

Fred Lonidier
Two Works From the 1980s
March 18 – April 22, 2018

ESSEX STREET is pleased to present our third exhibition with Fred Lonidier. The exhibition will consist of two works from the early 1980s: *L.A Public Workers Point to Some Problems*, 1980 and *I Like Everything Nothing But Union*, 1983.

Fred Lonidier is a core member of the San Diego group with Martha Rosler, Allan Sekula and Phel Steinmetz that began studying and teaching at UCSD in the early 1970s. These artists activated both the history of social documentary photography and recent conceptual art, but critiqued and attempted to repair their faults and deficiencies. They formulated a combination of the two genres by applying the format of conceptual art to the purpose of social documentary. Their work has always been political.

For over fifty years Fred Lonidier has dedicated his life's work to labor and class struggle. Beginning with a counter argument to the disembodied premise of conceptual art, Lonidier's work proves that everything is made by someone, and rather than alienate the object from its production, the object could be employed to report and demonstrate its production. Lonidier's artwork has always been, as he says, "For Labor, About Labor, By Labor." The vast tide of words covering the surface of Lonidier's installations are largely the words of those workers depicted. Furthermore the venues for his artwork have always included union halls, labor councils, universities, factories, protest sites, and public access television. Lonidier was also a co-founder and president of his union, the American Federation of Teachers Local 2034.

L.A Public Workers Point to Some Problems, 1980 was made for a group exhibition "Social Works" at the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art. It is a statement about the fiscal crises of the state, in particular after California's passing of Proposition 13 in 1978, which drastically reduced property taxes on homes, businesses and farms. In a catalogue essay from 1984 Benjamin H.D. Buchloh wrote "The work addresses the questions of the detrimental impact, not to say disastrous consequences of federal and state legislation in favor of corporate and entrepreneurial interests on those sectors of public life and culture, that we would not normally be confronted with as a museum or gallery visiting art audience, since the system of representation that we traditionally refer to as 'the aesthetic' by definition extracts itself – as it seemed – from the economic and political reality of the basis of culture in everyday life, in order to construct the aesthetic mirage that generates pleasure due to its mysterious capacity to disembody and disassociate our perception from the weights and demands of the real. Lonidier's work successfully counteracts that tendency – which is as compulsive in aesthetic production as it is firmly embedded in the conventions of aesthetic reception – by not only systematically exploring the basis of culture, i.e., labor, but also by specifying the connections where the global system of political and economical determinations concretely manifests itself in the conflicts of individual existence." Alongside and following the exhibition at LAICA, the work was published in *The Citizen*, the newspaper of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor AFL-CIO, and exhibited at the Service Employees International Union 660 and Union 434, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees District Council 36, the San Francisco Labor Council AFL CIO, the United Teachers of Los Angeles 1021, the American Federation of Teachers Local 61 and eventually many many other places.

I Like Everything Nothing But Union, 1983 was made following a request from Joseph Francis, the Secretary-Treasurer of the San Diego Imperial Counties Labor Council, AFL-CIO for a work to hang in the offices' boardroom. It still hangs there 35 years later. The artwork demonstrates the great diversity of the rank and file members of the affiliated unions: everyone from skilled laborers to college professors, public and private sectors, and including many different genders, races and ethnicities. Lonidier interviewed and photographed approximately 20 different union members who describe their work, its effect on their lives, and their views on the union. It discloses many of the challenges they faced and solidified that their voices would remain present in the union board meetings. The artwork also imparts the dignity of these individuals, their work and their own accounts. In an interview at the time in the LA Times Lonidier says "This is an attempt to put a frame around ideas and thoughts that are already there but that seldom get framed. It is to give workers a chance to be heard."

Fred Lonidier was born in Oregon in 1943 and lives and works in San Diego. He served as a faculty member at UCSD from 1972 to 2013. His work is currently included in *An Incomplete History of Protest* an exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Lonidier was also in the Whitney Biennial in 2014 and had a solo exhibition at the museum in 1977. His work has also been exhibited at the Reina Sofia, Madrid; United Nations Headquarters, Geneva; Istituto Svizzero di Roma; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Albright Knox Gallery, Buffalo; Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego; Centre de la Photographie de Genève; Bronx Museum; Smart Museum of Art, Chicago; Palais de Tokyo, Paris;

Berkeley Art Museum; Long Beach Museum of Art; MOCA, Los Angeles; FRAC Poitou-Charantes; High Museum, Atlanta; New Museum, New York and so many other venues. His work is also in the permanent collections of many of these museums.

*For a thorough examination of the extraordinary movement at the time in San Diego, which also included John Baldessari, David Antin, Allan Kaprow, Eleanor Antin, Helen Mayer Harrison, Newton Harrison, Jean-Pierre Gorin, Babette Mangolte and then later Lorna Simpson, Carrie Mae Weems and Moyra Davey see *The Uses of Photography: Art, Politics, and the Reinvention of a Medium*, an exhibition and catalogue, curated and edited by Jill Dawsey at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego in 2016. In that catalogue Dawsey writes “One of the San Diego group’s key concerns, especially with respect to the representation of others, was the inclusion of a great deal of context. This stance opposed that of the single, static fine-art photograph that signaled its aims for autonomy or transcendence.”

Opening Reception

Sunday March 18

Public Talks from 5-7PM

By

Jennifer Klein, Professor, Department of History, Yale University

&

Samuel Ewing, PhD Candidate, History of Art and Architecture, Harvard University

Closing Reception

Saturday April 21

Performance from 6-7PM

By

New York City Labor Chorus

Exhibition Checklist:

Fred Lonidier

I Like Everything Nothing But Union, 1983

Silver gelatin prints and photostats mounted on panels

Approximately 54 panels total

Each: 20 × 16 inches (50.80 × 40.64 cm)

Fred Lonidier

L.A. Public Workers Point to Some Problems, 1980

Silver gelatin prints and photostats mounted on panels

11 panels total

Each: 60 × 42 inches (152.40 × 106.68 cm)

ESSEX STREET

55 HESTER STREET NYC 10002

Wednesday-Sunday 12-6PM

917 675 6681 info@essexstreet.biz www.essexstreet.biz

Both levels of the gallery are accessible by elevator.

Open To The Public. Free Admission For All. Tours Available Daily. Groups Always Welcome.