

# PAULA COOPER GALLERY

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**BRUCE CONNER**

***Tapestries and Collage***

521 W 21st Street

May 3 – July 22, 2016

NEW YORK — The Paula Cooper Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of large jacquard tapestries by Bruce Conner, as well as a selection of his engraving and photocopy collages. The exhibition will be on view from May 3 to July 15 at 521 West 21st Street.

Few have mastered as many diverse art forms as Bruce Conner, whose relentless innovation extended into sculpture, collage, photography, painting, drawing and film. Often melding multiple mediums and processes in a single work, Conner's hybrid compositions drew from a vast and protean range of interests. A main figure of the West Coast countercultural movement, he delved with equal passion into mysticism and spirituality, punk rock and psychedelia, while tenaciously rejecting American jingoism and capitalist consumerism. Informed by his peripatetic pursuits, Conner's high-density and stunningly inventive works achieve a hallucinatory or phantasmal optical overload; and yet their material and referential multiplicity always remains anchored in meditative structural precision.

Created in 2003, the monumental tapestries on view translate Conner's early paper collages into dynamic textile works. Woven with cotton thread on a Jacquard loom in Belgium, each tapestry was derived from a specific collage by the same name, from the late 1980s and early 1990s. The collages were scanned and digitally edited by Conner and Donald Farnsworth at Magnolia Editions in Oakland, CA, to produce weave files. Sourced from old illustrated books on the Old and New Testaments and the life of Christ, the tapestries' figures have been re-imagined as players in allegorical scenes, addressing themes of mortality and the relationship between medicine and myth. Their esoteric resonance suggests self-examination and emotional inquiry and recall Conner's enduring interest in metaphysical and existential questions.

Individual engraving and photocopy collages are also on view. Composed from 19th century wood engravings, Conner collected and then meticulously rearranged the found fragments in intimate scales. As the artist described: "I move them around and transform them into one thing or another – not taking any of these solutions until the balance feels right. It is like watching a stage play or a movie except that I am moving the performers around ... It is a challenge to use the limited materials in a way that is satisfying. My faith in the process is such that I believe a transformation will take place." Begun with the same methodical procedure, the photocopy collages are never glued; instead Conner assembled loose images on the bed of a customized photocopy machine. Printed in graphite on archival paper, each of the final works represents a temporally unique scan of the reorganized fragments. In both the engraving and photocopy collages, the imagery forms obscure symbols suggestive of sacred or alchemical illustrations. Yet their implied structure and meaning is ultimately elusive; rather their significance is disclosed in the protracted and difficult pursuit of answers itself, in the delightful moment of wonder and unsolvable mystery.

Born in McPherson, Kansas, Bruce Conner (1933 – 2008) was raised in Wichita where he attended Wichita University. He received his BFA at Nebraska University in 1956 and continued

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his studies with scholarships at the Brooklyn Museum Art School and the University of Colorado. Conner is the subject of a forthcoming monographic survey entitled "BRUCE CONNER: IT'S ALL TRUE," which will open at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, on July 3, 2016, travel to San Francisco in the fall of 2016 and then to the Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid in the winter of 2017. The exhibition is organized by SFMOMA, co-curated by Stuart Comer, Chief Curator, Department of Media and Performance Art, MoMA; Laura Hoptman, Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture, MoMA; Rudolf Frieling, Curator of Media Arts, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Gary Garrels, The Elise S. Haas Senior Curator of Painting and Sculpture, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; with Rachel Federman, Assistant Curator, Painting and Sculpture, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. In 2015 Conner's work was exhibited at the "YES! Glue: A Half-Century of Collage by Bruce and Jean Conner," at the American University Museum in Washington DC, and "Bruce Conner: Somebody Else's Prints" at the San Jose Institute of Contemporary Arts in San Jose, California. In 2000, the Walker Art Center organized a retrospective of Conner's work titled "2000 BC: THE BRUCE CONNER STORY, PART II" which traveled to the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, the M.H. de Young Memorial Museum in San Francisco, and the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art. His work has been included in major exhibitions, such as the historic 1961 "The Art of Assemblage" at the Museum of Modern Art.

His works are in the collections of many major museums, including The Guggenheim Museum; The Metropolitan Museum of Art; The Whitney Museum of American Art; The Museum of Modern Art; The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; The Art Institute of Chicago; The National Gallery of Art, Washington DC; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington DC; and The Centre Pompidou, Paris.