

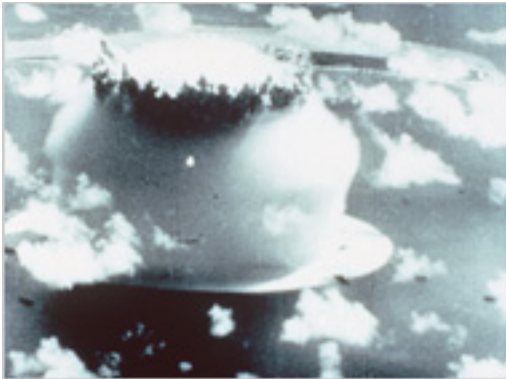
Johnson, Ken, "Bruce Conner, San Francisco Artist With 1950s Beat Roots, Dies at 74", NEW YORK TIMES, 9 July 2008.

Bruce Conner, San Francisco Artist With 1950s Beat Roots, Dies at 74



Bruce Conner in 2000.

[Bruce Conner](#), an artist internationally admired for his haunting, surrealistic sculptures and groundbreaking avant-garde films, died on Monday at his home in San Francisco. He was 74.



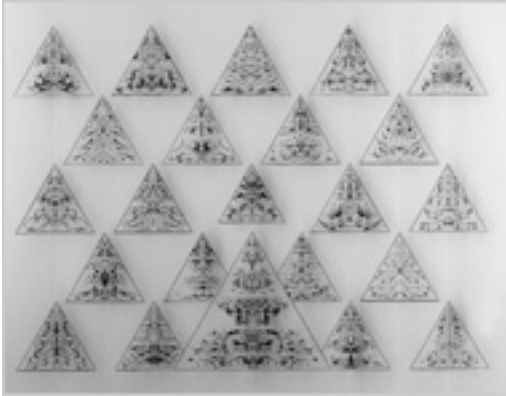
Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles
A still from "A Movie," a 1958 short by Mr. Conner selected for preservation by the National Film Registry.

His death followed a long illness, said Susan Inglett, his New York dealer. A key figure in the San Francisco Beat scene in the late 1950s, Mr. Conner first became known for his assemblages made from women's nylon stockings, parts of furniture, broken dolls, fur, costume jewelry, paint, photographs and candles. These works, created between 1957 and 1964, had the aggressive appearance of avant-garde sculpture but at the same time seemed old and musty, like broken-down junk found in a forgotten attic or props for a scary Hitchcock-like movie. They were a vehement rejection of the optimistic, consumerist spirit of mainstream American society.

In the late 1950s, Mr. Conner also began an influential parallel career as an experimental filmmaker. Under the influence of his friend and fellow filmmaker [Stan Brakhage](#), he created collages of found and new footage.

Mr. Conner's first and best-known film, "A Movie" (1958), is a 12-minute sequence of clips from old movies, newsreels and other sources set to lushly romantic music. Intermittently funny, erotic, horrifying and tragic, it is a wry commentary on the conventions and clichés of commercial media and a poetic, alternative vision of what filmmaking can be. (Some credit Mr. Conner as a major influence on [MTV](#)-style music videos.) In 1991, "A Movie" was selected for preservation by the United States National Film Registry at the [Library of Congress](#).

After the assassination of President [John F. Kennedy](#), Mr. Conner began work on a film called "Report" (1967), which consisted of images and sounds taken from television coverage of the event interspersed with commercial imagery. Another film regarded as an avant-garde classic is "Crossroads," (1977) in which official footage of a hydrogen bomb explosion on Bikini Atoll replays repeatedly at increasingly slower speeds to mesmerizing and paradoxically beautiful effect.



Susan Inglett Gallery
"Inkblot Drawing 5/28/1995," a Rorschach-like ink-and-pencil work. Mr. Conner worked with a wide variety of visual media.

— grids of small, Rorschach-like shapes executed by blotting small puddles of ink between the folds of accordion-pleated sheets of paper.

"A lot of things I've been involved in I've done because nobody else was doing them," Mr. Conner once told an interviewer for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

Bruce Guldner Conner was born in McPherson, Kan., on Nov. 18, 1933. Growing up in Wichita, he was interested in art from an early age. After first attending Wichita University (now Wichita State University) he graduated from the [University of Nebraska](#) in 1956 with a bachelor of fine arts degree. He continued his art studies on scholarship at the [Brooklyn Museum](#) Art School and had his first solo exhibition, a show of paintings, at the Rienzi Gallery in New York in 1956.

After a semester in New York, Mr. Conner went on scholarship to the [University of Colorado](#), where he met Jean Sandstedt, whom he married in 1957. She survives him, along with his son, Robert, who lives in the San Francisco Bay area; a sister, Joan Conner, and brother, William Nicholas Conner, both of Wichita; and a granddaughter.

Soon after their marriage, he and his wife moved to San Francisco, and Mr. Conner fell in with figures who would later become well-known members of the Beat generation, including the visual artists Wallace Berman, George Herms and Jay DeFeo and the poets [Lawrence Ferlinghetti](#) and Michael McClure.

Mr. Conner led a peripatetic life in the '60s. In 1961 and 1962 he, his wife and their young son lived in Mexico for a year. After running out of money, they went to Boston, where he spent time in the company of the LSD gurus Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert

"America Is Waiting," (1982) a three-minute film Mr. Conner made in collaboration with the musicians David Byrne and [Brian Eno](#), is one of several of his films that can be seen on [YouTube.com](#).

A restlessly inventive and unpredictable artist who avoided typecasting and irascibly resisted the demands of the commercial gallery system, Mr. Conner worked in a surprising variety of media and styles from the 1960s on. He created intricate mandala drawings using felt-tip pens and, using cut-up old engravings, did collages reminiscent of works by Max Ernst. In the 1970s, he made ghostly photographs of his own body, and from the late 70s on he produced delicate ink-blot drawings

before falling out with them. Back in San Francisco at the height of the hippie era, he collaborated in producing light shows for Family Dog at the Avalon Ballroom. From then on, Mr. Conner made San Francisco his home, and while continuing to create art, withdrew from the art world.



Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles
Bruce Conner's "Sound of Two Hand Angel," 1974.

Mr. Conner's works have been included in many major group exhibitions, including "Life on Mars: The 2008 Carnegie International" at the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, where the photographs of his body, called "Angels," are currently on view.

In 2000, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis organized the first retrospective exhibition of Mr. Conner's work, "2000 BC: The Bruce Conner Story, Part II," which traveled to the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art and other museums.

"I think Bruce will eventually be recognized as one of — perhaps the — most important West Coast artist of his time," said Peter Boswell, who organized the Walker exhibition and is now the senior curator at the Miami Art Museum. He added that he considered him on a par with [Robert Rauschenberg](#) and [Andy Warhol](#).

"He was an artist who never got his due," Mr. Boswell said.