

## THOMAS DANE GALLERY

**Bruce Conner**  
***THREE SCREEN RAY***

21 January–22 March 2025

Thomas Dane Gallery  
3 Duke Street St James's, London SW1

Thomas Dane Gallery is pleased to announce the first UK exhibition of Bruce Conner's *THREE SCREEN RAY* (2006), following on from the Gallery's presentations of *THE WHITE ROSE* in 2022, *BREAKAWAY* in 2019–2020, *A MOVIE* in 2017 and *CROSSROADS* in 2015.

Before music videos and rapid-fire editing pervaded popular culture, Conner pioneered techniques of vertical montage and subliminal messaging with his 16mm film, *COSMIC RAY* (1961). While Conner first gained attention for his film work with found footage, *COSMIC RAY* incorporated both found material and footage he shot himself after he relocated to San Francisco, including shots of the Bay Area artist Beth Pewther (1938–2024) dancing, the painter Joan Brown (1938–1990) in costume, and a fireworks display. Conner then meticulously spliced together this collection of varied imagery to a live recording of Ray Charles' hit rhythm and blues song, *What'd I Say* (1959), creating an explosive homage to the blind musician. The work's pioneering approach to moving image and montage, with its frenzied visual pace rhythmically doubling and amplifying the exuberant soundtrack, would later influence the first generation of music videos being produced for MTV in the 1980s.

Four years after the completion of *COSMIC RAY*, for the artist's first solo museum exhibition, held at the Rose Art Museum in Massachusetts in 1965, Conner reformatted the piece from a single projection to a silent, three-screen installation using three unsynchronised 8mm films of different lengths, opening up the possibility for constant reconfiguration. Decades later Conner revisited this concept of mutability, which first led to the silent three-channel installation, *EVE-RAY-FOREVER* (1965/2006), and then the final iteration – set once again to Charles' song – *THREE SCREEN RAY*. Conner's repeated re-editing and reformatting of existing work mirrored the constant fragmentation and reconfiguration of imagery in his approach to found footage and montage, in which material is continually broken up, spliced and reactivated, in a kind of metaphor for the operations of memory and creativity.

*THREE SCREEN RAY* (2006) replaces its predecessors with three newly edited films projected side-by-side. Notably, this iteration was created digitally and represents a number of existing works that Conner revisited and reconstructed from film to digital format during this late period, including *HIS EYE IS ON THE SPARROW* (2006) and *EASTER MORNING* (2008), in collaboration with editor Michelle Silva. This process presented an opportunity to explore editing options opened up by digital technology, as well as to experiment on his own oeuvre as a veritable readymade archive, in a subversive nod to his reputation as a pioneer in found footage.

*THREE SCREEN RAY* realises the visual equivalent of a cinematic slot machine: images meet, diverge and meet again, continuous yet non-linear. The quick-cut mash-up of imagery of war, commercials, and the female body reveals a common sexual subtext among disparate images that probes the drives underlying consumerism and martial aggression. In an earlier interview in 1974, Conner remarked that the visual elements of the work were, at their essence, pulling at the constant tension between 'the creative process' and 'destructive forces'.

Created toward the end of the artist's life, *THREE SCREEN RAY* is a summation of Conner's decades-long experimentation with moving image both conceptually and technically, in steadfast dedication to, as MoMA curator Stuart Comer put it, 'interrogating the conventions and possibilities of cinema in all its mutability'.<sup>1</sup> Conner's work found technically audacious and wholly unique means to connect the impulses of the individual and society, in a magisterial confluence of idiosyncratic lived experience and the collective psyche.

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<sup>1</sup> Stuart Comer, "Surface Tension: Bruce Conner in the Digital Age", in *It's All True*, ed. Rudolf Friedling and Gary Garrels (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2016), 357.

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Bruce Conner (b. 1933, McPherson KS, d. 2008, San Francisco CA) was one of the foremost American artists of the twentieth century, whose transformative work touched on themes of post-war American society, from a rising consumer culture to the dread of nuclear apocalypse. Working in a range of mediums, Conner created hybrids of painting and sculpture, film and performance, drawing and printing, including works on paper utilising drawing and collage. Conner came to San Francisco on the wave of the Beat Generation of the late 1950s, becoming an active member of the music scene during the late 1960s. In San Francisco, Conner became a singular practitioner within the underground film community and the city's flourishing art world, achieving international status early in his career. Conner received his BFA from Nebraska University before studying at the Brooklyn Museum Art School and the University of Colorado.

Recent solo exhibitions include: *Bruce Conner: Light Out Of Darkness*, Museum Tinguely, Basel, Switzerland (2021) and Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona, Spain (2022); *Please Enjoy and Return: Bruce Conner Films from the Sixties*, University of New Mexico Art Museum, Albuquerque NM (2018); *Bruce Conner: Untitled Prints*, Henry Art Gallery, Seattle WA (2018); *Forever and Ever*, Speed Art Museum, Louisville KY (2017); *A MOVIE*, Thomas Dane Gallery, London, England (2017); *Bruce Conner: It's All True*, Museum of Modern Art, New York NY, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco CA and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain (2016/17), among many others.

Selected public collections include: Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago IL; National Gallery of Art, Washington DC; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles CA; Museum of Modern Art, New York NY; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco CA; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis MN; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York NY; Glenstone Museum, Potomac MD; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh PA; and Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas TX.

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Gallery hours: Tuesday to Friday 11am–6pm, Saturday 12pm–6pm or by appointment.

Admission: Free

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Nearest Tube: Green Park or Piccadilly Circus

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