

Joan Lyons

Exhibition: November 15th – December 22nd, 2018

Opening Reception: November 15th, 2018, 6 – 8 PM

Steven Kasher Gallery presents a major solo exhibition of pioneering feminist artist Joan Lyons. Lyons (American, b. 1937) is one of the great unsung artists of her generation. The exhibition features nine of Lyons' pivotal photographic projects. This is the first gallery solo exhibition of the artist's work since 2013. Lyons' groundbreaking work freely combines feminist theory and personal experience. Her work is intimate and introspective, questioning the indexical quality of photography.

Over the past six decades, Lyons has employed a variety of difficult and obscure image-making processes. Her work spans a broad range of media including archaic photographic processes, pinhole photography, offset lithography, Xerography, screen-printing, and photo-quilt making. In the 1960s and 1970s, Lyons was one of the earliest artists to adopt xerography as an artistic practice and was recognized as an innovator in the use of Haloid Xerox drawing as an image making process. In a 1982 artist statement Lyons said "I work with what is available, a variety of optical devices. I work through complexity, to something simple and direct. This distillation process becomes more evident as time goes on. I work at those things that are evident; how I see, not conventions of seeing."



Lyons' work defies every artistic taboo of the 1950s. She had been taught that contemporary art should be universal, gestural, abstract, monumental, qualities which are inherently masculine. After trying and failing to follow these mandates, Lyons' realized that her work could not be separated from her own experiences as a woman. Her personal narrative, different in content and tone from the dominant male voice, pushed her to establish new artistic structures.



Highlights from the exhibition include *Untitled (Bedspread)*, 1969, the earliest work in the exhibition, is a sharp, ironic commentary on the status of women in the late 1960s. The repeated image of an anonymous, nude woman that has been screenprinted onto a fabric bedspread is a fierce response to the idea that women are best "barefoot and pregnant." The work also references practices widely considered to be women's work including sitchery, quilting and the "lesser" decorative arts.

In the Haloid-Xerox portraits, taken between 1972 and 1980, Lyons' utilized her own body in as a means of questioning photographic portraiture and female archetypes. The work is a deliberate attempt not to objectify women but to internalize their representation. Working in opposition to an instantaneous snapshot or a decisive moment, each image is a composite created over the course of many hours. The prints are the result of multiple transfers onto large sheets of paper using the original view-camera based flatbed Xerox equipment that yielded a carbon image on plain paper.



Artifacts, 1973, is a portfolio of 11 offset lithographs created in part as a response to Andy Warhol's soup can and other pop culture images. This body of work was informed by a desire to pay homage to the power objects in the artist's home, items that ruled the artist's everyday world.

Lyons' seminal 1974 work *Prom* is a ritual artifact, a trompe l'oeil deconstruction of her teenage daughter's first prom dress. Like most of Lyons' work, *Prom* is conceptual and process based. The piece is comprised of six life-size sections of the dress, pressed like flowers onto six pages. The weave of the fabric itself replaces a conventional halftone screen, emphasizing the connection between printing and weaving. *Prom* was personal, concrete and feminine, a forceful contradiction of everything Lyons' was taught that art should be.

In addition to her artistic practice, Lyons was the Founding Director of the influential Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1972 – 2004. Under Lyons' direction, the VSW Press has been active in the evolution and definition of the field of artist's books over the past three decades. Lyons was responsible for the publication of over 450 artist's books. The VSW Press also designed and produced books by photographers and writers, and titles relating to theory and historical inquiry in the visual arts. Lyons is the editor of the highly influential annotated bibliography, *Artist's Books: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1972–2008* (2009) and of *Artist's Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook*, (1986, 1988, 1991, 1993, 1995).

Joan Lyons (b. 1937) completed a BFA at Alfred University, New York (1957), and an MFA at SUNY Buffalo, New York (1973). Since 1963 her work has been exhibited at major institutions worldwide including Museum of Modern Art, New York, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, DeCordova Museum, Arts Council of Great Britain, Center for Creative Photography, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Museo de Arte Contemporaneo, Sevilla, Art Gallery of Ontario, National Gallery of Canada and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Lyons' work is found in permanent collections including the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Minneapolis Institute of Art, Norton-Simon Museum, J. Paul Getty Museum, Yale University Art Gallery, DeCordova Museum, Museum of Modern Art, New York and the National Gallery of Canada. Lyons has published over 30 editions of her artist's books since 1972. A retrospective exhibition, *Maker/Mentor: Selected Work from Four Decades*, appeared at the Rochester Contemporary Art Center in 2007.

Joan Lyons will be on view November 15th-December 22nd, 2018 at Steven Kasher Gallery, located at 515 W. 26th St., New York, NY 10001. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 10 AM to 6 PM. For more information about the exhibition and all other general inquiries, please contact Cassandra Johnson, 212 966 3978, cassandra@stevenkasher.com.