

For immediate release

SYSTEM AND VISION

February 28 – April 18, 2015

Opening reception: Saturday, February 28, 6–8 PM

Guided walkthrough with Susanne Zander, from Delmes & Zander: 5 PM



Type 42 (Anonymous)
Ursula Andress 37-22-35, 1960s–1970s
Mixed media on photograph
3 ¼ x 4 ¼ inches (8.3 x 10.8 cm)

David Zwirner is pleased to present the group exhibition *System and Vision*, organized in collaboration with Delmes & Zander in Berlin and Cologne. It includes artists whose unique ideas developed outside the circuit of art world institutions, often with limited interaction with other peers. Each offers a highly individualistic, authentic, and imaginative practice that roughly falls into one of four identifiable areas commonly absent from mainstream art-historical narratives: pseudo-science, science fiction, eroticism, and the occult.

Little, if anything, is known about some of the artists, whose work was uncovered posthumously or otherwise discovered, stowed away in inconspicuous locations. **William Crawford's** name is only encountered as a signature accompanying a handful of erotic drawings found along with hundreds more unsigned in an abandoned house in Oakland, California. Some of these were drawn on the back of prison rosters dating from the 1990s, suggesting that the artist may have been an inmate at some point. A recurring male figure may constitute self-portraiture, but the passionate subject matter with varying degrees of roughness and

intimacy is likely the realm of private fantasy at a time when online pornography was not widely available. The action is often depicted from unusual angles and offset by streamlined, linear backdrops that offer a hint of realism to the wistful yearnings.

The artist behind a group of almost one thousand Polaroids taken of famous female actresses on television screens remains anonymous, as does the motive for the methodical undertaking—**Type 42**, the particular film stock used, fills the gap of a name. Inscribed with the names of the actresses, and occasionally with their “measurements,” the photographs capture specific moments that are echoed throughout the archive, thus indicating a level of obsession not simply restricted to the female body, but also to the self-imposed rules of the project.

The two other artists whose works fall within the broader category of the erotic—Czech-born **Miroslav Tichý** and American **Morton Bartlett**—echo some of the artistic strategies deployed by the above. Tichý is widely recognized for his “outsider” status within the totalitarian regime of Cold War Prague, and his lingering antagonism to any sense of the establishment throughout his life prompted him to build his own cameras, developing the scratched, over-or-under-exposed photographs for which he has become known. Always depicting women, and often focusing on certain body parts or perspectives that evoke the position of the voyeur, Tichý was also an avid drawer—included in this exhibition are a series of almost nude depictions of women that extend the placid eroticism encountered in his photographic work.

Having dropped out of a fine arts program at Harvard University, Bartlett began to make realistic dolls of children in the 1930s, which he would dress with hand-sewn clothes and photograph against carefully staged backgrounds with varying degrees of light and shade. Neither the dolls nor the photographs were ever exhibited during his lifetime, and similar to his more famous contemporary, German artist Hans Bellmer, whom he is unlikely to have been familiar with, Bartlett eventually gave up doll making entirely. His fifteen dolls and accompanying photographs were found by relatives after his death, each neatly wrapped in newspapers and stored in a custom-built wooden box.

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Works by another group of artists in the show communicate profound and prophetic ideas about the future. Based in North Carolina, **George Widener** creates complex works on paper referencing a variety of calendars and other numerical data including computational commands. Often set within architectural structures, they suggest the idea of a code; through an exceptional aptitude for large numbers due to Asperger's Syndrome, Widener sets out to explore numerological consistencies to a variety of catastrophes with prognostic fervor. **Chris Hipkiss**, a collective name for British artists Chris and Alpha Mason, creates large-scale panoramic landscapes in which giant industrial or technological structures propel humans into the background. In **Prophet Royal Robertson's** work, the apocalypse appears imminent as autobiographical events decrying his ex-wife's unfaithfulness blend with schizophrenic hallucinations. Robertson added the name 'Prophet' himself, and his vividly colored, futuristic drawings—often accompanied by bold text and arranged inside and outside of his Louisiana home—became widely known following his inclusion in a 2009 documentary about self-taught artists.

Also driven by a sense of necessity, German artist **Harald Bender** became obsessed with drawing. Resorting to obscure scientific formulae, he covered thousands upon thousands of sheets of paper with geometrical shapes and color fields, often drawing and writing on top of photocopied manuals. A similar excessiveness characterizes the work of fellow German **Horst Ademeit**, who dedicated himself to documenting the harmful influence of so-called cold rays, a type of radiation he had identified. Each day he took photographs purporting to show the threat to his immediate environment, while also recording the behavior of spiders and fruit flies, and appropriating an arsenal of measuring instruments. His findings were meticulously inscribed on the sides of the photographs.

These pseudo-scientific projects are matched by several works in the exhibition claimed to have been done through the agency of a spirit. German-born **Agatha Wojciechowsky**, who emigrated to the United States in the early 1920s, was a well-known spiritual medium and healer whose works of art were informed by her communications with the deceased. **Margarethe Held**, another German medium, began drawing in her late fifties according to instructions by an unknown entity whom she identified as "Siwa, God of the Indians and Mongols." **Francesco Ponte**, president of the Spiritualist Federation in Puerto Rico in the early part of the twentieth century, used the relatively new invention of the camera to document occult and paranormal phenomena in an album with thirty-five original prints considered a prime example of spirit photography.

Bringing together twelve distinct types of practices that are rarely encountered in art world institutions, the present exhibition nonetheless reveals a number of shared artistic strategies with "official" art of the 1960s and 1970s. These include the systematic organization of information, the use of repetition, and the centrality of photography in documenting ephemeral events, but also extend to encompass a wider approach to artworks as means to an end, and not the end in and of themselves. The importance of the process characterizes all of the works in the show, and sometimes constitutes our only source of knowledge about their makers.

Since opening in Cologne in 1988, Galerie Susanne Zander has established itself as one of the leading international galleries for Outsider Art and Art Brut, dedicating its program exclusively to marginal artistic positions of outstanding quality, both historical and contemporary. In recent years, the gallery has focused its shows on "Conceptual Outsider Art," featuring works that raise the question of when something can be contextualized as outsider art, particularly when it shares visual strategies with contemporary art more generally. In 2014, Zander opened a second gallery in Berlin with Nicole Delmes, and both locations are now known as Delmes & Zander. A presentation of the work of Harald Bender will be on view at the gallery's booth during Independent 2015 in New York from March 5 – 8.

White Columns in New York will present the exhibition *Margret: Chronicle of an Affair – May 1969 to December 1970* in collaboration with Delmes & Zander (March 6 – April 18). It features an extensive collection of found materials relating to a private affair conducted between a German businessman and his secretary (through April 11).

Artists included in the show: Horst Ademeit, Morton Bartlett, Harald Bender, William Crawford, Margarethe Held, Chris Hipkiss, Francesco Ponte, Prophet Royal Robertson, Miroslav Tichý, Type 42 (Anonymous), George Widener, Agatha Wojciechowsky

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