



Title

Hollis Frampton: Photographs

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Article DOI**Url**

<https://contemporary.burlington.org.uk/reviews/reviews/hollis-frampton-photographs>

ISSN

2631-5661

Cite as

Anne Breimaier: 'Hollis Frampton: Photographs', *Burlington Contemporary* (26th November 2020),

<https://contemporary.burlington.org.uk/reviews/reviews/hollis-frampton-photographs>

About the author(s)

is an art historian, curator and educator based in Berlin. She currently works as a research assistant at the Institute of Philosophy and Sciences of Art (IPK) of Leuphana University of Lüneburg. Her forthcoming book, *Hollis Frampton: ADSVMVS ABSVMVS*, in memory of Hollis William Frampton, Sr., 1913–1980, abest (edited with Matthias Gründig), documents the results of an interdisciplinary project with art history and photography students, which led to the exhibition of one original edition of Frampton's series at UG at the Museum Folkwang, Essen (2018).

Cover image:

Hollis Frampton: Photographs

by Anne Breimaier • 26.11.2020

The American artist and art critic Hollis Frampton (1936–84) is best known for his experimental films, which were honoured during his lifetime with retrospectives at such renowned institutions as the Museum of Modern Art, New York (1973), the Knokke Experimental Film Festival, Knokke-Heist (1974), and the Anthology Film Archives, New York (1975). In recent years, an awakened interest in Frampton's work with still images has been demonstrated by a number of solo exhibitions as well as research by a second generation of scholars and curators, who address his multi-media practice beyond the imperative of his films.¹ The presentation of Frampton's photographs at Goldsmiths Centre for Contemporary Art, London (Goldsmiths CCA), which spans a period from the late 1950s to the mid-1980s, marks a promising chapter in the rediscovery of the artist's work with photography, from a curatorial as well as a scholarly perspective.²

As a retrospective, the show at CCA picks up where Bruce Jenkins and Susan Krane left off in 1984 with their influential exhibition of Frampton's photographs, xerographs and collages.³ *Hollis Frampton. Recollections / Recreations* had been developed with the artist before his untimely death that same year and began its tour of the United States at the Albright-Knox-Gallery, Buffalo. The exhibition was accompanied by a catalogue with a list of carefully researched references hidden in Frampton's images, ranging from Flaubert's *The Temptation of St. Anthony* (1874) to action painting and Marcel Duchamp's *Large Glass* (1915–23). Flaubert's novel provided the title for a corresponding series of black-and-white photograms from 1962 [FIG.1](#), also exhibited at CCA, which produce fluid patterns that resemble the abstract permutations in his film *Palindrome* (1969).



Fig. 1 Installation view of *Hollis Frampton: Photographs* at Goldsmiths CCA, London, 2020, showing works from the series *The Temptation of St Anthony* (left) and *Spaghetti* (right). (Courtesy Goldsmiths CCA, London; photograph Mark Blower).

The exhibition includes works from a range of Frampton's early photographic series. *The Secret World of Frank Stella* (1958–62) comprises situational portraits of the painter in the streets of New York and in his studio **FIG.2**, whereas the images from *Junk and Rubble* (1961–62) were made 'in the ruins of Bleeker Street'.⁴ Also on show are three images from Frampton's *Word Pictures* series (1962–63) **FIG.3**, photographic cut-outs found in New York's cityscape that anticipate the use of street signs and other instances of notational iconicity in his 1970 film *Zorns Lemma*. These early series can be perceived as traces of the artist's investigations into his time, his place and its past. This included the history of photography, a medium that, at the time, was still widely associated with a Modernist aesthetic or journalism, and according to Frampton, devoid of a critical tradition. His writings on Eadweard Muybridge, Edward Weston and Paul Strand, published throughout the 1970s in such leading magazines as *Artforum* and *October*, must therefore be regarded as a critical enterprise that strongly informed his work as an artist photographer.

Whereas in his art criticism Frampton investigated the work of iconic photographers, in his own imagery he aimed to point out 'clichés in method and seeing',⁵ creating 'riddles' or 'puns' for the viewer.⁶ His references to protagonists of the history and theory of photography through strategies of resemblance must therefore be understood as secondary to his goal to create 'a most meaningful (image) structure that is most meaningful to the intellect'.⁷ Frampton's practice thus anticipated a generation of cultural practitioners, such as Douglas Crimp or Sherrie Levine, who inherited a similar critical attitude towards Modernism's picture-making conventions, which resulted in the need to address

'representation as such'.⁸

Frampton's recursive approach is demonstrated in the images of *Junk and Rubble*, which ironically refer to the tradition of Weston's iconic object studies of urinals, peppers and nudes, while a blurry Stella pictured from behind in a washtub quotes the bathing Picasso photographed by David Douglas Duncan for *Life* magazine in the late 1950s. The three images from *Word Pictures* are reminiscent of Dorothea Lange's photographs of billboards and street signs in rural America during the Great Depression. For the series *Vegetable Locomotion* (1975), made together with Marion Faller, the artists employed zucchini, cabbage and apples from their garden to reference Muybridge's studies of moving bodies, which were first published in 1888 [FIG.4](#).⁹ Muybridge's photographic fragmentation of the animated, however, is rendered absurd by the actions that Frampton and Faller perform with the unanimated.

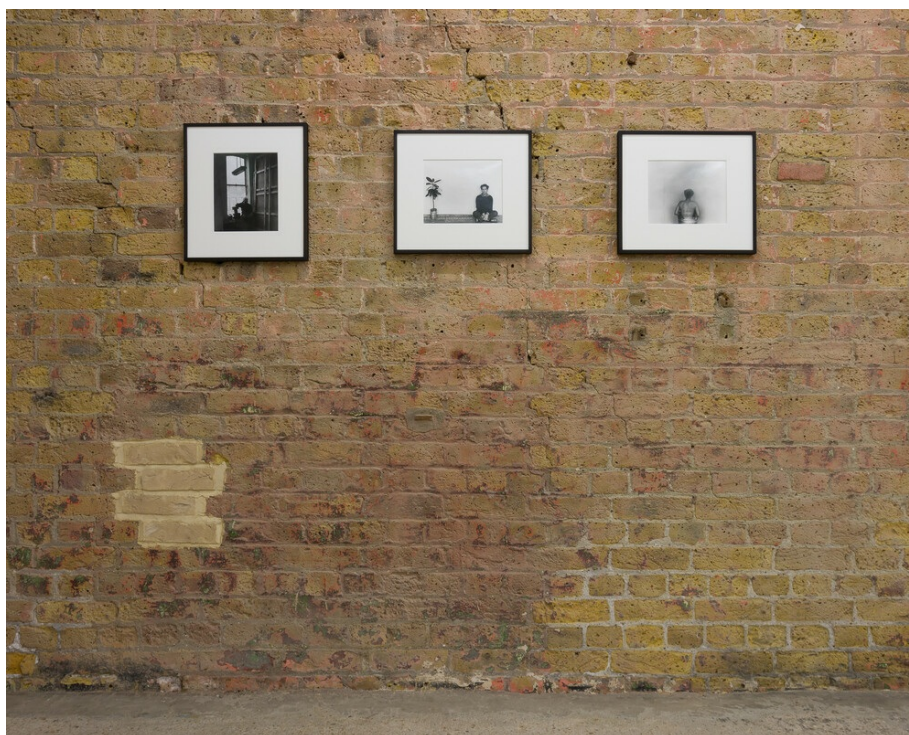


Fig. 2 Installation view of *Hollis Frampton: Photographs* at Goldsmiths CCA, London, 2020, showing works from the series *The Secret World of Frank Stella*. (Courtesy Goldsmiths CCA, London; photograph Mark Blower).

The exhibition at CCA supports a way of looking at Frampton's early photographs as appropriations *avant la lettre*. To this effect, it has recently been argued that his attitude towards his artistic ancestors should be understood as one of revision rather than succession. The show also indirectly addresses one of the major challenges facing Frampton scholarship today, which is the retracing of a formal development within his conceptual practice involving photography, not only within an American context.

Much like his early films, Frampton's photographs from the 1960s are certainly testament to the struggle of a young artist in New York City trying to find a voice in an art ecology that he felt was inherently hostile to his interest in questioning photographic illusion.¹⁰ However, Frampton's late conceptual series, such as *ADSVMSV ABSVMVS*, *In memory of Hollis William Frampton, Sr., 1913-1980*, *abest* (1982), dedicated to his late father, and *Rites of Passage* (created with Marion Faller between 1983 and 1984), leave much room for speculation about how his practice could have developed further conceptually.



Fig. 3 *Time*, from the series *Word Pictures*, by Hollis Frampton. 1962-63. Gelatin silver print, approx. 10 by 15 cm. (© Estate of Hollis Frampton; courtesy Goldsmiths CCA, London; exh. Goldsmiths CCA, London).

The fourteen colour photographs in *ADSVMSV ABSVMVS* depict a series of specimens, plants and animals **FIG.5**, which allude to an abundance of references, some of which are seminal works in the theory of photography and film, such as William Henry Fox Talbot's *Pencil of Nature* (1844) or André Bazin's 'L'ontologie de l'image photographique' (1945). The twenty black-and-white images that make up *Rites of Passage*, on the other hand, create a tableau of middle-class rituals of consumerism and convention, featuring variations of the same wedding cake, which only differ from each other in their toppers **FIG.6**. They are reminiscent of visual investigations into the properties of societal conformity at the time, such as Dan Graham's conceptual project *Homes for America* (1965).¹¹

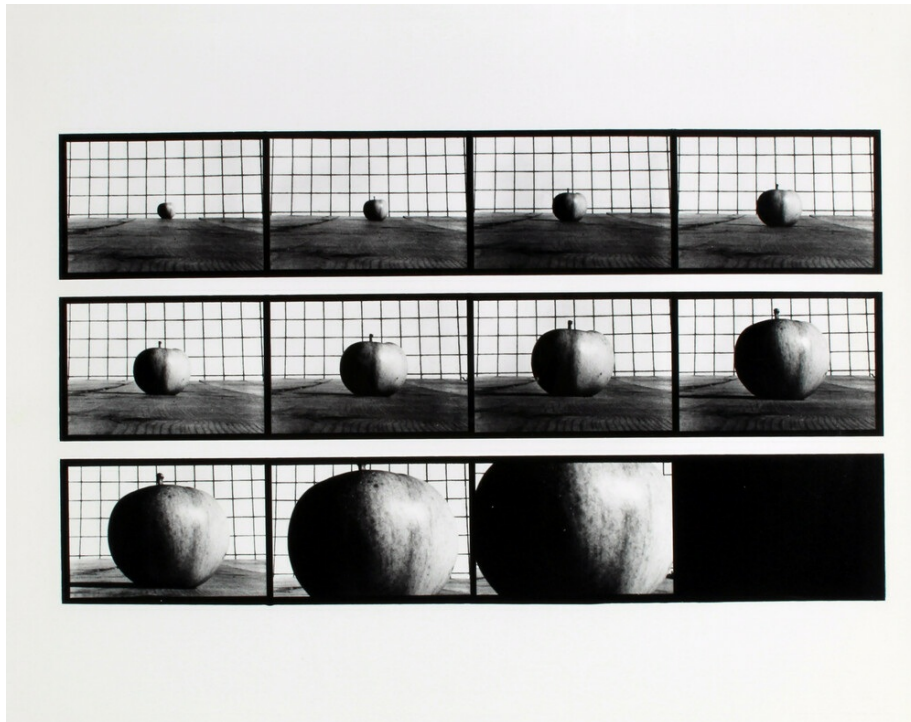


Fig. 4 782. *Apple advancing [var. "Northern Spy"]*, from the series Sixteen Studies from VEGETABLE LOCOMOTION, by Marion Faller and Hollis Frampton. 1975. Gelatin silver print, 27.9 by 35.6 cm. (© Estate of Marion Faller and Hollis Frampton; exh. Goldsmiths CCA, London).

These late photographic series by Frampton are crafted 'copresences', 'contending for the center of the spectatorial arena', 'supreme fiction, which parses sets of spaces in favor of successiveness',¹² in which 'image and language trespass in each other's house'.¹³ Their traditional arrangement at eye level in the exhibition space at CCA invites the visitor to experience the temporal, spatial and tactile capacities of photography FIG.7 FIG.8. It can thus be understood as a congenial gesture by the curator of the exhibition, that while moving between the photographs on display, visitors can listen to a set of files preserved at Harvard Film Archive of Frampton's work in time-based media, performance and music, accessible via QR code.¹⁴

Confronting the viewer with performance and sound this retrospective at CCA frames Frampton's photographs not as mere prints on a wall or decisive moments captured of curious specimens, but as instructions for their own reception in a world so 'full of still photography to kill every one of us a hundred times over'.¹⁵ It not only grasps the 1960s didactic gist of Frampton's images but also provides an introduction to his visual politics at large. As such, it may also work to promote a better understanding of his influence on a contemporary generation of artists, such as the late curator, performer and educator Ian White.¹⁶



Fig. 5 *X. PEPPER (Capsicum longum)*, from the series *ADSVMVS ABSVMVS*, In memory of Hollis William Frampton, Sr., 1913–1980, *abest*, by Hollis Frampton. 1982. Ektachrome print, 50.8 by 40.6 cm. (© Estate of Hollis Frampton; courtesy Goldsmiths CCA, London; exh. Goldsmiths CCA, London).



Fig. 6 s [sic], from the series Rites of Passage, by Hollis Frampton and Marion Faller. 1983–84. Gelatin silver print, 35.6 by 27.9 cm. (© Estate of Hollis Frampton; courtesy Goldsmiths CCA, London; exh. Goldsmiths CCA, London).



Fig. 7 Installation view of *Hollis Frampton: Photographs* at Goldsmiths CCA, London, 2020, showing the series *ADSV MVVS ABSVMVS*, In memory of Hollis William Frampton, Sr., 1913–1980, *abest*. (Courtesy Goldsmiths CCA, London; photograph Mark Blower).



Fig. 8 Installation view of *Hollis Frampton: Photographs* at Goldsmiths CCA, London, 2020, showing the series *Rites of Passage*. (Courtesy Goldsmiths CCA, London; photograph Mark Blower).

Exhibition details

Hollis Frampton: Photographs

Goldsmiths Centre for Contemporary
Art, London (Goldsmiths CCA)
18th September–13th December 2020

Footnotes

- 1** Recent exhibitions of photography and xerography by Hollis Frampton include *ADSVMS ABVSMVS* (2015) and *Hollis Frampton: By Any Other Name* (2017), both at Room East, New York, and *ADSVMS ABSVMVS, in memory of Hollis William Frampton, Sr., 1913–1980*, abest, at the Museum Folkwang, Essen (2018). For the Essen exhibition, see A. Breimaier and M. Gründig, eds: exh. cat. *Hollis Frampton: ADSVMVS ABSVMVS, in memory of Hollis William Frampton, Sr., 1913–1980*, abest Essen (Museum Folkwang) 2021.
- 2** Due to further lockdown restrictions imposed in the United Kingdom to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, the exhibition closed in November.
- 3** See B. Jenkins and S. Krane, eds: exh. cat. *Hollis Frampton. Recollections / Recreations*, Buffalo (Albright-Knox Art Gallery) 1984.
- 4** C. Andre and H. Frampton: 'On forty photographs and consecutive matters. Part 1: January 26, 1963', in: *idem: 12 Dialogues: 1962–1963*, edited by Benjamin Buchloh, Halifax 1980, pp.57–67, at p.60.
- 5** Andre and Frampton, *op. cit.* (note 4), p.57.
- 6** Frampton's only known sculpture *A Cast of Thousands*, a flat plaster cast that bares an imprint of the number one thousand, is featured on one of his photographs that slowly burn on a stove in his film *nostalgia* (1971).
- 7** Andre and Frampton, *op. cit.* (note 4), p.62.
- 8** D. Crimp: *Pictures*, New York 1977. A reprint of the text, which was originally written for an exhibition with the same name at Artists Space, New York, was published in *X-TRA Magazine* 8, no.1 (2005), available at <https://www.x-traonline.org/article/pictures>, accessed 20th November 2020.

- 9** Eadweard Muybridge's *Animal Locomotion: An Electro-Photographic Investigation of Consecutive Phases of Animal Movement 1872-1885* was first published by the University of Pennsylvania in 1888. For a reprint of this publication see, for example, E. Muybridge: *The Human Figure in Motion: A source book of sequential action images by a master photographer*, New York 1989.
- 10** In an interview with Adele Friedman in 1978 at the Video Data Bank in Chicago Frampton states: 'There I was [. . .] having fallen amongst sculptors and painters [. . .] dogmatic anti-illusionists [. . .] and found myself in the uncomfortable situation of being a committed illusionist'. See B. Jenkins, ed.: *On the Camera Arts and Consecutive Matters – The Writings of Hollis Frampton*, Cambridge MA 2009, p.185.
- 11** For a research-based description of Graham's project, see <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/homes-for-america/>, accessed 20th November 2020.
- 12** Hollis Frampton quoted in a brochure that is an integral part of the series *ADSVMVS ABSVMV*, which was first presented at the Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester, in 1982. The booklet included black-and-white reproductions of one edition of the fourteen colour prints exhibited at Goldsmiths CCA, London, together with fifteen texts. See *ADSVMVS ABSVMVS, in memory of Hollis William Frampton, Sr., 1913-1980*, abest, Rochester (Visual Studies Workshop) 1982.
- 13** H. Frampton: 'Notes: by any other name' (accompanying text for the series of xerographs by Frampton titled *By Any Other Name* (1980)), reprinted in: B. Jenkins, ed.: *On the Camera Arts and Consecutive Matters – The Writings of Hollis Frampton*, Cambridge MA 2009, p.298.
- 14** One recording is an audio file of Frampton's only known performance *A Lecture* (1968), performed by the artist with Michael Snow at Hunter College. The other recordings are his experiments with a moog synthesizer, originally conceived for his films, which sound like free jazz performed in morse code.
- 15** H. Frampton: 'A talk on photography and history: Time, space and causality', lecture delivered for the symposium *Toward the new Histories of Photography* at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1979, reprinted in B. Jenkins, *op. cit.* (note 13), pp.51-57, at p.52.
- 16** *Lemon Rose*, performed by Ian White and Jimmy Robert on 13th and 14th April 2012 at Jeu de Paume, Paris, was inspired and included a screening by Hollis Frampton's film *Lemon* (1969).

THE
BURLINGTON
MAGAZINE

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ISSN 2631-5661

The Burlington Magazine
14-16 Duke's Road, London WC1H 9SZ