

## Cherry and Martin

Press Release

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### Alan Shields

November 23, 2013 – January 11, 2014  
Opening reception: Saturday, November 23, 4-6pm

**Cherry and Martin is pleased to announce Alan Shields' first solo exhibition on the West Coast in four decades. The exhibition will include major sculptural pieces, conceptual word drawings, free-hanging paintings and pulped paper works.**

The brightly colored, densely textured and layered works of Alan Shields (1944-2005) grew out of his deep consideration of material and process, color and space. Throughout his many decades of practice, Alan Shields consistently took on a broader context for the art object and what it could do. Shields intended for many of his objects to hang freely in space -- designed for buildings without walls -- and to be circumnavigated bodily by his viewers. Shields was actively engaged with architecture, theater and dance, and while he consistently used the word "painting" in interviews to describe his approach, his art clearly takes on not only expanded painting practice, but also the conceptual and minimalist objects of the New York scene of the 60s and 70s in which Shields was immersed. With his long hair, painted nails and handmade clothes, Shields stood out; upon moving to New York from Kansas in 1968, he quickly established himself as one of the most successful young artists in the downtown New York scene, with successful shows at Paula Cooper Gallery, a brief stint working at Max's Kansas City, and a lengthy interview that made the cover of *Artforum* in 1971. Reflecting on those years, he later recalled that, "it didn't seem logical to continue to paint a painting and hang it on a nail in the living room...when I first came to New York it impressed me that the most interesting artists were the ones who could talk about other things" (Alan Shields "Dimensions of a Cherry Stone," SUNY Stony Brook 1982). Shields' life-long insistence on the connection between art and life was admired by a diverse group of actors and writers, filmmakers and playwrights, and fellow artists as diverse as Lynda Benglis and Chuck Close, Jack Whitten and Sol LeWitt.



**Alan Shields**  
*Good Brother Step Beyond*  
1990-91  
Acrylic and thread on canvas  
30 x 30 inches, 76.2 x 76.2 centimeters

In her essay for "High Times Hard Times: New York Painting 1967-1975," curator Katy Siegel writes that Shields was an artist that "insisted that painting could be radical in the late 60s." In his essay for the same exhibition, which appeared at the National Academy Museum in 2007, David Reed goes on to say that, "There is no sensible history of painting since the mid-1960s, and there can be none until the contributions of artists like those in this exhibition are recognized" (p. 23). Reed points out the two-pronged attack on experimental painting of the 1970s, which was not just, "condemned by the conservative defenders of tradition...at the same time, it was dismissed by those who did not see how painting could be connected to other forms of experimental art. For these critics, no kind of painting was possible. Such attacks stemmed from a lack of understanding and sympathy for experimental painting, or from ideological turf wars and posturing. Often experimental painting was not acknowledged because in such an old and distinguished, male dominated medium, the innovations had come from unexpected, new sources -- women, blacks, lesbians, gays, counterculture radicals, and bohemian sensualists." (p. 21-22).

One of the earliest pieces in Cherry and Martin's exhibition, "Untitled (typed drawing)" (1968) is a concrete word poem, the text of which appears to be pulled from an advertisement for a "jim walker 'x-10' rubber powered airplane." Organized as a grid, the piece emphasizes the shape, pattern and structure of the type-written text. The strong formal logic of these works -- and Shields' approach to the modernist grid in part from the vantage point of craft -- relates perhaps to Shields's interest in other practices, such as quilt-making (much of which is usually worked out in advance on graph paper), that he learned from his mother and sisters growing up on a farm. In his notebooks from 1968-1971, we get a sense of Shields building his art, playing his fibers-based practice off of conceptualism and minimalism. These notebooks include, for example, instructions for ephemeral grid pieces made with string; indeed, as curator Diane Vanderlip noted in her show of Shields's environments in 1977, "His first works consisted of thread patterns alone" ("Alan Shields: Four Parts," Moore College of Art Gallery, Philadelphia, PA, 1977).

Another work in the Cherry and Martin show, "Dance Bag" (1985) is a major hanging sculptural piece that consists of a dyed and beaded canvas construction suspended over a mirror to emphasize the formal and spatial qualities of the work. The free-hanging "In Bed the Sky is Teacups" (1976-1977) uses the sort of maritime belting and line that Shields encountered while fishing - a lifelong interest - and later in life working as a ferry boat driver on Shelter Island. Shields began living on Shelter Island in 1972

in order not only to make his work but also to hunt, garden and get back to the land. On Shelter Island and in his loft in New York, Shields experimented with layered, dyed pulp paper constructions, which he worked on throughout his career - notably at the Sarabhai residency in Ahmadabad, India. "The Queen of Jordella's Crown" (1978), which will appear in the Cherry and Martin show, is a unique, pulped paper, wire construction using handmade paper. Shield's legacy in printmaking, according to the critic Robert Hughes, is "one of the most important of his generation" (Robert Hughes, "Alan Shields" Beach Museum, 1999).

In 1973, Shields was included in both the Whitney and Paris Biennials. Throughout the next two decades he had solo museum and gallery shows in both the US and Europe: in France, his work was seen through the lens of Supports/Surfaces; in Italy, it was included as some of only American art in Filiberto Menna's landmark 1978 exhibition, "Disseminazione." Renewed interest in Shields' work has led to an intense examination of his practice. His environment, "Maze" (1981-82) will be exhibited at SITE Santa Fe (December 2013 - January 2014) as an excerpt of a traveling exhibition curated by Jill Brienza and organized by the Parrish Art Museum. This exhibition will be on view at the Salina Art Center from February - April, 2014 and the Parrish Art Museum from October 2014 - January 2015. Shields work was recently seen in a solo exhibition in Paula Cooper Gallery, and was included in two recent shows curated by Ugo Rondinone: "The Spirit Level," at Gladstone Gallery and "39greatjones," at Galerie Eva Presenhuber. Shields work is included in such museum collections such as the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY; Tate Collection, London, UK; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY. Shields is represented in New York by Van Doren Waxter.

**Cherry and Martin gallery hours: Tuesday - Saturday 10am-6pm or by appointment.**