

ARTFORUM

Armetta, Amoreen, "Bruce Conner", ARTFORUM.COM, 7 November 2007.

Bruce Conner

SUSAN INGLETT GALLERY

522 West 24 Street

October 18–November 17

Departing Angel, 1973, a photogram self-portrait created by posing in front of photosensitive paper, presides over this meditative Bruce Conner exhibition. Part of the artist's "Angels" series, the incandescent glow delineated a portion of Conner's askew torso, and the resultant artwork suggests ecstasy, a state which runs the gamut from fear and madness to pleasure and rapture—a bid for bodily transcendence and the effect of one of our most popular recreational drugs. This range typifies Conner's practice. One of the original angel-headed hipsters, he was part of the early-'60s California scene that included Jay DeFeo, Wallace Berman, and Dennis Hopper. He maintains an ambivalent attitude toward exhibiting, which, along with an embrace of media as diverse as assemblage, film, and the music video and an earnest exploration of spirituality, may account for the way his art-world profile lags behind his artistic achievement.

In the gallery's main space are fifteen drawings spanning forty years. Most, from his ongoing "Inkblot Drawing" series, are often created by folding sheets of paper accordion-style, applying ink incrementally along each fold, and then blotting, so that a dizzying riot of baroque forms dances within an orderly grid. Conner has said that these works are inspired by the symmetrical patterns found in wood grain, snowflakes, and crystals. One smirks, imagining a blissed-out artist delicately dropping the ink, but these pieces escape the clichés that could easily date them. Instead, they are adrift in a formal-spiritual continuum that began in America when the Transcendentalists mixed Puritan fortitude with an ecstatic religious sense, found a foothold in Abstract Expressionism, and perhaps recurs now not only at Burning Man but also among a new generation of artists, proving Conner's enduring relevance as he continues through his fifth decade of artmaking.

—Amoreen Armetta



Inkblot Drawing, July 4, 1992, pen and ink on paper, 23 1/8 x 22 7/8".