

For immediate release

GORDON MATTA-CLARK

Above and Below

April 2 – May 4, 2013

Opening reception: Tuesday, April 2, 6–8 PM

Press preview with the curator: Monday, April 1, 10 AM

Guided public tour with the curator: Saturday, April 20, 11:30 AM

Film screenings at Anthology Film Archives: Sunday, April 21, 7:30 PM



Jacob's Ladder, 1977. Silver dye bleach print
39 ¾ x 30 inches (101 x 76.2 cm)

David Zwirner is pleased to present an exhibition of late works by Gordon Matta-Clark, focusing in particular on his activities as a filmmaker. Curated by Jessamyn Fiore, the show features the artist's explorations in subterranean New York and Paris alongside building cuts and projects involving aerial elevation. It is on view at the gallery's 519 West 19th Street space in New York.

The exhibition begins above ground with *City Slivers*, Matta-Clark's fragmented portrait of New York City from 1976. Eschewing a clear viewpoint and leaving large parts of the screen black, viewers are offered vertical cuts of bustling streets and skyscrapers interspersed with panoramas taken from atop the World Trade Center. The shifting viewing angles, sometimes shown simultaneously, seem at once celebratory and nervously laden, and contain a poignant, if perhaps subliminal, reference to the artist's twin brother, who fell to his death from a window in their shared apartment that summer. A brief and barely legible text towards the end of the film includes the words "he just hit the pavement...face down."

Made a year earlier, *Conical Intersect* was filmed in and around Matta-Clark's iconic cut through two properties awaiting demolition next to the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris (under construction at the time). The film reveals various stages of the elaborate project, whereby a large circular shape was sliced from a heavy masonry, street-facing wall in one building, and a conical space carved out across the other side at an upward angle, piercing a small hole in the roof. The laborious digging through several layers of the buildings' foundations was complemented two years later with *Sous-sols de Paris* (1977), where the camera was taken below ground to multi-level tunnels and structures long abandoned. Through minimal editing, the underground—illuminated only by handheld torches—is contrasted with brief clips from the streets above. Matta-Clark thus creates a dialogue between new and old Paris, the visible and hidden city, both light and sinister. Deep below L'Opera and Les Halles, a neatly arranged

wall composed of thousands of human skulls and bone fragments dating from the days of the Revolution finds a curious match with countless wine bottles, safely stored in the cool temperatures. The film ends, perhaps appropriately, with a wine tasting.

Substrait (Underground Dailies) (1976), Matta-Clark's underground portrait of New York, reveals a view of the American city never seen by most people. Burial chambers underneath the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, tracks running deep below Grand Central Station, and sewage structures with underground rivers streaming through, combine to make up the urban tissue beneath the surface—vividly compared in the explanatory dialogues accompanying the film as "arteries and veins."

Photographs and drawings accompany the films on view, documenting both the metropolitan explorations and contemporaneous projects by the artist. *Jacob's Ladder*, Matta-Clark's ambitious project for Documenta 6 in Kassel, Germany, in 1977, originally included plans to develop an aerial dwelling site suspended some fifteen feet above ground, but ultimately took on the shape of a long woven net attached to a thirty-story-tall chimney, which brave visitors could ascend one thin batten at a time. The title of the installation was chosen by Matta-Clark for its analogy to the Old Testament story of Jacob's dream, of a staircase connecting Heaven and Earth. By implication, it is also a reference to brotherly rivalry, as this vision occurred while he was fleeing from his brother Esau, with whom he had been fighting for inheritance. As such, the project contains perhaps another reference to the loss of artist's twin brother a year earlier.

A series of diagrammatic sketches entitled *Sky Hook (studies for a balloon building)* (1978) are testaments to Matta-Clark's idealistic interest in architecture and urban renewal. Based on vigorous research into the mechanics of ballooning, these drawings outline tent-like towers attached to large inflatable shapes. Balancing somewhere between actual proposals for flexible, economic housing networks and playful fantasies, they map out alternative spaces

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in defiance of existing social environments and even gravity. As such, they match one of the inspirations behind the subterranean expeditions, where the search for the "negative" spaces of the city became part of a broader interest in "mapping...lost foundations: working back into society from beneath."

Born in New York in 1943, **Gordon Matta-Clark** is widely considered one of the most influential artists working in the 1970s. He was a key contributor to the activity and growth of the New York art world in SoHo from the late 1960s until his untimely death in 1978.

Since 1998, the Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark has been represented by David Zwirner, and *Above and Below* marks the fifth solo exhibition of the artist's work at the gallery in New York.

In 1985, the first museum retrospective of the artist's work was presented at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, and traveled until 1989 to over a dozen institutions worldwide, including the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Kunsthalle Basel; Le Nouveau Musée, Villeurbanne, France; Brooklyn Museum; and the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. *Gordon Matta-Clark: You Are the Measure* was the first full-scale retrospective organized twenty years later by the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, in 2007. The exhibition traveled to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. From 2009 to 2010, *Gordon Matta-Clark: Undoing Spaces* toured South America to venues including the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Santiago; Museu de Arte Moderna, São Paulo; Paco Imperial, Rio de Janeiro; and Museo de Arte de Lima.

Matta-Clark's work is represented in prominent public collections, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen, Antwerp; San Francisco Museum of Art; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. The Gordon Matta-Clark Archive is held at the Canadian Centre for Architecture in Montreal, and includes the artist's personal correspondence, notebooks, drawings, photographs, slides, films, as well as other archival material documenting his life and work.

Above and Below is curated by **Jessamyn Fiore**, an independent curator and writer. In 2007, she became Director of Thisisnotashop, a not-for-profit gallery space in Dublin, which supported emerging artists. She also co-founded The Writing Workshop in 2007, which functioned as a collaborative forum for writers and artists. Fiore is co-director of the Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark with her mother Jane Crawford, Matta-Clark's widow. She received a Masters from The National College of Art and Design, Dublin, in 2010. In 2011, Fiore curated *112 Greene Street: The Early Years (1970-1974)* at David Zwirner in New York, which led to the critically acclaimed, eponymous catalogue, published by David Zwirner and Radius Books in 2012.

SPECIAL PROGRAMS

DAVID ZWIRNER | 519 West 19th Street, New York

Saturday, April 20, 11:30 AM

Guided tour of the exhibition by curator Jessamyn Fiore

This event is free and open to the public, but space is limited. For more information and to RSVP, contact Jill Smith at David Zwirner 212-727-2070 x100 or jill@davidzwirner.com.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES | 32 Second Avenue, New York

Sunday, April 21, 7:30 PM

Anthology Film Archives will host a film program exploring the connections between the work of Matta-Clark and a circle of contemporaneous New York artists and filmmakers working with subjects and materials that influenced and inspired one another. This program will feature the very first screening with English subtitles of Matta-Clark's *Sous-sols de Paris* (1977), and will be followed by a Q&A with Jessamyn Fiore and filmmakers Jane Crawford and Robert Fiore.

The program also features Matta-Clark's *Splitting* (1974); Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt's *Swamp* (1971); *Landscape for Fire* and *Landscape for White Squares* (both 1972), Anthony McCall's sculptural performances in a landscape grid; Ken Jacobs's training in spatial disorientation, *Airshaft* (1967) and *Let There Be Whistleblowers* (2005); and the gravity and entropy of Smithson's *Partially Buried Woodshed*, as documented by Jane Crawford and Robert Fiore (2004). The program also includes Joseph Cornell's early work, *Gnir Rednow* (1955), whose focus on New York City's elevated train and subway systems (above & below) rhyme with Matta-Clark's investigations. For more information, visit anthologyfilmarchives.org.

FRIEZE PROJECTS AT FRIEZE NEW YORK | Randall's Island, New York

Friday, May 10 – Monday, May 13, 2013

Curated by Cecilia Alemani, Frieze Projects will include a special tribute to FOOD, the legendary SoHo restaurant opened in October 1971 by Matta-Clark and Carol Goodden in collaboration with other artists. This tribute will take the form of a temporary restaurant where the history and legacy of FOOD will be celebrated. A meeting space, a restaurant, and a total work of art, FOOD was driven by the energy of the people that ran it and those who gathered there. In the same spirit, FOOD 1971/2013 will be both a restaurant and performance stage where each day a different artist will be invited to cook in a convivial environment. For more information, visit friezeprojectsny.org.

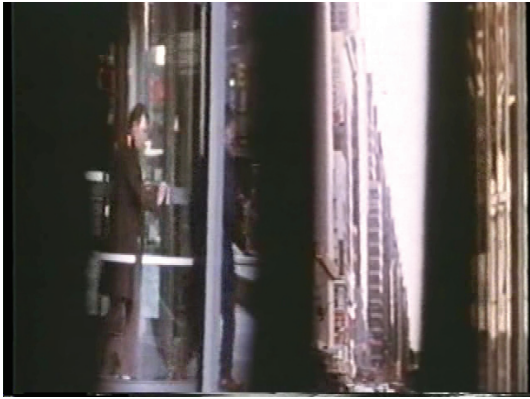
For information about the exhibition and to attend the press preview, contact

Kim Donica, Press Officer, David Zwirner 212-727-2070 x122 kim@davidzwirner.com

GORDON MATTA-CLARK

Above and Below

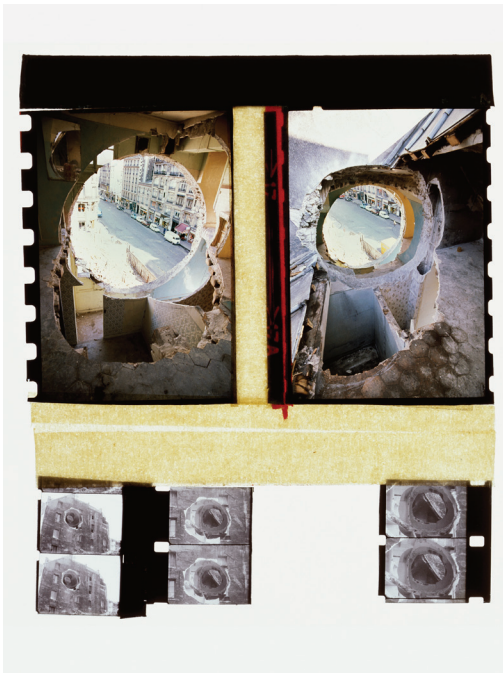
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*City Slivers*, 1976

City Slivers is Matta-Clark's fragmented filmic portrait of New York City from 1976. Eschewing a clear viewpoint and leaving large parts of the screen black, viewers are offered vertical cuts of bustling streets and skyscrapers interspersed with panoramas taken from atop the World Trade Center. The shifting viewing angles, sometimes shown simultaneously, seem at once celebratory and nervously laden, and contain a poignant, if perhaps subliminal, reference to the artist's twin brother, who fell to his death from a window in their shared apartment that summer. A brief and barely legible text towards the end of the film includes the words "he just hit the pavement...face down."

City Slivers embodies Matta-Clark's unique approach to his medium, which can be seen both in terms of content and technique. In this film, as Corinne Diserens notes, "the artist directly cut and glued the negative, inserting bits of text into the filmic material, which presented the street and the glass architecture of Manhattan-man caught in his urban environment."¹

¹ Corinne Diserens, "Gordon Matta-Clark: The Reel World," in Corinne Diserens, ed., *Gordon Matta-Clark* (London: Phaidon, 2003), p. 210.

*Conical Intersect*, 1975

This film and the accompanying photographs document Matta-Clark's ambitious project, *Conical Intersect*, from 1975. Spanning two late seventeenth-century properties awaiting demolition near the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, the artist cut out a large, circular shape from a heavy masonry, street-facing wall in one building and carved out a conical space at an upward angle through to the other side, piercing a small hole in the roof.

The cone-like structure of the cut has been compared to a lens, a description which underscores the cinematic dimension of the work. According to Gerry Hovagimyan, who assisted with the film, *Conical Intersect* was inspired by Anthony McCall's *Line Describing a Cone* (1971), in which light from a projector gradually forms a circle while the beam takes the shape of a hollow cone. Like McCall, Matta-Clark was able to demonstrate distinctly cinematic qualities using the basic qualities of light and air.

Thomas Crow further notes how *Conical Intersect*—the first project in which Matta-Clark was able to join multiple structures with a single cut—opened up for a "monocular, 'cyclopean,' projection, there to reveal unexpected patterns—of a virtually Cubist complexity—torn from the architectural fabric by the crossover between the rectangular divisions of the two interiors and the passage of the elegantly oval conic sections that laid them bare. From the proper angle on the street below, the new edifice of the Pompidou was visible, miniaturized as if seen through the wrong end of a telescope."¹

A pair of praying hands on view near the installation of *Conical Intersect* in the exhibition at David Zwirner are intimately, if indirectly, connected to the project: as Matta-Clark was removing layer upon layer from the abandoned buildings, he allegedly fell one day, landing on his back. The statue hands, dislodged from a forgotten den somewhere, dropped down on his chest, temporarily assuming the position of his own hands. Their fragmented appearance dates back to the French Revolution of the late 1700s, when thousands of religious statues were desecrated. Matta-Clark kept the hands as a personal souvenir from the project.

¹ Thomas Crow, "Gordon Matta-Clark," in Corinne Diserens, ed., *Gordon Matta-Clark* (London: Phaidon Press, 2003), pp. 95-96.

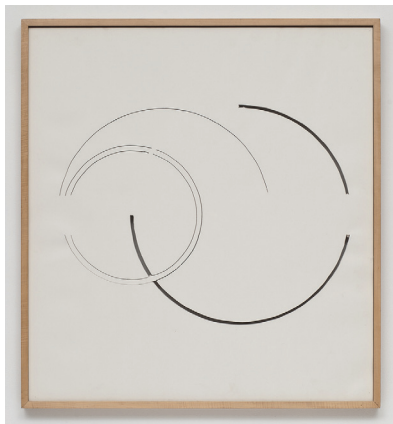


Office Baroque, 1977

Office Baroque, one of Matta-Clark's largest and most iconic cuts, was executed in Antwerp, Belgium, following an invitation by the city's Internationaal Cultureel Centrum - ICC. In this complex architectural project, tear-shaped holes were sawed into the floors of an unused 1930s office building, creating a series of overlapping circles through all five floors. Matta-Clark saw this intervention as an "enforced opportunity...to develop ideas about spatial rhythm and complexity that I might otherwise never have done...an almost musical score in which a fixed set of elements played their way up and down through the layers. By accident the rings left by a cup of tea on a drawing suggested organizing the piece around two semi-circular areas of slightly different diameters. These began on the first floor providing the constant motif as they were cut up through the floors and roof. Where these circles crossed, a peculiar, almost row-boat shaped hole resulted and was mutated from floor to floor as structural beams and available floor space dictated."¹

The transformation of the building generated a series of uncanny and somewhat vertiginous photographs, many of which were exhibited at the Internationaal Cultureel Centrum in 1977. These unique works create a disorienting perspective of the cuts that reflects an innovative approach to the convergence of photography and the medium of architecture.

¹ Gordon Matta-Clark, "Interview with Gordon Matta-Clark, September 1977," in Corinne Diserens, ed., *Gordon Matta-Clark* (London: Phaidon Press, 2003), p. 190.



Cut Drawing Pad, 1976

This *Cut Drawing* demonstrates how Matta-Clark applied his sculptural and architectural sensibility to two-dimensional, graphic art. He used a small electric saw to make geometric incisions into a thick stack of white paper. The resulting "cut" drawing thus reflects an interest in the extraction of space in order to redefine and transform structural mass.

The circular and semi-circular shapes presented here echo the cuts made as part of *Office Baroque* in Antwerp in 1977. While the original incisions made into the unused office buildings in the Belgian city no longer exist, like the rest of the artist's architectural cuts, this drawing expresses the intricacies and physicality of the project. In addition to presenting a direct visual link, it also offers a window onto Matta-Clark's working method and how "layering" in general was approached.



Descending Steps for Batan, 1977

Descending Steps for Batan was the title of a performance by Matta-Clark at the Yvon Lambert Gallery in Paris in 1977. Like several works planned and executed by the artist around this time, it appears to have a strong autobiographical dimension, evoking his twin brother's death the previous year from a fall from a window in their shared apartment in SoHo. The brother is directly referenced in the title as "Batan," a nickname for Sebastian.

Thomas Crow describes the lengthy performance: "During the run of his show...[Matta-Clark] worked away at a large hole in the dirt floor of the cave, one side of which he sculpted into shallow descending stairs; visitors could observe him at work through a square hole of equal size in the street-level gallery floor, a single lamp dangling at the end of a cord providing all the illumination of work and performer. He called the performance and its residue *Descending Steps for Batan*. The direction of the gesture and the invitation is precisely opposite to *Jacob's Ladder* [Matta-Clark's contribution to the 1977 Documenta in Kassel, Germany, which consisted of a rope ladder suspended from the top of a tall chimney], but the burrowing to nowhere (only the end of the exhibition arbitrarily stopped the descent) cancels the redemptive overtones of the sweeping rope structure, Jacob's gate of heaven at Documenta. At the end of the exhibition, his crude earthen architecture in reverse was filled in and obliterated as any kind of physical monument."¹

¹ Thomas Crow, "Gordon Matta-Clark," in Corinne Diserens, ed., *Gordon Matta-Clark* (London: Phaidon, 2003), p. 106.



Substrait (Underground Dailies), 1976

Substrait (Underground Dailies), Matta-Clark's underground portrait of New York, reveals a view of the American city never seen by most people. Burial chambers underneath the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, tracks running deep below Grand Central Station, and sewage structures with underground rivers streaming through, combine to make up the urban tissue beneath the surface—vividly compared in the explanatory dialogues accompanying the film as “arteries and veins.”

The film comprises footage from several “underground dailies” produced by Matta-Clark in conjunction with an exhibition at the Holly Solomon Gallery in SoHo in 1976. Over the course of the show, the artist's daily trips below the city would be screened the following day, adding a performative dimension to the project while also enhancing the idea of reportage. The immediacy with which the short films were made available to the public was particularly noteworthy at the time.

Matta-Clark's physical handling of the film also represented a novel departure from existing work in the medium, and incorporated methods used in his photcollages and even his architectural cuts themselves. According to Jane Crawford, “Gordon had cut the film exactly like he would cut photographs. He would cut single perforated film to double perforated film, emulsion to base—he would have some with a magnetic strip of sound, and some with an optical strip of sound.”¹

Presenting an edited version of the footage shown at the Holly Solomon Gallery in 1976, *Substrait (Underground Dailies)* includes the following parts:

Croton Aqueduct (section between 42nd Street and Central Park)

The 13th Street Pump Station

Grand Central Station and New York Central tracks

Cathedral of St. John the Divine

Archer Avenue extension of the New York City Subway

New York City Water Tunnel No. 3

¹ Jane Crawford cited in James Attlee and Lisa Le Feuvre, *Gordon Matta-Clark: The Space Between*. Exh. cat. (Glasgow: Centre for Contemporary Art, 2003), p. 91.



Sous-sols de Paris, 1977

With *Sous-sols de Paris*, Matta-Clark takes his camera below the ground in central Paris to multi-level tunnels and structures long abandoned. Through minimal editing, the underground—illuminated only by handheld torches—is contrasted with brief clips from the streets above. Matta-Clark thus creates a dialogue between new and old Paris, the visible and hidden city, both light and sinister. Deep below L'Opera and Les Halles, a neatly arranged wall composed of thousands of human skulls and bone fragments dating from the days of the Revolution finds a curious match with countless wine bottles, safely stored in the cool temperatures. The film ends, perhaps appropriately, with a wine tasting.

Matta-Clark created a small number of photo-collages with imagery from the excursion. These were produced by exposing a roll of photographic paper to light bit by bit, continuously winding and unwinding the spool in the process. Arranged vertically, the collage-like effect thus generated matches the “layered” nature of the underground visit, in some cases literally showing “above and below” scenes from particular locations. The large-scale, sculptural collages have an almost totemic appearance, and present a further example of Matta-Clark's interest in the crossovers between different media.

While the below ground imagery was new to the artist, the project as a whole carried an autobiographical dimension, evoking exploratory childhood outings undertaken with his brother Sebastian during visits to their stepmother in Paris. Executed a year after Sebastian's death, *Sous-sols de Paris* can be seen to complement the performance *Descending Steps for Batan* at the Yves Lambert gallery the same year.

The English transcript of the film's French dialogue, with archaeological details of the underground tour, is available for the first time. An exhibition copy can be found at the front desk of the gallery.



Jacob's Ladder, 1977

Jacob's Ladder, Matta-Clark's ambitious project for Documenta 6 in Kassel, Germany, in 1977, originally included plans to develop an aerial dwelling site suspended some fifteen feet above ground, but ultimately took on the shape of a long woven net attached to a thirty-story-tall chimney, which brave visitors could ascend one thin batten at a time. The title of the installation was chosen by Matta-Clark for its analogy to the Old Testament story of Jacob's dream, of a staircase connecting Heaven and Earth. By implication, it is also a reference to brotherly rivalry, as this vision occurred while Jacob was fleeing from his brother Esau, with whom he had been fighting for inheritance. As such, the project contains perhaps another reference to the loss of artist's twin brother Sebastian a year earlier.

*Sky Hook / Balloon Buildings, 1978*

These diagrammatic sketches reflect Matta-Clark's idealistic interest in architecture and urban renewal. Based on vigorous research into the mechanics of ballooning, they outline tent-like towers attached to large inflatable shapes. Balancing somewhere between actual proposals for flexible, economic housing networks and playful fantasies, they map out alternative spaces in defiance of existing social environments and even gravity.

James Attlee provides further details of Matta-Clark's intention behind the diagrams: "He imagined a city in which the redundant spaces between high buildings could be used to float canopies of vegetation, providing oxygen and shade to the urban environment, using the waste heat generated by the city as a source of life. He envisaged a balloon tethered to a rooftop, below it a network of rigging giving access to a series of circular platforms on which a person could sit, high above the city, as though on a magic carpet or in the crow's nest of an old-fashioned sailing ship."¹

Matta-Clark envisioned *Sky Hook*—which borrowed its title from Russian constructivist El Lissitzky's plans for an elevated transportation system in 1920s Moscow—during the last year of his life. Abruptly cut short by his death at age 35, the project never advanced beyond the diagrammatic stage and remains, in Attlee's words, "dreams...informed by a potent combination of Russian socialist utopianism, science fiction, and contemporary American ballooning magazines."² With more time and research, it remains anybody's guess whether the dreams would have become concretized, their urgency intensified by advances in technology and the growing pressure on large cities with ever-increasing energy consumptions. As they stand, the drawings cautiously indicate what a second decade in Matta-Clark's career might have encompassed.

¹ James Attlee and Lisa Le Feuvre, *Gordon Matta-Clark: The Space Between*. Exh. cat. (Glasgow: Centre for Contemporary Art, 2003), p. 65

² *Ibid.*, p. 64