

JAMES COHAN GALLERY

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Robert Smithson: *IKONS* -- Religious drawings and sculptures from 1960-1973

For Art Feature, James Cohan Gallery proposes to mount an exhibition of rare and early Robert Smithson drawings and sculptures in which the artist employed religious imagery. These important works, dating from 1960 – 1973, illustrate Smithson's early musings on transcendence and fragmentation, ideas that would ultimately culminate in his overarching interest in notions of entropy. This exhibition intends to show the non-linear stream in which Robert Smithson's investigations into religious iconography transformed into more sublimated imagery that can be found in later works in the early 1970's.

Ikons is a term that Smithson coined during a period in which he made overtly religious works between 1960 and 1963. These works were created after he was invited to exhibit at the Galeria George Lester in Rome. Smithson's Mannerist drawings of the crucifixion, stigmatization and musings on the struggle of Christ presented notions of transcendence by incorporating the use of pen, ink and collage with a clear nod to William Blake's use of line and imagery. The polymorphous iconography that Smithson employed is infused with sexuality, transgression, Greek mythology as well as Christian icons.

The Rome exhibition allowed Smithson the opportunity embark on a series of works with such images in a moment of time when Expressionism and the beginnings of Pop Art were at the forefront of major art dialogues. These *ikons* in the early religious works ultimately gave way, through the development of his practice outside of the rarified environment of the gallery space, to Smithson's better known representations of chaos and disorder, such as *Partially Buried Woodshed* (1970). Remnants and recurrences of religious iconography can be found in later drawings such as *Concrete Juggernaut* (1970) and *Pierced Meandering* (1971) (also to be shown in this proposed exhibition) as well as in sculptures such as *Island of Broken Glass* (1969) and *the Eliminator* (1964).

These religiously inspired drawings and sculpture works have rarely been seen in the last twenty-five years and never before as a singular block of works. Smithson's influence upon the art world continues to resonate today. The presentation of these significant works would be an important opportunity for a younger generation of artists and professionals to see yet another side of the complex and multifarious works Smithson produced in his short life.

James Cohan Gallery is the sole representative of the Estate of Robert Smithson.