

MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ALLAN SEKULA: Photography,
A Wonderfully Inadequate Medium
Curated by Marie Muracciole
14 March – 18 May 2019



Portrait of Allan Sekula in Studio Babelsberg's Prop Department in Germany, 2012; courtesy Ina Steiner.

Opening reception, Thursday, 14th May, 6-8 pm

Here was a visual art for which, unlike cinema, discontinuity and incompleteness seemed fundamental.

– Allan Sekula, 1984¹

Marian Goodman Gallery London is delighted to present an exhibition of works by the late American artist Allan Sekula (1951-2013), curated by Marie Muracciole. The presentation will bring together a selection of significant works, highlighting the formal and conceptual links between different periods of the artist's practice, including photography, film and criticism.

This exhibition focuses on the photography of artist Allan Sekula (1951–2013), who was also a writer, a filmmaker, a theoretician, and a teacher. From his student days in the 1970s at the University of California, San Diego, he witnessed the economic and social changes that eventually ended up tightly restructuring the global economic situation. Inspired very early on by critical Marxist theory, his work was consistently engaged without becoming dogmatic; he remained constantly involved in recording the evolution of the world of labour in the face of globalized capitalism, through series of photographs relating strongly to facts but also to his critical writings.

Introducing this exhibition are the photographic narratives of *California Stories* (1973–1975), in which Sekula documents his surroundings and everyday life, and *This Ain't China: A Photonovel* (1974), in which Sekula portrays the struggles of a group of workers with the conditions of the job. The latter is shown here together with its maquette and a video piece about the same topic, *Performance under Working Conditions* (1973).

Sekula built his photography practice from the prolongation of some of his early performances, and against the preference developed by conceptual photography for erasing any human presence; he took charge of the medium's social roots, vernacular uses, and the dependency of the image on a range of facts and political issues. His first writings, along with photographic essays, were published by Benjamin Buchloh in 1984 under the title *Photography Against the Grain*, and have stayed seminal to the critical history of the medium ever since.

Sekula constantly experimented with diverse ways of intertwining the visual and the written, arguing that the photograph, especially the single photographic image, is radically insufficient as a mode of social and artistic communication. He was in fact interested by this insufficiency, the dependency of the photograph on its context

¹ Allan Sekula, "Introduction" [1984], in *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo Works, 1973–1983*, 2nd ed. (London, Mack, 2016), p. XIV.

MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY

and to all that provides it some meaning, the words and texts that interfere with visual perception: “Here was a visual art for which, unlike cinema, discontinuity and incompleteness seemed fundamental, despite attempts to construct reassuring notions of organic unity and coherence at the level of the single image.”² By creating montages of images and texts – against the myth of the adequacy and sufficiency of the medium – Sekula formed the concept of the “disassembled movie”.

In his work, images are always fragments in a wider series, and often in diptychs or triptychs. He would produce a slideshow or a sequence and relate it to specific writings, which in return related to images, but also to art and literature with references that shed light on his photographs. One example is Sekula’s major photographic essay and book, *Fish Story* (1995), with its nine chapters comprising prints, slideshows, captions, and texts. In *Fish Story*, like other series such as *Black Tide/Marea negra* (2002–2003) or films such as *The Lottery of the Sea* (2006), Sekula developed his exploration of the maritime world – where he would travel for months – as a significantly “forgotten space”. Having grown up in a harbour, Sekula was aware of the sea world as a material, social, and economic space for the problems raised by capitalism and through this, by globalization.

The works shown here attest to Sekula’s strong political approach, in the way he looked at the world he was living in, but also in the way he experimented with photography against the idea of the medium as a universal language, or of any art “based on the coherence of a system or on the homogeneity of a style”.³

Marie Muracciole, 2019

Marian Goodman Gallery would like to thank Allan Sekula Studio for its support of the exhibition.

Please join us for the private view on Thursday 14 March 6 – 8pm

For further information, please contact Charlie Nia Dunnery McCracken at charlie@mariangoodman.com or +44 (0) 20 7099 0088.

For all press enquiries, please contact Rosanna Hawkins at Rees & Co: Rosanna@reesandco.com or +44 (0) 20 3137 8776.

² Ibid.

³ Sekula, cited in Marie Muracciole, “Purposeful Immersion”, in *Allan Sekula: Photography at Work* (Beirut: Beirut Art Center, 2017), p. 10.