

# LISSON GALLERY

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## Press Release

### Roy Colmer

25 November 2017 – 13 January 2018  
67 Lisson Street, London

Lisson Gallery presents Roy Colmer's first-ever solo exhibition in London and the gallery's inaugural project with the artist in the United Kingdom. Influenced by the likes of Arshile Gorky, Bruce Nauman, Nam June Paik and Jackson Pollock, with a career spanning five decades, Colmer's work holds an important place in the narrative of contemporary art. The presentation at Lisson Gallery highlights Colmer's unique visual language by bringing together eight paintings from the early 1970s, reflecting the artist's intellectual engagement with the contemporary changes of science and technology of that time, along with a film and documentation of his work in this medium.

London-born artist Roy Colmer (1935–2014) was a painter, photographer, graphic designer and film artist. Through the use of painting, film, photography and collage, inspired by the introduction of new, electronic media that dominated the artistic landscape of the 1970s, Colmer challenged the disciplinary boundaries in which he worked. His incorporation of time-based technologies with paint and canvas – which other artists at the time found too conventional – mark Colmer as a true innovator in his field.

Colmer began painting in the mid-1960s after graduating from Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Hamburg, where he was taught under the tutelage of Almir Mavignier, Eduardo Paolozzi and Georg Gresko. Colmer's signature approach, characterised by his use of a spray gun, brought about a nuanced language of painting, allowing him to create filmic effects that evoke the sensation of vibration, movement and distortion. Reminiscent of early TV sets flickering to life, the paintings on display as part of the exhibition – all from the early 1970s and rarely exhibited before – display an optical haze of colour built around horizontal stripes and pulsating lozenge-like, organic forms. These works particularly demonstrate Colmer's ongoing experimentation with technique and style, progressing to include multi-forms and waves created against a background of shifting colours. Lines bend and gyrate, taking on an almost figurative quality, as sections of these misty, tonal canvasses take on shadowy contours. As Alex Bacon identified in an exhibition catalogue that accompanied Colmer's first exhibition with Lisson in January this year, "It was a true innovation of Colmer's to jerry-rig his spray gun to be able to change colours in the course of a single pass across the canvas."

In the 1970s, around the same time Colmer was producing spray-paintings, he began working with closed circuit television, exploring the effects of video feedback and interference in this new medium. The television thus became his spray gun. Toying with the stream of electrons that are blasted against a TV screen, like the play between spray-gun, paint and canvas, Colmer's video works continued to embody his painterly style, the changing, undulating patterns similar to those found in his paintings. The work featured as part of this exhibition, *Metamorphosis* (1974), realises the dance-like movement Colmer wanted to convey in his films in direct response to the movement expressed in abstract expressionist paintings. Black-and-white figures transform into amorphous abstractions; their colourful forms, mixed with intermittent flashes of light and static, similar to the imagery generated by heat-sensing body cameras. Rare, archival photographs documenting Colmer's process behind the creation of his films accompany the exhibition, providing unique access into this area of the artist's practice.

## About Roy Colmer

Known primarily for his conceptual photography, film projects and colour-intensive paintings, Roy Colmer challenged the boundaries between these disciplines in order to develop a new kind of perception. Inspired by the shifting artistic cultural landscape brought about through the introduction of electronic media, Colmer connected the surfaces of his paintings to video through the use of spray techniques and a careful selection of colour, suggesting filmic effects such as movement, flicker, distortion, and as Colmer described, “feedback.” He was interested in the immediacy and versatility of the spray gesture and the ability to manipulate space and depth through colour and form, notions influenced by his Concretist mentors at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Hamburg, Germany. By the early 1970s, Colmer began to incorporate this telegenic feedback directly into his practice, increasingly working in video and film. His exploration and manipulation of electronic signals was part of a larger group of artists working in the area at the time, among them Nam June Paik and Bruce Nauman. Colmer stopped experimenting with paint entirely a few years later and focused his attention on photography and documentary projects.

Roy Colmer was born in London in 1935. Aged twenty, he was conscripted into the British Army and was stationed in Germany. After leaving the military, he studied painting at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Hamburg on a full scholarship, where he was taught by professors Almir Mavignier, Eduardo Paolozzi and Georg Gresko. As a student he began a lifelong friendship with Hanne Darboven that resulted in several collaborations. In 1966 he moved to New York where he continued his painting practice and began to experiment with film and photography. From November 1975 to September 1976, Colmer photographed more than 3000 doors, inclusive and in sequence, on 120 intersections and streets of Manhattan from Wall Street to Fort Washington. The project, titled *Doors, NYC*, became his seminal work, and the New York Public Library acquired a full edition for its archives in 2005. Colmer taught photography at the New School in New York from 1987 to 1995. His paintings and video feedback works were included in ‘High Times, Hard Times: New York Painting 1966-1975,’ a touring exhibition organised and circulated by Independent Curators International from 2006 to 2008. His work *Doors, NYC* was incorporated in Darboven’s work *Kulturgeschichte 1880–1983 (Cultural History 1880–1983)*, 1980–83, and in 2015, it was exhibited as part of ‘Greater New York’ at MoMA PS1, New York, and in ‘175 Years of Sharing Photography,’ an exhibition from the collection of the New York Public Library. Colmer was a recipient of the John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship in 1988 and received a grant from the Foundation for Contemporary Performance Art in 1990. The artist died in 2014 in Los Angeles.

## About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and develops 56 international artists across two exhibition spaces in London and two in New York. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie, to the public for the first time. In addition to a number of renowned artist estates, including Roy Colmer, the Leon Polk Smith Foundation and the John Latham Foundation, the gallery represents leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller and Tatsuo Miyajima. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Nathalie Djurberg & Hans Berg, Ryan Gander, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes and Wael Shawky.

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