

PAULA COOPER GALLERY

Alan Shields

JANUARY 10 – FEBRUARY 16, 2019
521 W 21ST STREET

NEW YORK—Paula Cooper Gallery is pleased to announce a one-person exhibition of work by Alan Shields (1944–2005) at 521 West 21st Street. Shields, who showed with the gallery from 1968 to 1991, is known for his magnanimous fluency across painting, drawing, and sculpture, blurring these divisions through theatrical construction and unconventional mixed-media. On view from January 10th through February 16th, 2019, the exhibition will present works created in the first two decades of the artist's career. There will be an opening reception on Thursday, January 10th from 6 to 8pm.

Throughout his life, Shields created unique and imaginative structures. Comprised of early works made between 1968 and 1984, the exhibition includes wall-mounted paintings, typed poetry, and freestanding or suspended objects layered with bright colors and loose geometric patterns. "His art is lushly, unabashedly decorative. Every one of his works implies an environment not just attractively livable, but also alive with sensuous impulses." Shields brought to the decorative "not an overlay of theory designed to supply it with specialized art-world gravitas, but an energy that connects it to all that is vital and positive in the larger world where we spend most of our time."^[1]

Shields' monumental wall pieces—painted on unstretched canvas or woven textile—convey generosity and depth through an intimate application of yarn, beads, and swatches of stitched fabric. Mottled with vivid washes of acrylic paint, the works suggest the evanescent flux of atmosphere and light, which both transcends and embodies their material construction. On view in the reception area are four *Typewriter drawings* from 1968—early

examples of Shields' playful experimentation with poetry and form. Transcribing found texts (such as rules for Monopoly, or manufacturing details for Reese's Peanut Butter Cups and Colgate's dental hygiene products), Shields arranges the excerpts in neat rectangles, concluding the verse with a list of resonating colors.

A hanging work, titled *Singing Toy Car*, 1975, presents cotton belting, softly draped across a horizontal pole and stained in misty gradations of green, red, yellow and blue acrylic. The latticed textile and stitched threads dangle with a delicate buoyancy, summoning a reciprocal dance between object and viewer. Also on view are several works made of canvas stretched over thin metal rods, which sprout from the ground like tall reeds. Painted in vibrant horizontal or diagonal bands, stacked circles, or speckled dots, the works punctuate the gallery, inflecting the surrounding environment. With titles such as *The Top is Not Here*, *Dreams in Colors*, and *Ten Begin Again*, the works toy with the limitations of naming: like nonsense verse or New York School poetry, they are both hyper-specific and open to whimsical indulgence.

Born in Herington, KS, in 1944, Shields attended Kansas State University from 1963 to 1966, studying civil engineering and studio art. He moved to New York City in 1968, where he showed with Paula Cooper Gallery for over twenty years. In 1973 he received a Guggenheim Fellowship. He continued to maintain a studio in New York City but spent most of the year living on Shelter Island, NY, where he finally took up permanent residence. Alan Shields died in Shelter Island, NY, in 2005. Important museum exhibitions of the artist's work includes "Alan Shields: Common Threads," Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, NY (2018); "Alan Shields: Protracted Simplicity (1966-1985)," Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, CO (2016), "Alan Shields: In Motion," Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, NY (2015); "Into the Maze," SITE Santa Fe, NM (2014); "Stirring Up the Waters," Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, NY (2007); "Alan Shields: A Survey," The Beach Museum of Art, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS (1999); "1968 – 1983: The Work of Alan

Shields,” Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Memphis, TN (1983), which traveled to Lowe Art Museum, Coral Gables, FL, and Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO; and “Alan Shields: Paintings and Prints,” Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, MA (1981). Shields is represented in the collections of prominent institutions including 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, N.; Tate Collection, London, UK; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY.

This exhibition is in cooperation with Van Doren Waxter and the Estate of the Artist.

1. Ratcliff, Carter. “Alan Shields: Then and Now.” In Alan Shields: Protracted Simplicity, 1944-2005. Aspen, CO: Aspen Art Museum, 2017. ↩

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