

Richard Nonas: As Light Through Fog**Fergus McCaffrey New York**

April 28 – July 15, 2022

“I place my sculpture, I mean to say, to shape our shifting pasts.

*– I place it as **history** in a world that slips away.”ⁱ*

Fergus McCaffrey is pleased to present *Richard Nonas: As Light Through Fog*, the first exhibition of the artist’s work since his death on May 11, 2021. It is Nonas’ seventh solo presentation with the gallery and features large-scale steel floor sculptures from the last four decades, juxtaposed with the final works he completed during the Covid pandemic. This body of work, comprised of salvaged wood and hot-rolled steel, is brought together with an expansive collection of published and unpublished books, texts, and ephemera.

Born into a Jewish family in Brooklyn, New York in 1936, Richard Nonas spent his formative teenage summers in the American southwest and Mexico working as a cowboy. Though always drawn to literature, receiving a Bachelors degree in the subject from Lafayette College ca. 1958, these early experiences in the southwest led him to pursue a PhD in anthropology at Columbia University in 1960, where he studied under scholars such as Margaret Mead. In 1966, midway to obtaining his PhD—after eight years of conducting fieldwork and living in indigenous communities of Northern Canada, Southern Arizona, and Northern Mexico—Nonas began making sculpture, as he realized that his fascination with the cultural-mediated special experience of place could be better expressed through the lyrical ambiguity of objects, rather than the logical language of academia.

Nonas sought to reveal passive space as places that could resonate and reverberate enigmatically, where precisely located abstract forms can probe and push us into a state of euphoric speechlessness, beyond the limits of language. Drawn from his training and anthropological practice, Nonas made use of objects that were hand-wrought and evocative; materials that were connected to ritual and the history of place, rather than the polished surfaces and precise geometries of the prevailing orthodoxy of industrialized Minimalism. He preferred secular objects, with worn surfaces and acquired patinas that evinced and encouraged touch and engagement, to the “eyes-only” sanctity of Minimalist forms. In so doing, Nonas was seeking a wider discourse for tangible sculpture unincumbered by hermetic allusions to philosophy and phenomenology.

In the 1970s, when Nonas and a group of intrepid downtown artists began creating and showing works in alternative spaces, including the artist run 112 Greene Street, Nonas found himself at the heart of this pivotal rethinking of how art could be shown and experienced. He conceived of his found materials as “tools,” which could be recycled and re-placed ad infinitum for the creation of new works. Each composition always somehow perfectly familiar, but never the same.

He posed the question: “What happens when a sculpture designed and built for a specific place is installed on another very different site?” He answered: “The sculpture is destroyed. And another quite different sculpture is reborn.”ⁱⁱ Nonas was wary of singular understanding, simple identifications, or, what he called, “handles”—means of grasping and limiting the semiotic generosity of his ever-shifting perceptual provocations. He was devoted to ambiguity, to fog, and to “doubleness.” “What I’m after is one-thing on the verge of becoming another-thing. A kind of double vision, a queer propinquity, an

unexpected juxtaposition—or even just a strange combining of everything that’s actually and already there.”

About the Artist

Richard Nonas (b. Brooklyn, 1936, d. New York City, 2021) has exhibited extensively in the U.S. and abroad, making small and very large works both indoors and out, and has written extensively on the culturally dependent intellectual and emotional meanings of sculpture, space and place. His works appear in numerous collections such as the Museum of Modern Art, New York; MASS MoCA, North Adams, Massachusetts; Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Panza Collection, Varese, Italy; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; and MAMCO Geneve, Switzerland.

In recent years, Nonas has exhibited worldwide with Fergus McCaffrey, New York, Tokyo, St. Barth; Galerie Hubert Winter, Vienna; OV Project, Brussels; Galerie Christophe Gaillard, Paris; P420 Galleria d’Arte, Bologna; Galerie Pietro Spartà, Chagny, Bourgogne; and Galerie Hans Mayer, Düsseldorf. Further, he has been the subject to multiple museum and institutional exhibitions, most recently including: Musee Gassendi, Digne-les-Bains, France, 2019; MAMCO Geneve, Switzerland, 2019; the Art Institute of Chicago, 2017; MoMA PS1, New York, 2016; MASS MoCA, North Adams, Massachusetts, 2016; and the Walker Art Museum, Minneapolis, 2012.

Two major forthcoming publications on the artist will be released in 2022–23, including an extensive artist monograph edited by Dieter Schwarz, with essays by Fabien Faure, Dieter Schwarz, and Richard Shiff; and a comprehensive publication of ephemera and paper matter by Nonas, published by Tonino Editoria, with text by Alex Bacon.

About Fergus McCaffrey

Founded in 2006, Fergus McCaffrey is internationally recognized for its groundbreaking role in promoting the work of postwar Japanese artists such as Sadamasa Motonaga, Kazuo Shiraga and Jiro Takamatsu. The gallery also exhibits the work of emerging and seminal Western artists including Anna Conway, Marcia Hafif, Birgit Jürgenssen, Richard Nonas, Sigmar Polke and Carol Rama. In keeping with the gallery’s commitment to Japanese art and culture, McCaffrey opened its Tokyo outpost in March 2018. Fergus McCaffrey has locations in New York, St. Barth, and Tokyo.

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Left to right: 1. *Phase 1, Intervention*, Fergus McCaffrey, New York, Jan 2014; 2. *Phase 2, Intervention*, Fergus McCaffrey, New York, Feb 2014; 3. *Phase 3, Intervention*, Fergus McCaffrey, New York, March 2014; photographs by Richard Nonas

ⁱ Richard Nonas, *Double Clutch: Two Block Walk* (Vienna: Galerie Hubert Winter, 1998), 6.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, 4.