

# MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Robert Smithson

*Hypothetical Islands*

2 December 2020 – 9 January 2021

Marian Goodman Gallery London and Holt/Smithson Foundation are pleased to announce the first exhibition of Robert Smithson at the Gallery, open from 2 December 2020 to 9 January 2021.

Born in Passaic, New Jersey, Robert Smithson (1938-73) recalibrated the possibilities of art. For over fifty years his work and ideas have influenced artists and thinkers, building the ground from which contemporary art has grown.

*Hypothetical Islands* pays attention to Smithson's enduring interest in islands. It presents over fifty works spanning 1961 to 1973, many of which are being exhibited for the first time in many decades. For Smithson, islands were speculative sites showing the constantly changing surface of our world and the limits of human knowledge. Some of his islands are locations for sculptural invention, others are sites investigating the formation of landscape through earthworks and sculptures. The selection of works will move from mobile to spiral islands, through forking jetties, meanders, concrete seas and rising volcanoes.

An autodidact, Smithson's interests in travel, cartography, geology, architectural ruins, prehistory, philosophy, science fiction, popular culture and language spiral through his work. In his short and prolific life, Smithson produced paintings, drawings, sculptures, architectural schemes, films, photographs, writings, earthworks and all the stops between. From his landmark earthworks to his 'quasi-minimalist' sculptures, Nonsites, writings, proposals, collages, detailed drawings and radical rethinking of landscape, Smithson's ideas are profoundly urgent for our times. By exploring the conceptual and physical boundaries of landscape Smithson raised questions about our place in the world, their relevance heightened as the dangers of global warming move ever closer.

Smithson's conceptual islands explore time, limits, scale and human collaboration with geology. The exhibition includes a continuous film programme focusing on Smithson's earthworks and interest in geological agency, featuring two previously unseen 1971 films—*Bob with Books* and *Mangrove Ring*. A careful selection of drawings demonstrate his unrivalled capacity for invention. In 1970 he explained, "I like landscapes that suggest prehistory. As an artist it is sort of interesting to take on the persona of a geological agent where man actually becomes part of that process rather than overcoming it." Three years later he declared, "Imagine yourself in Central Park one million years ago. You would be standing on a vast ice sheet, a 4,000-mile glacial wall, as much as 2,000 feet thick. Alone on the vast glacier, you would not sense its slow crushing, scraping, ripping movement as it advanced south, leaving great masses of rock debris in its wake."

*Hypothetical Islands* is accompanied by a simultaneous exhibition, *Primordial Beginnings*, at Galerie Marian Goodman, Paris. Both exhibitions will feature rarely seen works from the personal

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collection of the artist Nancy Holt (1938-2014). Holt married Smithson in 1963 and managed his Estate between 1973 and 2014. *Hypothetical Islands* and *Primordial Beginnings* are organised in partnership with Holt/Smithson Foundation, an artist-endowed foundation dedicated to continuing the creative legacies of Nancy Holt and Robert Smithson.

### Notes:

#### About the exhibitions

*Primordial Beginnings* and *Hypothetical Islands* are organised by Philipp Kaiser, Chief Executive Director of Artists and Programs at Marian Goodman Galleries, and Lisa Le Feuvre, Executive Director of Holt/Smithson Foundation.

#### About Holt/Smithson Foundation and Marian Goodman Gallery

In February 2020 Holt/Smithson Foundation and Marian Goodman Gallery announced their partnership.

The partnership between Holt/Smithson Foundation and Marian Goodman Gallery marks a return. In 1965 Marian Goodman was a founder of Multiples, Inc., a landmark project publishing prints, multiples and books by leading American artists - including Robert Smithson. An exhibition dedicated to Multiples, Inc. will launch at Marian Goodman Gallery, New York in January 2021.

#### About Holt/Smithson Foundation

Active since 2018, Holt/Smithson Foundation exists to continue the creative and investigative spirit of the artists Nancy Holt (1938-2014) and Robert Smithson (1938-73). Holt and Smithson developed innovative ways of exploring our relationship with the planet, expanding the limits of artistic practice. Their Foundation engages in programmes developing the artists' creative legacies, continuing the transformation they brought to the world of art and ideas. Holt/Smithson Foundation works in partnership to produce exhibitions, publications, public programmes and new research.

<http://holtsmithsonfoundation.org>

#### About Marian Goodman Gallery

For over forty years, Marian Goodman Gallery has played an important role in introducing European artists to American audiences and helping to establish a vital dialogue among artists and institutions working internationally. Marian Goodman Gallery was founded in New York City in late 1977. In 1995 the gallery expanded to include an exhibition space in Paris and in 2014 an exhibition space in London. In late 2016 Marian Goodman realised her dream of opening a bookstore and project space in Paris.

<https://www.mariangoodman.com>

#### About Robert Smithson

Born in Passaic, New Jersey, Robert Smithson (2 January 1938 – 20 July 1973) spent his formative years in New Jersey. In 1963 he married the artist Nancy Holt (1938–2014), who managed the

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Estate of Robert Smithson from 1973 to 2014, and who literally willed Holt/Smithson Foundation into being.

Smithson is best known for his earthworks *Spiral Jetty* (1970), *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* (1971) and *Amarillo Ramp* (1973). Prior to these earthworks Smithson created performative entropic land works, such as the ephemeral sculptures *Asphalt Rundown* (1969, Rome), *Glue Pour* (1969, Vancouver), *Concrete Pour* (1969, Chicago) and *Partially Buried Woodshed* (1970, Kent State), which speak poignantly to issues of time and the human condition.

Smithson's first solo exhibition, with emphasis on what he described as 'expressionistic work', took place in 1957 at Allan Brilliant's gallery in New York. The artist's peripatetic life took him to Rome in 1961, when George Lester offered him his first solo international exhibition at Galleria George Lester, where he explored quasi-religious subject matter. His early paintings, drawings and sculptures made between 1961 and 1963 were imbued with references to concrete poetry, popular culture and science fiction. Influenced by minimalism, in 1964 Smithson declared his quasi-minimal sculptures, made from industrial materials of metal and mirrored Plexiglas, as his 'mature' works, distancing himself from his early expressionistic paintings and drawings.

Smithson's writings on art, western culture, graphic texts, and interviews, are published in *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, edited by Nancy Holt (1979, New York University Press, with an expanded version edited by Jack Flam published in 1998). His works are in numerous museum collections, including the Art Institute of Chicago, Dia Art Foundation, Museum of Modern Art New York, National Museum of Modern Art Tokyo, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Whitney Museum of American Art.

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