

Gordon Matta-Clark

Works 1970–1978

21 November–20 December 2018
24 Grafton Street, London



Gordon Matta-Clark creating *Garbage Wall* under the Brooklyn Bridge, 1970. © Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark

David Zwirner is pleased to present an exhibition of works dating from 1970 to 1978 by Gordon Matta-Clark (1943–1978). Marking the first solo presentation of his work at the London gallery, the exhibition will include key examples from the artist’s short but prolific career, including films, photographs, sculptures, and works on paper that illustrate his complex engagement with architecture and the many ways in which he reconfigured the spaces and materials of everyday life.

A central figure of the downtown New York art scene in the 1970s, Matta-Clark pioneered a radical approach to art making that directly engaged the urban environment and the communities within it. Through his many projects—including large-scale architectural interventions in which he physically cut through buildings slated for demolition—Matta-Clark developed a singular and prodigious oeuvre that critically examined the structures of the built environment. With actions and experimentations across a wide range of media, his work transcended the genres of performance, conceptual, process, and land art, making him one of the most innovative and influential artists of his generation. As Roberta Smith notes, Matta-Clark ‘used his skills to reshape and transform architecture into an art of structural explication and spatial revelation.’¹

A year after moving back to New York City from Ithaca, New York, where he received a degree from Cornell University’s School of Architecture, Matta-Clark executed the first *Garbage Wall* (1970), a temporary, stand-alone unit constructed with trash sourced from the streets. The artist intended for this wall to be rebuilt and adapted to different locations by using found garbage from the specific city in which it is made. The *Garbage Wall* emerges out of Matta-Clark’s observations of, and response to, New York’s infrastructural decline and growing homeless population during the Seventies. The work - executed three times during his lifetime, in addition to posthumous iterations - is representative of the artist’s overlapping commitments to art, architecture, activism, and civic engagement that was very much ahead of his time.

Using his architectural training, Matta-Clark engaged with architecture as a sculptural medium, creating new structures from buildings that were often neglected or to be torn down. His activity in the early 1970s included some of his first architectural cuts, among them *Claraboya (Skylight)* (1971)—represented here by a set of photographs documenting the project from various vantage points. In this project, he carved a square hole from the men’s bathroom on the basement level of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Santiago,

¹ Roberta Smith, ‘Back in the Bronx: Gordon Matta-Clark, Rogue Sculptor’, *The New York Times* (11 January 2018), accessed online.

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Chile, all the way up to the roof, installing mirrors throughout the length of the incision to bring light into the otherwise darkened space. This process of subtraction brought the outside world in and would become one of the artist's primary working methods, informing significant future projects such as *Bronx Floors* (1972/1973), *Splitting* (1974), *Bingo* (1974), *Day's End* (1975), *Conical Intersect* (1975), *Office Baroque* (1977), and *Circus* (1978).

Films and photographs are among the only surviving records of Matta-Clark's ephemeral projects; they were used by the artist not only for documentation, but also as an essential means to explore some of the major ideas underpinning his practice. On view will be a selection of newly remastered films by Matta-Clark documenting some of his seminal works, including *Splitting*, in which he made a vertical slice through a suburban home slated for demolition in Englewood, New Jersey.

In 1973, Matta-Clark witnessed a growing graffiti culture in New York; enlivened by the changing urban environment and the proliferation of street art, he began photographing tags throughout the city, selectively hand-colouring some of the resulting prints to bring out the vibrancy of the graffiti. Matta-Clark continued to experiment with colour in his photographs later toward the end of his career, making large-format Cibachrome prints, then a relatively new process made from colour transparencies, which he favoured for its deeply saturated hues. Cutting up and collaging 35-millimetre slides, which he then enlarged, gave the artist the opportunity to express in more detail notions of scale and perspective and to describe the vertiginous instability that often resulted from his architectural cuts.

As with his photographs, Matta-Clark used paper as both a material for drawing and a surface for cutting. His energetic drawings of trees and arrows, some of which will be on view, illustrate his interest in imagining natural alternatives to the urban landscape and relate to his broader interest in creating 'breathing cities' in treetops as well as below ground. As Elisabeth Sussman notes, 'his was a life of intense creative energy directed at changing the surrounding environment, at expanding the imaginative possibilities of the places and the conditions in which we live our lives.'² With his *Cut Drawings*, Matta-Clark physically cut through stacks of paper, cardboard, or gesso, miming his signature approach to buildings. Rethinking architecture and urban planning through the medium of paper, as well as films, photographs, sculpture, and performance, Matta-Clark set out to address the needs of communities, and through a systematic process of dismantling, suggest alternatives to the built environment.

Gordon Matta-Clark's (1943–1978) work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at prominent institutions worldwide, including *Gordon Matta-Clark: You Are the Measure*, a retrospective held at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, which travelled to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2007–2008). Recent institutional exhibitions include Museu Serralves, Porto, Portugal (2017), and The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo (2018). The artist's work is currently the focus of a critically acclaimed travelling exhibition, *Gordon Matta-Clark: Anarchitect*, that was recently on view at The Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York, and Jeu de Paume, Paris. *Anarchitect* continues in 2019 at the Kumu Art Museum, Tallinn, Estonia, and Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts.

Since 1998, the Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark has been represented by David Zwirner. *Works 1970–1978* marks the seventh solo exhibition of the artist's work with the gallery.

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² Elisabeth Sussman, 'The Mind Is Vast and Ever Present', in *Gordon Matta-Clark: You Are the Measure*, ed. Elisabeth Sussman. Exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art; New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 13.