

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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**PRESS RELEASE**

**Ray Johnson**

May 5 – June 24, 2017

Opening: Thursday, May 4, 6:00 to 8:00 PM

Matthew Marks is pleased to announce **Ray Johnson**, the next exhibition in his gallery at 523 West 24th Street. Included are almost forty collages spanning nearly three decades.

Johnson is one of the more eccentric figures in contemporary art. Born in Detroit in 1929, he attended the legendary Black Mountain College, where he met and befriended many of the leading avant-garde figures of the day. He moved to New York in 1949 and began exhibiting abstract paintings. Within a few years, however, he had rejected painting in favor of collage. That medium's combinatory principles became central to his art, which grew to encompass performance, conceptual art, and sculpture. By the late 1950s his practice of mailing collages to friends and acquaintances had become a primary artistic focus, directly giving rise to the Mail Art movement.

Johnson's collage works, which often incorporate celebrity images cut from magazines, are considered among the earliest examples of Pop art. He exhibited them at galleries and museums in the 1960s and 1970s, but starting in the late 1970s, with only a few exceptions, he stopped showing his work publicly. He never stopped working, however, and by 1995, when he committed suicide by jumping off a bridge, he had created an extraordinarily rich and varied body of work.

It was during Johnson's reclusive final decades that he created most of the works in this exhibition, building them up in layers of magazine clippings, found photographs, and handmade marks. He worked in a nonlinear way, often setting aside a collage for years before picking it up, adding to it, and setting it aside again. This layering can be seen in the works' content too, with images and phrases (such as "mouth of the month," "Janis Joplin's mother's hat," and "I love you Alice B. Toklas") joined together in associative chains that are equal parts comedy and poetry.

As Johnson grew increasingly isolated, he seemed to build a world within his work, filling it with a peculiar mix of celebrities, writers, and members of the New York art world. A partial list from this exhibition alone: David Bowie, William Burroughs, John Cage, Salvador Dalí, Candy Darling, James Dean, Jacques Derrida, Agnes Gund, Arsenio Hall, Peter Hujar, Jasper Johns, Sophia Loren, Agnes Martin, Louise Nevelson, River Phoenix, Paloma Picasso, Lou Reed, Gertrude Stein, and Shirley Temple.

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated 192-page catalogue with an essay by Brad Gooch.

Johnson's work has been shown in museums across the United States and Europe, including one-person exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, and the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Oslo. In 1999 the Whitney Museum of American Art organized "Ray Johnson: Correspondences," the first full-scale retrospective of his work.

**Ray Johnson** is on view at 523 West 24th Street from May 5 to June 24, 2017, Tuesday through Saturday, from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM.

For additional information, please contact Jacqueline Tran at 212-243-0200 or [jacqueline@matthewmarks.com](mailto:jacqueline@matthewmarks.com)