

# THINKING AND SEEING BEYOND THE LENS

## CONCEPTUAL PHOTOGRAPHY FROM THE COLLECTION

June 11 – September 24

Drawing from the Santa Barbara Museum of Art's permanent collection, this exhibition presents an illustrative selection of works by artists who have applied the framework of Conceptual art to the medium of photography. By theorizing beyond the lens, they have heeded the call of American artist Sol LeWitt (1928–2007), who succinctly stated in 1967, "The idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work."

Conceptual art is tied to the rise of Postmodernism in the mid-20th century, as visual artists innovated their creative production in radical ways. Many of them rejected formalism, the idea that the visual aspects and material components of art should be prioritized over its narrative, a characteristic linked to Modernist art. American art critics such as Lucy Lippard and John Chandler questioned whether an artwork even needed to be physically present, as asserted in their seminal essay "The Dematerialization of Art" (1968). These groundbreaking modes of thinking about art, along with a repudiation of the conventions of art making, led to the birth of Conceptual art as an art movement.

Although Conceptual art can be associated with early 20th-century works by French artist Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968), it did not emerge as a global artistic style until the 1960s. Artists across Europe and the Americas emphasized idiosyncratic thinking and atypical methods of production for their mostly intangible artworks. Idea and process took precedence over execution, as seen in the photographs of the artists featured here: Blythe Bohnen, Barbara Ess, Wanda Lee Hammerbeck, Robert Heinecken, James Hugunin, Ana Mendieta, Robert Morris, Kenji Nakahashi, and Dennis Oppenheim.