MARCH 2012





When photography develor Light Years: Conceptual Art and Photography" at the Art Institute of Chicago

gather and record iBY MICHELLE WEIDMAN audacious street scene. The combination of truth it could register When photography developed In the 1860s photoginto a mainstream process to the liam H. Warner triegatherrand record informationage Scotland Yard that the understanding of how mucht catch a killer by phtruth it could register was hazya the eyes of the deadn the 1860s photographer Wil-ph would find an imagdiam H. Warner tried to convince moment of life recoScotland Yard that they coulde retina and hence a catch a killer by photographing c

A century later, wwould find an image of the lastis primarily interested moment of life recorded on the based art - concepteting and hence a portrait of the – picked up photog**culprit**.i with a lingering excesA century later, when artists n in mind, a plethora primarily interested in ideabased on the belief based artee conceptual artists tivity of photography, picked up photography, it was

the eyes of the dead. There they

an excess of privile with a lingering excess of truthol artistic production.in mind, a plethora of truths against these excesbased on the belief in the objecdeveloped their tactivity of photography, as well as g

"Light Years: Coran excess of privilege afforded to artistic production. It was in and against these excesses that they

developed their tactics.oth "Light Years: Conceptual conceptual art and and the Photograph 1964-1977" maturation of pho- at the Art Institute of Chicagor raphy through its through March 1h registers nt the birth of conceptual art and the maturation of photography through its contentious adoption and development within an artistic context. John Baldessari's "An Artist is Not Merely the Slavish Announc-Slavish Announcer er of a Series of Facts, which in of a Series of Facts, this Case the Camera has had to Case the Camera haccept and Mechanically Record," cept and Mechanic located just inside the entrance located just inside tof the exhibition, ushers in the show's framework chronologically and thematically. Made between 1966 and 1968 the piece consists of the title stenciled below a black and white photograph of a remarkably mundane

the purposefully ordinary image and the audacious statement presents the concerns of the show in a deceptively simple way. By demoting the formal qualities of the image and stressing a proclamation, it raises the questions: What is an artist? What is the nature of photography? How can they be mutually beneficial or productively destructive? ioWhile much of the art presented questions the legitimacy of aesthetic distinctions, it is primarily the few women represented in the show that break from an aesthetic and institutional critique to offer more broad social scrutiny. Adrian Piper's "Mythic Being" series looks at identity and racial profiling. Annette Messager's "Voluntary Tortures" presents images of more or less painful beauty procedures in at way that highlights their absurd and grotesque qualities. These artists bring to light not only the



rary practices including but not limited to Social Practice and Relational Aesthetics. The continued relevancy of much of the work is a testament to the value of the exhibition but also

(TOP) John Baldessari (American, born 1931) "Throwing Three Balls in the Air to Get a Straight Line (Best of Thirty-Six Attempts)" (1973) Museum of Contemporary Photography at Columbia College Chicago.

(LEFT) Dennis Oppenheim (American, 1938-2011) "Stage 1 and 2. Reading Position for 2nd Degree Burn Long Island. N.Y. Materal... Solar Energy. Skin Expo sure Time. 5 Hours June" (1970, 1970) Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection.

excesses of photography and art vasbut also the excesses of feminin ity and race. ic The show is a vast survey of conceptual art's major players and presents many iconic works. It is broken up into five sections with accompanying wall text that provides minimal but insightful elaboration into the variety of tactics utilized within the field such as the theme "Invis-

ibility" that discusses the use of photography to represent "ineffable or prolonged experiences." The exhibition presents a new programmatic abundance as an institutionalization of institutional critique.

Many of the artists and ideas presented in "Light Years" still inform a variety of contempo-

isto the perpetuation of artistic excess. In other words, if the exhibition is a representation of social standards, we may no longer entertain the belief that photography can record the last moments of a life in the eyes of the dead, but we still do believe in the sanctity of artistic thought

and production.

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