar iconography seen from a street-level perspective, the photograph in some ways foretells the modernist future, foreshadowing a purposeful, alternative modernist vision. Photography would shatter the traditions of late nineteenth-century painting, creating the experimental visual language that ultimately defined its trajectory.

Europeans named the approach of new photography "new seeing" or "new vision." Its opti-



Paul Caponigro, *Two Pears*, Cushing, ME, 1999, gelatin silver print, 7 1/4 x 9 3/4".

cal inclusiveness introduced exciting ways of imaging both the diminutive and the vast, dramatically expanding visual arts' vocabulary. In Boris Ignatovich's *Tramway Handles*, a 1930s gelatin silver print, an abstract composition is based on a close-up, angular perspective designed to subvert the "ordinary" character of industrial subject matter. Ignatovich's rhythmic repetition of cropped ovals and rounded parallel lines lyrically suggests the visual appeal of the vehicle's shape and form.

A New Vision showcases photography by nearly all of the canonical modernists. It also includes works by recent photographers who built upon early modernism and found ever-distinctive ways to reinvent the real. —Christopher Volpe