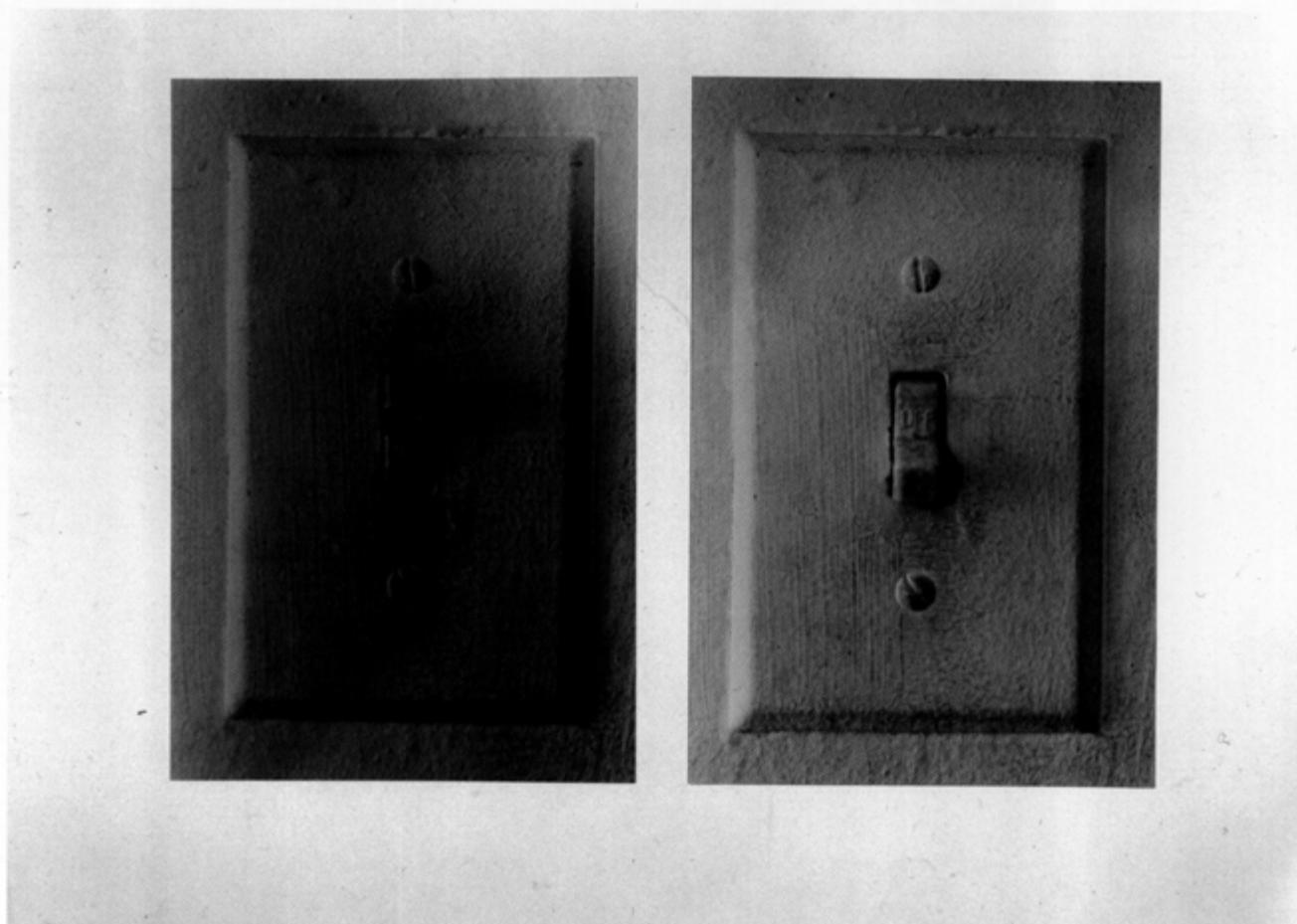


# **LUCIO POZZI**

## **PHOTOWORKS 1975 - 2004**



**6 NOVEMBER - 11 DECEMBER 2004**

**UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY | STALLER CENTER FOR THE ARTS | STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY**

**Foreword**  
by Max Kozloff

*As I write, I may perhaps be articulate, but I am voiceless. Nevertheless, I have at my disposal an artificial device whose aim is to encourage you to hear me. Oh, by italicizing these words, I am appealing to you to keep them in mind, to remember them because they're important. Neither an abbreviation nor a quotation, the photograph states to the eye: "Do not ignore what is shown here; it has a frame and it is special. Photographs are like sightings of the world in italics. But every photograph is also equivocal and ghostly,*

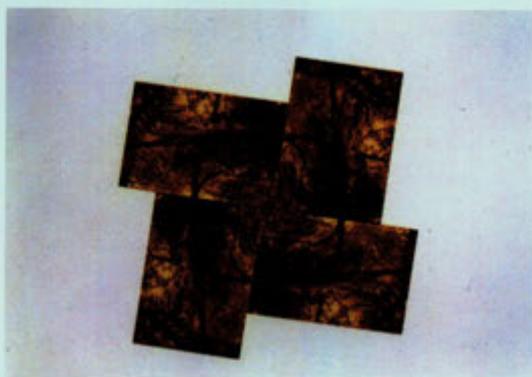
*being a physical image, surely, but also, dis-incarnate and ghostly; literally an after-life. It could be that the inherently reflex-jabbing character of the photographic image acts as some kind of compensation for its disembodied state. It could be that the exhorting frame is both a defining structure and a hope, a minimal hedge against the oblivion into which such images fall.*



*The Island*, 1995  
Photocollage and ink on paper, 29-3/4 x 22-1/4"



*Homology*, 1998  
Mixed media, dimensions variable

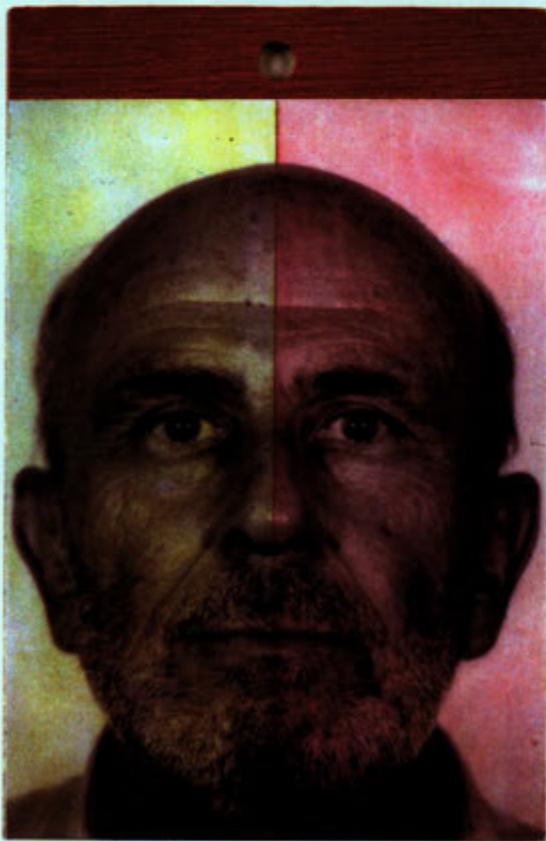


*Vert/Hor Colour*, 1976  
Sepia photographs mounted on rag board,  
22 x 30"

## The Photographic Activity of Painting

by Cira Pascual Marquina

Recent attempts to theorize the emergence of photo-based art in the 1980s and 1990s have discussed it as a form of the expanded activity that was once called painting. This is a reasonable idea, if for no other reason than that pre-photographic painting did not exclude photography—in the same way that pre-cinematic photography did not exclude moving images. Hence it remains an open question whether the set of *operations* that painting carried out are not best seen as functioning in an ontologically-authentic medium based on the chemical activity of light on sensitized surfaces. This is a logic that, in a related argument, David Joselit has applied to suggest that recent use of video projection might in fact inherit the concerns of painting—making it, for those who do not equate a medium with a set of materials, possibly a *kind* of painting.<sup>1</sup>

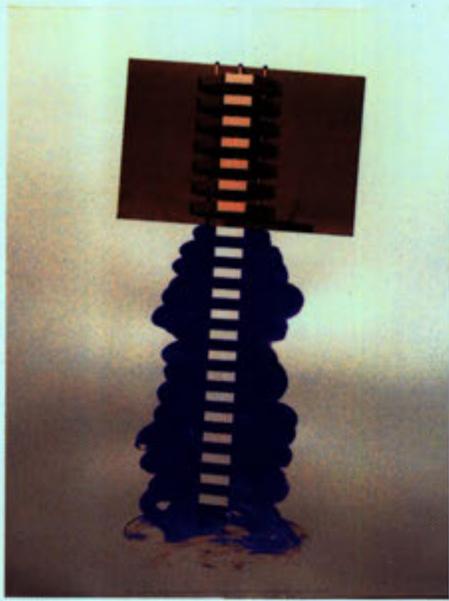


*Portrait of a Self*, 1999  
Photocollage on wood, 7-3/4 x 5"

As interesting and as plausible as these arguments are, it is worth noting that they are all *ex post facto* gestures— attempts to reread history well after the relevant events of the period have occurred and even after the medium's initial historicization has taken place. It thus remains all the more interesting to find instances of artists who theorized their photographic practice, contemporary with the beginnings of the tendency. This is the case for the Italian-born artist Lucio Pozzi, who, in the early 1970s, just as the photographic work of conceptualism was about to be translated into photo-based art, reduced painting to a set of operations— *texture, four colors, duality, remove and relocate, gravity, and imitation*—that were inclusive of his photographic practice.

Pozzi's paintings as photographs (or photoworks, as he prefers to call them) are a wide-ranging medium. They can pack an oblique political agenda, as in *Pink Eye Installation* (1977) and other works from the late 1970s and early 1980s. Or they can be more obviously personal, as in his couple portraits, such as *Stenia and Marphan (Gaze Exchange)* (2001), in which the operation of imitation is combined with the operations of duality and remove and relocate. Some of the work, such as the texture exemplifying *The Birth of Time* (1999), operates most obviously on the level of purely formal composition. The net effect is to deploy photography in diverse modalities—patron portraiture, contemporary history, self-reflexive statement—that sometimes seem as diverse as the modalities of traditional painting.

Without making any claims that as eccentric and individual a body of work as Pozzi's constitutes a missing link in the connection between painting per se and painting as photography (an idea he would abhor), it is worth considering the historical circumstances that occluded the possibility of any mediation between these two kinds of art-making. Central among these circumstances is the fact that the entry of photography into mainstream art was



*The Sudden Departure of Spring—  
Stony Brook, June 20, 2004,*  
Photocollage, graphite, and gouache  
on paper, 29-7/8 x 22-1/2"



*Pink Eye Installation, 1977*  
Photowork installation: detail right wall



*The Birth of Time, 1999*  
Photomontage and gouache on paper,  
23-1/4 x 18"

concurrent with and tied to the operation of photography in conceptual art, and the latter kind of artistic practice for the most part saw itself in a generic, post-medium condition.<sup>2</sup> While it was common even during the heyday of conceptualism to question the idea that art could be *dematerialized*, the doctrine that conceptual art successfully entered a *de-mediumized* condition has had much greater longevity. With the dogma of a generic art operation put firmly in place by conceptualism, the subsequent birth of photo-based art under its aegis created a condition of amnesia such that some photographic works could later be rediscovered to be using the operations of painting. Pozzi, by contrast, appears never to have lost sight of painting and its specificity: rather than reduce the whole of art to a generic operation, he reduced painting to a set of operations that were inclusive of much that flew (and continues to fly) under the flag of photography. The possibility of the latter more limited reduction would be quite interesting in itself even without its anticipating—by way of a robust anti-essentialist reading of medium—the theorizations of photo-based art in the decades that would follow.

*Cira Pascual Marquina is a Helena Rubenstein Curatorial Fellow at the Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Study Program. She is the founder of Spark.*

<sup>1</sup> David Joselit, "Inside the Light Cube," *Artforum* (March 2004): pp. 154-59.  
<sup>2</sup> Joseph Kosuth, "Art After Philosophy," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1999): pp. 159-77, originally published in *Studio International* in 1969.

## Rhonda Cooper Interviews Lucio Pozzi

March 2004

RC: *How important is it for an artist today to study earlier practices? To what extent has your knowledge of art history informed your own work?*

LP: Art of the past represents a giant dictionary of forms and visual thought. It is like a quarry from which we can extract whatever we like. You may call it a database that includes all other times and cultures. I cannot conceive of any person interested in the visual arts lacking curiosity about past art. I have hungered to know what the artists who came before me produced, but I see their works with the eyes and mind of a man living here and now. I may read or hear all kinds of explanations about the circumstances surrounding practices that interest me, but I essentially see them through the ever-changing lens of my own present.

RC: *How does an artist reconcile any conflicts that may exist between his or her personal vision and the demands of the marketplace? How does one avoid compromising one's integrity while making a living as an artist?*

LP: For those who cherish a personal vision, reconciliation is not necessary. The art is made, and then one tries to sell it or place it where it feels welcome. Some artists make a living by taking other jobs or using private income, or both. Others are supported by a spouse, and still others live in poverty. Most try to present their work in public in any manner they can. A few do not care to do so, and the wider art audiences discover them only after a long while. Some people believe that the art market represents the new standard for art and that the idea of fostering a personal vision is a false premise valid only in a romantic utopia. They say the artist should meld his or her practice into a recognizable package that tries to respond to the current demands of the market and should promote it as such. This package is often expected to distinguish itself from other packages by appearing novel, original, consistent.

RC: *How do you view the relationship between painting, sculpture, performance, and other forms of artistic expression?*

LP: The language of painting is my quarry. I translate from it and extend it in other directions, such as toward theater or architecture. For instance, a tiny combine of squares in watercolor may find itself translated into a whole cavern of geometric angles into which visitors can walk, or the crowding of marks on a canvas could be transposed into a cluster of people and their voices in a hall. I think of myself as a maker of situations, even when I paint on canvas. The situations are combinations of ingredients that derive from the quarry, so the distinctions among drawing, painting, sculpture, and

performance have become merely descriptive. In the 1960s, I felt, as did peers of mine, that the conditions within which painting was being created were being taken for granted and that the medium had exhausted its creative and critical potential. Yet, contrary to what some people thought, my view was "Painting is dead; long live painting," and so I proceeded to rethink the discipline of painting from the inside out. Conceptual art was very useful for my project. I learned from it, but I also turned the tables on it. Instead of regarding its tenets as the final points in a negative dialectics—in a linear evolution of progress—I took its concepts to be the starting point for an open engagement with all mediums and codes, including the signs and modes of painting. I thought of conceptual art as the generator of a refurbished dictionary of art, similar to Diderot's *Encyclopedia*, that I could now use in any manner I liked. I had originally moved to New York to put myself in the lion's mouth, so to speak. From the very start, I sought to reform my thinking by experiencing firsthand, in the very place where it was being hatched, the conflict between creativity and packaging that was beginning to affect contemporary art. I decided to risk controversy—and even ridicule—by making increasingly wider explorations and then exhibiting them. I even included in my search practices like painting landscapes in open air; these works were then presented publicly by courageous dealers and curators. As a youngster I read ravenously a history of theater in five volumes, and my father introduced me to architecture when I was eight years old by giving me a professional manual of perspective rendering. My mother brought me to the opera. When my mother, after her divorce, married a British sculptor I was introduced to the world of fine arts.

RC: *And photography?*

LP: Of all the ingredients I mix in many of the situations I produce, photography is used in so many ways and with so many associations. It holds a primary place in the fabric of my universe. When I was a child, my father put his Leica camera in my hands and taught me about aperture and depth of field; he taught me how to focus, how to compose, say, by having a detail in the foreground relate to a wider landscape, and so on. In the late 1960s, the thought came to me that not only could I alter a surface with paint but also by applying a photo image to it. I generally take my own photos, mostly in black and white, and then print them on paper and mount them on board, canvas, or wood, or on the wall. I sometimes cut or scratch them, color them with photo-coloring oil pigments or acrylic paints. Other times, though rarely, I buy them from a photographic agency or rephotograph them from a book or magazine and then

transform them.

*RC: Where do your ideas come from? What advice would you offer to aspiring artists who want to enhance their own creative imaginations?*

LP: I try to listen to my impulse. After doing one thing, another thing will pop into my mind. I trust that they are linked even if I do not detect what the linkage is. I don't waste time explaining. Intensity comes to my work when I pay attention to its process of formation and observe myself as its agent. I sometimes draw from the repertory found in my quarry, knowing that what I take from there will never evolve as I expect once I start working with it. Sometimes I stumble upon doing things that I have never done before. My emotion rises within the terms I have set out to work with; it is not the theme of my art. Emotion arises unexpectedly, and I do not assume that viewers will feel it in the same way I have felt it. A piece of mine could conceivably heat someone deeply and be the result of a cold feeling of mine, or vice versa. Those who are interested in making visual art should consider themselves already artists, not aspiring artists. They should look around and see what others are doing, but they should also operate within the terms of their own experience, no matter how limited it may be, and go on from there, taking risks as they arise. Artworks cannot be preempted. An artistic situation did not exist before it was made, and once it is made, there it is.

**Lecture:**

**"THE NEXT 475 YEARS OF MY ART AND LIFE,"**  
Wednesday, November 10 at 12:30 pm

**Performance: "PATCHAMEENA GUIDED TOUR,"**  
Saturday, November 20 at 8 pm

### Acknowledgements

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Most of all, I wish to thank Lucio Pozzi for sharing his work with the Stony Brook community.

*Rhonda Cooper*  
Gallery Director

University Art Gallery  
Staller Center for the Arts  
Stony Brook University  
Stony Brook, New York 11794-5425  
Tel: 631.632.7240  
www.staller.com