

Introducing Tony Conrad: A Retrospective

Throughout his career, Tony Conrad (American, 1940–2016) forged his own path as an unparalleled innovator in painting, sculpture, film, video, performance, and installation, tenaciously working to challenge the boundaries between artistic categories while helping to define a vast range of culture, including rock music and public television. Conrad once declared in an interview, “You don’t know who I am, but somehow, indirectly, you’ve been affected by things I did.” This exhibition, Conrad’s first museum survey, focuses on works he presented in museum and gallery settings and is part of an ongoing reappraisal of his creative achievement.

Conrad’s first film, *The Flicker*, 1966—a stroboscopic experiment famous for its attack on both the filmic medium and its audience’s senses—soon led to projects in which he pickled, deep-fried, roasted, and otherwise treated film as a sculptural and performative material. He invented musical instruments out of materials as humble as a Band-Aid tin and presented these as sculptures themselves. In the 1980s, his films about power relations in the army and in prisons assembled large casts of collaborators. Representative examples from these projects are joined in this exhibition by Conrad’s last sculptures and installations, which evoked and critiqued what he perceived as an emerging culture of surveillance, control, and containment.

A deep-rooted contributor to the cultural life of Buffalo, Conrad was a professor in the Department of Media Study at the University at Buffalo from 1976 until his death. Fittingly, this exhibition is divided into simultaneous presentations at the Albright-Knox and the University at Buffalo Art Gallery at the Center for the Arts.

Many community partners have planned associated installations, screenings, performances, and more in honor of Conrad through May 2018. For more information, please visit our website.

This exhibition is accompanied by a special audio tour featuring archival recordings of Conrad discussing his work; free audio wands are available downstairs at the Admissions Desk. The audio tour includes excerpts from interviews produced and recorded by Tyler Hubby; the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; and Gareth Long, Kunsthalle Wien.

Introducing Tony Conrad: A Retrospective is organized by the Albright-Knox Art Gallery with the support of the University at Buffalo Art Galleries. Its presentation in Buffalo is organized by Cathleen Chaffee, Chief Curator, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, and Rachel Adams, Senior Curator, University at Buffalo Art Galleries, with Tina Rivers Ryan, Assistant Curator, Albright-Knox Art Gallery.

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The Flicker, 1966

16mm film, black and white, sound

Running time: 30 minutes, looped

Courtesy Tony Conrad Archives

In 1962, Conrad graduated from Harvard University and moved to New York City, where he associated primarily with experimental musicians and underground filmmakers. He even became roommates with the notorious filmmaker Jack Smith, who prompted Conrad to apply his musical experiments to making movie soundtracks. Conrad's own career as a filmmaker began on March 5, 1963, when he, Smith, and Mario Montez, Smith's muse, became entranced by the flickering light of an old projector. Conrad had learned in college about the effect of this phenomenon on brainwaves, and he was inspired to see if it would be possible to make a mind-bending film based on "harmonies" between frequencies of flickering light made by patterns of black and white frames, in a manner parallel to his work with harmonies between different sound frequencies. Although Conrad almost always screened *The Flicker* in a theater setting, it is presented here on a film loop, recreating the way Conrad's showed the film in a dedicated gallery during the run of an exhibition of his work in Scotland in 2014.

The Flicker became an instant scandal and secured Conrad's lifelong reputation as a filmmaker following its premiere at the New York Film Festival at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts on September 15, 1966. While audience responses ranged from nausea to hallucinations and hypnosis, critics generally emphasized the "minimal" or "structural" qualities of the work, noting how it reduces cinema to its most basic element: the flickering of light through a projector. Although Conrad would go on to make more flicker films, he claimed to not be interested in distilling the essence of film (or any other medium); rather, he was fascinated by the relationship of sound and image, the experience of duration, and new states of consciousness.

This Piece Is Its Name, 1961

Ink on graph paper, three pages on two sheets (page one verso reproduced as facsimile)

Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

In the 1940s and 1950s, the avant-garde composer John Cage attempted to overcome the constraints of musical conventions and his own taste by using eccentric instruments and chance methods in the composition and performance of his music. Inspired by his example, a younger generation of composers and artists emerging in the 1960s sought new ways to redefine ideas about authorship and art. These included Conrad and his friends La Monte Young and Henry Flynt, who all began composing scores made up of verbal instructions instead of traditional musical notation. Shaped by his study of mathematics, Conrad's scores resemble abstract logic games or puzzles, but have absurd or even impossible outcomes: "to perform this piece, do not perform this piece," reads one score, while in another score the phrase ". . . the instructions for performing this piece follow . . ." continues endlessly in a circle. Young and Conrad would continue to undermine the idea of composition through their collaboration in the improvisatory Theatre of Eternal Music (active between 1965 and 1966), while Flynt and Conrad would ramp up their critique of musical and artistic conventions by protesting against the very existence of New York's elite Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts.

Three Loops for Performers and Tape Recorders, November 8–21, 1961
Ink and pencil on paper, pages 1, 2, 3, 4, and 8 from a set of 10 sheets
Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

H, 1965
60 pages of continuous-form IBM computer printouts
Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

In 1962, one of Conrad's computer programming instructors proposed to him the idea of making a computer-animated film. After he graduated and moved to New York City, one of his first jobs was as a programmer for *LIFE* magazine's circulation department, where he used an IBM printer to make *H*, which he later called "a minimalist print work in a format analogous to film." An early example of what was then called "computer art" and the first of Conrad's many objects that cross the boundaries between multiple artistic disciplines, *H* relates to computer programming, literature, printmaking, and even sculpture. As Conrad suggests, it is also like a film: its columns of capital Hs evoke successive rectangular frames on a filmstrip, and its scrolling pages create a continuous line of paper like celluloid on a reel. *H* relates to music, too, as the repetition of the same letter over and over recalls Conrad's drone music, in which a single note could be repeated or sustained for extended durations.

Cycles of 3s and 7s, 1977
Video, black and white, sound, transferred to digital
Running time: 12 minute excerpt of 23 minute original
Courtesy Tony Conrad Archives and Greene Naftali, New York

Conrad's first video work, *Cycles of 3s and 7s*, resembles much video art of the 1970s: recorded in a single take, the grainy footage documents the artist performing a repetitive action for the camera in his studio. Conrad was a math major in college and former computer programmer, and here he punches calculations into a handheld calculator, assuming the demeanor of a friendly math teacher (a role he would reprise in the cable program *Homework Helpline*, 1994–95, also on view in this exhibition). However, the video is as much about music as it is about math, building on Conrad's lifelong rejection of traditional methods of composition. By repeating the numbers three and seven, he creates ratios associated with non-Western music, and as Conrad himself noted, the sound of his voice narrating the calculation of these ratios takes on a rhythmic quality, creating a kind of computer-generated song.

In addition to being a video about music, *Cycles of 3s and 7s* is also a video about computers. As Conrad later explained, although the digital hand-held calculator was a fairly new consumer product, it was nonetheless an accessible machine, something even a child could operate. By deliberately using a familiar technology, Conrad hoped to question the "fetishization" of computers by some media artists:

I was at such a point of skepticism [about the uses of computers in art] that I felt that it would be interesting to do computer art using a computer much simpler than the kinds of computers that were being fetishized at the time, because the tendency at that point in terms of techno-culture was for the artist to access the most lavishly endowed computer possible. . . . It was an almost erotically driven fantasy of control

and sophistication, which I wanted to debunk.

Pi, 1978

Audio recording on cassette tapes transferred to digital

Originally recorded at ZBS studio with Tony Conrad, voice, and Joe Kos, percussion

Running time: 8 minutes, 57 seconds

Courtesy Tony Conrad Archives

Pi (π) is unusual number: while its digits (3.14159 . . .) appear random, they in fact express the very specific ratio between the circumference and diameter of a circle. Because pi is a ratio, and ratios are the basis of both rhythm and harmony in music, Conrad decided to use the number to generate a song—one that would be both random and not random, just like pi itself. He devised a conceptual system that relates each digit of pi to a measure; as he later explained:

A measure of three beats is followed by a measure of one beat, then by a measure of four, then one, then five, and so forth, following the digits in pi. Since this interpretation of the digits leaves a zero ill-defined, I decided to use the zeros in pi as punctuation. When a zero appears, there is a brief interlude or cadenza, and when two zeros finally appear in a row, the piece ends.

With this project, Conrad subtly argues that the use of certain ratios in music is a cultural convention rather than an immutable law; there is no fixed reason any ratio or system could or could not be used to compose a song or, by extension, a work of art.

To create his *Yellow Movies*, Conrad painted black rectangular frames in the same proportions as traditional movie screens on large pieces of rolled photographic backdrop paper. He coated the interior of the rectangle with paint he knew would yellow and darken with time, and directed viewers to wait. Thinking about the way furniture pulled away from a wall after a period of years leaves a “photographic” impression—its darkened outline—Conrad recalled, “I realized that if I used cheap house paint as an emulsion, people who wanted to be in my *Yellow Movies* could stand against them for, say, a year or two and leave their trace embedded in them in a monumental way.”

The *Yellow Movies* were mainly painted between the end of 1972 and early 1973, and were first exhibited in a one day only screening at the Millennium Film Workshop in New York City on March 10, 1973. Although they looked very much like the Minimalist painting emerging in the 1960s and '70s, Conrad saw these not as paintings at all but rather as incredibly long films that far surpassed previous durational works such as Andy Warhol’s *Empire*, 1964 (running time: 8 hours, 5 minutes) or **** (Four Stars), 1967 (running time: 25 hours). Even when they are not on view, Conrad’s *Yellow Movies* are always “screening,” their surfaces reflecting the passage of time itself. Conrad exhibited the *Yellow Movies* a few times in the 1970s, including at Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center in Buffalo, but they were not seen again until the mid-2000s. It was only at that time, with the reemergence of the *Yellow Movies*, that Conrad came to be widely appreciated outside Buffalo for his work as a visual artist as well as a musician, filmmaker, and educator.

Yellow Movie 12/14–15/72, 1972

Emulsion: Citron tinted low lustre enamel, Speedflex Latex Colorizer, Brooklyn Paint & Varnish Co.

Base: White seamless paper

Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

Yellow Movie 2/2/73, 1973

Emulsion: Antique white undercoat, Provincial Colorglaze Enamel, Martin Senour Paint No. 226

Base: White seamless paper

Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

Yellow Movie 2/23–24/73, 1973

Emulsion: Sterling gray low lustre enamel (water based, thick textured)

Base: Dusty rose seamless paper

Collection Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo
Charles Clifton Fund, by exchange, 2012

Yellow Movie 3/5–6/73, 1973

Emulsion: Clear gloss varnish, Super Valspar No. 10, thin textured

Base: Studio white seamless paper

Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

Yellow Movie 4/3/73, 1973

Emulsion: Honey beige low lustre enamel (water based), tinted midtone base

Base: Studio white seamless paper

Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

Yellow Movie—35mm Format #3, 1973, and Yellow Movie—35mm Format #4, 1973

Dispersion varnish on canvas

Courtesy Marc Selwyn, Los Angeles

These two paintings are part of a group of four that Conrad made shortly after undertaking the larger *Yellow Movies* on view in this gallery. The *Yellow Movie* paintings are made using cheap white paint on photographic backdrop paper. All materials used in art change—for example, even high-quality white paint can yellow over the decades and centuries—but these changes are so slow that the human eye generally cannot perceive them. For Conrad, the change that his materials would inevitably undergo was analogous to an excruciatingly long photographic exposure. For him, these works were a bridge between the relatively marginalized world of avant-garde cinema and the elevated domain of abstract painters.

In some ways, this pair of small canvases served a very practical didactic purpose: in the early 1970s Conrad wanted to share his concept of painting as a kind of durational film, but

the *Yellow Movie* paintings were often enormous and awkward to transport. If those works evoked the movie screen one might see in a theater, these diminutive and easily portable *35mm Format* paintings are scaled to a small single frame of film. Conrad deliberately painted these on used canvases and left visible traces of the earlier materials. He described this as his response to people who had looked at a *Yellow Movie* and simply seen another painting. These somewhat messy *35mm Format* works could not be confused with just another pristine Minimalist canvas.

Yellow TV, February 3, 1973

Citron Yellow Daylight Fluorescent Naz-Dar Screen Process Ink, Naz-Dar No. 5594, and Scrink Transparent Base, Craftint No. 493, applied over Super White Process Color, Art-Brite No. 700, on Saturated Felt
Courtesy Jacob Kassay

Yellow TV, February 3, 1973

Citron Yellow Daylight Fluorescent Naz-Dar Screen Process Ink, Naz-Dar No. 5594, and Scrink Transparent Base, Craftint No. 493, applied over Super White Process Color, Art-Brite No. 700, on Saturated Felt
Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

Yellow TV, February 3, 1973

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Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

Soon after Conrad made his series of *Yellow Movie* paintings (on view in this gallery) he extended his interest in manipulating the process of filmmaking to make "movies" that he presented as objects. Photography's early pioneers had been kitchen-sink chemists and inventors, but as film production and processing had become increasingly mechanized and professionalized, Conrad wrote, "it seemed terribly corny that Kodak had taken all the fun in making the film, making lenses, making cameras, even processing the film for itself." Like the *Yellow Movie* paintings, Conrad's pickled, batter-coated, stir-fried, electrified, shattered, deep-fried, woven, and roasted films were homemade productions that attempted to leave moviemaking's technological advances and mechanization behind.

Some of the food films can actually be screened and others—such as the ones on view in this gallery—are objects that you can see, and possibly smell, but usually cannot watch as movies. During this period, Conrad shifted his focus from the time involved in watching his works to the means and processes involved in fabricating them, and he equated the act of cooking to film processing. Rather than continuing to shoot film, labor over an optical printer, and project the results in a black box cinema, Conrad deliberately adopted what was traditionally considered "women's work" and set about adapting culinary recipes and cooking film in the family kitchen. The title of each work refers to the cooking method and often to the Eastman Kodak catalog numbers for the film stock used. His *Sukiyaki Film* performances famously featured him battering and cooking film before an audience and then "projecting" the result by throwing it at the screen, but most of these objects are too fragile to be screened in any way. To rectify this problem, Conrad stored the films in padded

film cans that he would hold up and display to the audience during lectures or include in exhibitions alongside his paintings.

Deep Fried 7302, 1973

Fried EK 7302 16mm film stock

Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

Roast Kalvar, 1974

Roasted Kalvar 16mm film stock

Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

During his time teaching at Antioch College in Ohio, Conrad learned about an alternative film product called Kalvar. Since Kalvar is only sensitive to UV light, the artist could manipulate the material under normal room light without affecting the image. Conrad made this work by winding, coiling, and oven-roasting great lengths of Kalvar, using the heat to “expose” it. This labor-intensive process was a parody of filmmaking and its deconstruction. Conrad presented the resulting *Roast Kalvar* as a film sculpture.

Recipe for Sukiyaki, December 17, 1973, and Conrad performing *7360 Sukiyaki (1973)*, ca. 1973–74 (printed 2018)

Laserjet and inkjet prints

Courtesy Tony Conrad Archives

Conrad preparing *Roast Kalvar* (second iteration), Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio, 1974 (printed 2018)

Inkjet prints

Photos: Allan L. Jones

Courtesy Tony Conrad Archives

Photochromic Emulsion Loop, 1974

16mm film in film canister

Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

Flicker Matte, 1974

Kalvar 16mm film stock and microfilm

Courtesy Collection of Phillip Aarons and Shelley Fox Aarons

The vertical strands in this work are microfilm—they lack the sprocket holes that are required to screen film—while the horizontal strands are perforated Kalvar film: a material only sensitive to extremely bright light. Once he had completed this weaving, Conrad exposed the mat to direct sunlight and then treated it with fixative chemicals in a bathtub.

Conrad described how he envisioned the black and white frames of film could theoretically be unwoven and projected, but as a whole the weaving could also be held up to the light and be "projected" in that limited way. "I thought that for me it made a much, much more effective and intimate kind of viewing experience in this form, so it remains [woven]." The title of this work, and its alternating frames of light and dark film, directly connect it to Conrad's best-known film, *The Flicker*, 1966, on view by the entrance to this gallery. "Matte" is a technical term referring to film that restricts some light from passing through the camera lens, and it is often used when creating special effects. *Flicker Matte* was included in Conrad's December 1977 solo exhibition at Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center in Buffalo along with his *Yellow Movie* paintings and other works on view in this gallery, such as *Pickled 3M 150*, *Roast Kalvar*, and his fried films.

Selections from *Pickled 3M 150*, 1974

Pickled 3M 150 16mm film stock in twelve canning jars with vinegar, vegetables, sugar, salt, and spices

Pickled E.K. 7302-244-0502, May 2006

16mm film stock preserved in three pickling jars with vinegar, vegetables, and spices
Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

Conrad made this series of celluloid sculptures by following a classic recipe for pickled onions from *The Fannie Farmer Cookbook*. By embalming a short strand of raw film stock in a vinegar-filled mason jar, he was, in effect, extending its duration for years beyond that of filmed, processed, and projected stock. As he once described, "It seemed to me that this was a mechanism for permanently implanting the film in a situation where it would be clearly unapproachable. The mystery, for example, of the fact that the middle part of the film is never seen." As a first-time canner, Conrad made a few errors in his first batch of pickled film sculptures from 1973. For example, he used zinc lids, which corroded and allowed the liquid contents of the jars to evaporate. The artist prepared a second set of pickled film sculptures as part of his contribution to the 2006 Whitney Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. He assembled new versions in a performance outside the museum's café, which were later displayed in a vitrine in the exhibition.

Man Misspelling His Own Name (OTNY), June 17, 1977

Color photobooth photographic strip

Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

Top row

Untitled (surface study ed. 12/76), 1977

Untitled (surface study ed. 2/77), 1977

Middle row

Quadrilateral, 1977

Untitled, 1977

Bottom row

Untitled, 1977

Photo corners on paper
Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne

Beholden to Victory, 1983

Super 8mm film shot for *Hail the Fallen* (1981) in 1980, color, sound, transferred to video and digital

Running time: 26 minutes

Courtesy Squeaky Wheel Film and Media Art Center, Buffalo

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Conrad created a series of genre films as part of his investigation into authority and his attempts to dismantle and reenvision structures of power. *Beholden to Victory* focuses on two military types: the officer and the soldier. Conrad filmed the work in 1980 during his time as a visiting professor at University of California San Diego, which is located on the site of a decommissioned Marine Corps base, Camp Matthews. He enlisted friends and students to act in the film, including artists Mike Kelley and Tony Oursler. Conrad presented situations for the actors to follow but did not give them explicit direction or dialogue. The film's relatively improvised scenes include soldiers drilling and procuring supplies, officers prepping for battle, and soldiers getting lost in the desert. Conrad created several different versions of *Beholden to Victory*, two of which are included in this exhibition. A twenty-six-minute version from 1980–83 is on view here. In the version on view at the University at Buffalo, completed in 2007, Conrad took advantage of digital technology to introduce variability into the work's sequencing, something he had long intended but had been unable to accomplish using older film or video technologies.

When making the film, Conrad imagined the viewers' role as analogous to that of the officers: they hold the power to accept or reject his film. At many of the work's screenings in the 1980s and in the 2007 version, Conrad gave material form to this power dynamic by requiring audience members to choose a "side"—military or civilian—before watching the video. In this way, the audience was forced actively to visualize power dynamics—not only between officers and soldiers but also between the filmmaker and the viewers of his work.

Four untitled paintings, 2010

Acrylic on board

Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

These four small paintings are part of a larger body of work in which Conrad investigates the origins of linear perspective. One painting includes a transfer print from a sixteenth-century manual on linear perspective, and another includes a radically foreshortened version of Albrecht Dürer's (German, 1471–1528) woodcut *Draughtsman Making a Perspective Drawing of a Reclining Woman*, ca. 1525.

Untitled (. . . mine if you . . . yours [III]), 2009

Untitled (forgotten treasures), 2009

Untitled (. . . mine if you . . . yours [II]), 2009

Untitled (looking swell, dear), 2009

Acrylic and underwear on bulletin board
Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York
Gate, 2016
Regalo Easy Step Extra Tall Walk Thru Gate
Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

In 2009, Conrad made forty-five “underwear paintings” with standard-sized pinboards, pushpins, various undergarments, and acrylic paint. The pinboards display and support the underwear, and the painted frames—which are reminiscent of the artist’s *Yellow Movie* paintings on view in the adjacent gallery—focus our attention. When he made these works, Conrad was preoccupied at times with the indignities of ageing. He told an interviewer that he chose extraordinarily unsexy and oversized underwear, as might be worn in the twilight of life, in order to challenge societal taboos on this subject: these are difficult works, evocative of ageing, incontinence, and the unforgiving passage of time. This installation recreates a number of details that Conrad designed for his first exhibition of these works: the wall is lined with a cheap fake tile that gives the installation a discomfitingly clinical character, and the paintings are joined by Conrad’s sculpture of a baby gate. Rather than blocking an infant’s path, this gate stands open, suggesting a precipice between childhood and old age, birth and death.

Glass, 2014
Acrylic and graphite on primed canvas
Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

Conrad delivering a lecture in conjunction with a screening of his work for the Independent Film Makers Series, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, November 13, 1974
Black and white half-inch videotape transferred to digital
Running time: 60 minutes, 30 seconds
Courtesy Carnegie Museum of Art

Conrad delivering his four-part Sunday Music Seminar *The Harmonic Series and Applied Basic Arithmetic as Bases for Musical Practices*, West Nile, Brooklyn, March 16, 23, and 30, 2008
Digital audio recordings and looping digital slideshow of photographs
Running time (audio): 8 hours and 31 seconds
Courtesy Tony Conrad Archives

From 2007 to 2010, Conrad had a studio at West Nile, a communal space for experimental artists in Brooklyn. Over the course of three days in 2008, he delivered four lectures there on his own preoccupations in music, such as “just intonation,” a system that uses ratios of whole numbers found in the harmonic series to calculate pitches. In addition to teaching music theory, Conrad’s lectures also explored the history of Western music going back to the ancient Greeks, who held that harmonic intervals reflect a divine or cosmic order. Conrad rebelled against the idea of fixed, hierarchical structures in music, which he compared to oppressive social structures, such as aristocracies. This stance was in keeping with the critique of institutions that enforce hierarchies of value or power, such as museums, schools, prisons, and the army, expressed in earlier artworks. In fact, Conrad

considered the tablecloths on which he wrote during the seminars to be works of art, but they could not be located for this exhibition. Conrad's seminars are represented here by photographs and audio recordings of the lectures.

WiP, 2013

Installation of wooden bars, locks, bunk beds, moving blankets, bedpans, sinks, chair rails, painted walls, and blinking overhead LED lighting, with digital projection of edited footage from *Jail Jail* (1982–83, unfinished; 16mm film, black and white, sound, transferred to digital; running time: 68 minutes, 40 seconds)

Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

In 1982, Conrad invited a number of friends and fellow artists, including Tony Oursler and Mike Kelley, to act in a new film project. The artist envisioned the work as building directly on his investigation into authority and his attempts to dismantle and reenvision structures of power at the heart of *Beholden to Victory* (on view in the adjacent gallery), which was still in progress at the time. According to Conrad, we are "always already confined in many ways. We're captured—under conditions of control and authority." When the actors arrived at the artist's studio, they found that he had built an elaborate jail set, complete with bunk beds, blankets, and sinks. Conrad had decided to engage with the tropes of the "women in prison" genre of B-grade exploitation films, and all of his actors were assigned female characters to play in a film he later called *Jail Jail*. The rules of this prison were explained, and the actors instructed to improvise within these restrictions; Conrad's cameras captured evidence of what occurred when a small group of people created an imaginary penitentiary.

Conrad's plan was to revisit this same set and actors years later with scripted versions of their improvisations from the early 1980s, emphasizing the inherently repetitive nature of prison life as well as the illusion of change and evolution in life outside prison walls. He continued to pay rent on the studio housing the set for decades, eventually buying the building itself. In 2012, Conrad transferred some of the footage to video and used it as part of this installation, *WiP*, which includes a recreation of jail cells from Conrad's original sets and flickering overhead lights that intermittently interrupt the video image. He finally began shooting the long-planned new footage within this 2012 installation, but with the suicide of artist Mike Kelley that same year, *Jail Jail* remained definitively unfinished. *WiP*, which stands for both *Women in Prison* and the homophone "whip," makes visible mechanisms of control and challenges the viewer to choose a place either inside or outside of these restrictions.

Untitled, 2013

Untitled, 2013

Glass with metal hardware

Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

These hanging glass panels, which Conrad alternately called "paintings" and "pictures," were inspired by his interest in the development of linear perspective in Western painting during the Renaissance. More than any other invention in the history of Western art, linear perspective has dominated the way viewers look at painting over the past five hundred years and has defined what makes a "good" work of art: the more successful the mathematically calculated perspectival illusion, the better the painting is deemed to be. In statements related to this body of work, Conrad referred to many of the figures who helped

codify traditional perspective. These include Leon Battista Alberti (Italian, 1404–1472), who compared the painter’s view of a scene to a glass window and introduced the technique of using a gridded frame to transpose an image onto canvas in proper perspective in his 1435 treatise *On Painting*. Each of Conrad’s glass works has a peephole cut out at approximately eye level. This is an absurd addition to an already transparent object; any prospective Peeping Tom would be caught in plain sight. The glass works—and Conrad’s small diagrammatic studies for these on view in the adjacent gallery—should be seen as part of the artist’s overarching artistic project of assailing authority of all sorts, including the almost invisible authority of mathematical perspective that governs the way we see in art. Shown together with the jail cells and video that comprise Conrad’s *WiP* (on view in this gallery), these works are part of the artist’s overall investigation of control and surveillance, visibility and invisibility, inside and outside.

Waterworks, 1972/2012

Projection of 16mm film, color, sound, transferred to digital

Running time: 18 minutes, 55 seconds

Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

In June 1972, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs sponsored “12 Events for George and the Solstice,” a citywide series of public performances, dance workshops, film projections, and other art-related activities. Conrad organized one of the events, *Waterworks for the Summer Solstice*, with his wife at the time, the underground film actress and director Beverly Grant. Forty participants dressed in white gathered at 10:30 pm on a Wednesday night in the heart of a then-seedy Times Square to enact a kind of mock pagan ritual in honor of the summer solstice. To the surprise of passersby, the participants waved flowers, frolicked, and danced to music orchestrated by Rhys Chatham. Decades later, Conrad would edit footage of the event into *Waterworks*, a seemingly nostalgic celebration of the social misfits, outcasts, and transients of the neighborhood, as well as of Conrad and Grant’s bohemian circle. However, in making clear that the original event was a staged production rather than an organic gathering of friends, the project also explores how communities are formed, represented, and remembered through media.

Loose Connection, 1973/2011

Super 8mm film, color, sound, transferred to digital

Running time: 54 minutes, 54 seconds

Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

To make *Loose Connection*, Conrad built a camera that moved in two directions simultaneously: it could be rolled backward and forward on a waist-high rig made with baby carriage wheels, and it automatically rotated 360 degrees. Conrad recorded the sound continuously, but he set up the camera to only shoot several frames at regularly spaced intervals as it turned. This innovative apparatus was put to use only once, in a continuous shoot that followed Conrad and his family from their home in midtown Manhattan to the local A&P. Largely because Conrad did not have the money to finish the project, the collection of exposed rolls of 8mm film remained in storage for thirty-eight years. When he finally developed the film and transferred it to digital video in 2011, he was able to realize the project as planned: a jittery, flickering version of gritty, even intense everyday reality in New York City where the illusion of motion that film normally creates is shattered and sound and image remain only loosely connected.

Tiding over till Tomorrow, 1977

35mm slides with recorded piano performance by Conrad and text by Anne Turyn, transferred to digital

Running time: 35 minutes

Collection Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York

Gift of the artist and Greene Naftali, New York, 2012

Conrad debuted *Tiding over till Tomorrow* as a live performance at The Kitchen in New York City in 1977, where it took the form of a dual slide projection with live piano accompaniment by the artist. In this 2012 installation version, the slides were transferred to digital projection and Conrad's live accompaniment was replaced by a contemporaneous recording of him playing piano. The piano accompaniment belongs to a larger durational performance project that Conrad called *Music and the Mind of the World*. Between 1976 and 1982, the artist—who was known as a violinist and had no formal piano training—recorded himself experimenting at length on the piano. The photographs that make up *Tiding over till Tomorrow* were taken by Conrad and are joined by a number of enigmatic text slides by the artist Anne Turyn.

The work's haunting and fractured narrative seems to depict different aspects of the art scene in Buffalo at the time; some images capture artists and performers gathered in Conrad's own studio and apartment. *Tiding over till Tomorrow* is remarkable for its use of still photography to show action from multiple, even conflicting, viewpoints, undermining the illusion of a stable or coherent narrative. The performers in the photographs include Dan Conrad, Malou Conrad, Ted Conrad, Leora Eiferman, Richard Henderson, Karen Kazinski, Fran Keeman, Steven King, Paul Lemberg, Jason, Tony, and Joey Lucca, Una McClure, Linda Neaman, Kevin Noble, Ken Pelka, Anne Turyn, and Conrad himself.

Video was arguably Conrad's most significant medium as a visual artist. Although this retrospective contains many videos, shown both on monitors and as projections, several factors have limited its ability to represent the true depth and breadth of Conrad's video production. In organizing this exhibition, it was necessary to respect how important the *context* and specificity of presentation and performance were to this artist. His decisions about where and how to show his artworks were always carefully considered, as were his decisions about when, if ever, to migrate works from one presentation platform to another—for example, from film to video or from a monitor-based presentation to a projection. The exhibition curators decided to present only artworks that Conrad had shown in museum or gallery settings or otherwise made available for distribution in his lifetime, and to do so in the formats—film, video projection, monitor presentation—in which he had chosen to present them.

Conrad organized a single compilation of his videos for public installation and screening: *Authorized to Surrender*, which featured videos created between 1977 and 1990 and was presented daily during the artist's 1991 exhibition at The Kitchen in New York. However, beginning in the 1980s, Conrad was regularly invited to present and speak about his videos at museums, galleries, and art centers around the world, and his work was featured in important video festivals and touring group video compilations. At the same time, he began sharing his work on different public access platforms. Such formats and platforms were how the majority of new video art was seen during this period, however, these were usually one-

off screenings, and none of Conrad's later videos were shared for distribution. Reckoning with Conrad's vast and incredibly rich video production will hopefully be the subject of a future, more focused exhibition survey, but in order to better represent the scope of Conrad's practice within this retrospective, the exhibition's curators have chosen to include an additional selection of videos in this gallery.

Here, Conrad's anthology of his own work, *Authorized to Surrender*, is presented in two different ways. On one monitor, the six-hour program plays through in the order Conrad intended and as he screened it in his lifetime. On another monitor, the individual videos in *Authorized to Surrender* are made available using an "on demand" menu. Because *Authorized to Surrender* only includes work created prior to 1990, the Albright-Knox invited two scholars and Conrad's close collaborators, Anna Scime and Laura McGough, to organize a selection from Conrad's later videos. These are available on a third monitor in this gallery, which also features an "on demand" menu. Finally, although *Authorized to Surrender* contains an excerpt from *Studio of the Streets*, a weekly public access program that Conrad co-organized and filmed on the steps of Buffalo's City Hall, this hardly addresses his sustained advocacy for the public's involvement in media creation and his work with public access television. The fourth monitor in this gallery contains excerpts from another of the artist's public access television projects: *Homework Helpline*, a live call-in talk show Conrad hosted for local school students.

Authorized to Surrender: A Video Retrospective, 1977–90
Single-channel compilation of four videotapes transferred to digital
Running time: 6 hours
Courtesy Tony Conrad Archives and Greene Naftali, New York

In 1976, Conrad was invited by Woody Vasulka, head of the Center for Media Study at the University at Buffalo, to join the faculty as a professor of video. Although before taking the job Conrad had actually never made a video, he quickly immersed himself in the medium and by the early 1990s had created around two dozen video works. The sharing of videos on the internet would not become common for another two decades, so in order to show his works more widely, Conrad organized a six-hour compilation of his videos that could be easily shipped and screened. Entitled *Authorized to Surrender*, the compilation reveals the stylistic range of Conrad's video projects, including simple single-take videos, videos with special effects, and footage of performances. As indicated by the compilation's title, many of these works deal with questions of authority and power, often with a focus on the triangular relationship between Conrad, his work, and its audience. Produced in Buffalo with the support of Squeaky Wheel Film and Media Art Center, which Conrad helped cofound, and Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, where Conrad had his first retrospective in 1977, *Authorized to Surrender* notably was shown in New York City as early as February and March 1991, when it was screened daily in its entirety at The Kitchen, an experimental media space where Conrad presented his work on several occasions beginning in 1972.

Authorized to Surrender: A Video Retrospective, 1977–90
Single-channel compilation of four videotapes transferred to digital and shown as an interactive video program
Running time variable
Courtesy Tony Conrad Archives and Greene Naftali, New York

In 1976, Conrad was invited by Woody Vasulka, head of the Center for Media Study at the University at Buffalo, to join the faculty as a professor of video. Although before taking the job Conrad had actually never made a video, he quickly immersed himself in the medium and by the early 1990s had created around two dozen video works. The sharing of videos on the internet would not become common for another two decades, so in order to show his works more widely, Conrad organized a six-hour compilation of his videos that could be easily shipped and screened. Entitled *Authorized to Surrender*, the compilation reveals the stylistic range of Conrad's video projects, including simple single-take videos, videos with special effects, and footage of performances. As indicated by the compilation's title, many of these works deal with questions of authority and power, often with a focus on the triangular relationship between Conrad, his work, and its audience. Produced in Buffalo with the support of Squeaky Wheel Film and Media Art Center, which Conrad helped cofound, and Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, where Conrad had his first retrospective in 1977, *Authorized to Surrender* notably was shown in New York City as early as February and March 1991, when it was screened daily in its entirety at The Kitchen, an experimental media space where Conrad presented his work on several occasions beginning in 1972.

Homework Helpline, 1994–95

Excerpts of recordings of cablecasts of *Homework Helpline*, broadcast 1994–95 on Buffalo Learning Television

Video, color, sound, transferred to digital

Running time: 10 minutes, 49 seconds

Courtesy Tony Conrad Archives

In 1994, Conrad took over the Buffalo public access television station to host a live call-in talk show for local school students. He realized that many parents did not have the ability to help their kids with difficult homework assignments and saw an untapped potential in broadcasting to address this issue. Although Conrad was a Harvard University-educated mathematician, he seldom solved students' assignments for them during episodes of *Homework Helpline*. Instead, he encouraged their fellow students to call in to help. In an era when students could not rely on the internet for assistance, Conrad facilitated teamwork and collaboration, and gave local students a small but impactful boost in their efforts to succeed in school. *Homework Helpline* is an example of both media activism and community-run independent media, which Conrad was committed to throughout his career. He not only helped cofound Squeaky Wheel Film and Media Art Center in Buffalo but also was actively involved with Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center in Buffalo and ISSUE Project Room in Brooklyn.

Tony Conrad: Later Works in Video, 1989–2011

Curated by Anna Scime and Laura McGough

Single-channel compilation of digital videotapes and videotapes transferred to digital, shown as an interactive video program

Running time variable

Courtesy Tony Conrad Archives

As a complement to *Authorized to Surrender*—an anthology of Conrad's videos from the 1970s and 1980s that was organized by the artist and is on view nearby—this compilation introduces Conrad's later body of video works from the 1990s and beyond. It is curated by Anna Scime and Laura McGough, who both worked with Conrad during his lifetime.

Panopticon, 1988

Five-channel video installation on monitors (color, sound, transferred to digital), with foamboard and cardboard elements, motorized satellite model, two fluorescent lamps, spotlight, pine branch, and a sixty-foot triangular apron of orange plastic fencing
Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

Panopticon was Conrad's most ambitious video art installation to date when it was first installed at Cornell University in 1988 as part of an exhibition about media art in Buffalo. In the project, Conrad stresses the way in which the public is increasingly subject to invasive forms of surveillance in social spaces as diverse as malls and art galleries. *Panopticon* reflects Conrad's reading of new cultural theorists in the 1970s and 1980s, including Michel Foucault. It most explicitly references Foucault's writing on the influence of the panopticon, an eighteenth-century prison designed to reform prisoners' behavior by making them fear that guards could be watching them at any moment. When the work was installed again the following year, in the Albright-Knox's survey *In Western New York 1989*, critic Richard Huntington of *The Buffalo News* described its satire in terms that anticipate today's environment of media saturation and inescapable surveillance:

With Tony Conrad's room-size installation *Panopticon* nothing much is left of the self, pure or otherwise. It is eroded by media and a society that sees the individual as a target of the sales pitch. In this foam-core city with its fluorescent lamps, plastic construction fencing, and motorized satellite model, "reality" is seen only on the five video programs that drone continuously, with which Conrad "sells" us on the pleasures and virtues of "surveillance TV."

Invented Acoustical Tools

In late 1962 Conrad began playing improvised music with La Monte Young, Marian Zazeela, John Cale, and Angus MacLise in a group that was alternately called the Theatre of Eternal Music or the Dream Syndicate. Together, they pioneered the first drone music, utilizing "just intonation" and sustained sound, which sometimes created a hypnotic trance state and aural hallucinations. Their purpose, as Conrad later described it, "was to uproot and dismantle the cultural function of the Western serious music composer." Throughout the 1960s, Conrad's exploration of sound extended beyond the group, however. As he later recounted, he would get together with friends and experiment: "I played a metal ladder with a baseball bat; I bowed on guitars and blew on a 'Tibetan' horn made out of a mike stand; I played feedback through a reverb chamber; I played through a swung loudspeaker in a can at the end of a wire; and I played my lute-guitar by completely loosening one string and hand-tightening it by pulling it against the lute-guitar's body." It wasn't until 2011 that Conrad began exhibiting such radically improvised and playful instruments as sculptures. In these *Invented Acoustical Tools*, punctured milk jugs, PVC tubing, wood scraps, steel banding, cut drumheads, hardware of all varieties, handmade electronics, and refuse are often patched together with common wire, jerry-rigged seams, sloppy glue, and wayward tape. Conrad created subcategories for these works, which evoke the way they may have been used: "Very Quiet Instruments," "Amplified Bowed Instruments," "Instrument Players and Electronic Instruments," "Wind Instruments," "Other and Auxiliary Instruments," and "Theoretical Instruments."

Band-Aid box stereo oscillator, ca. 1969

Metal Band-Aid box, electrical components, and tuning knob

Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

Stereo Guitar Pickup, 1970

Leather strap and electrical pickups

Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne

Golf Club Sleeve Chimes, ca. 1983

Plastic tubes and wood

Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

Electric Bass, ca. 1996

Wood, bass strings, electric pickup, and tuning keys

Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

Ear Bow (with half-size bow), 2000

Bow, pin, and string

Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne

Compositions by La Monte Young, 2001

Frames, offset prints, and tape

Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

Conrad found reasons to look for sound in disparate objects throughout his career, perforating drumheads and canvases and bending a cheap metal stove shield in order to play them like instruments. For a festival at the Albright-Knox in 1976, he bowed a mirror's edge to give voice to its reflections in an outdoor performance called *Sunbow*. Much later, he turned a copy of La Monte Young's *Compositions* into an *Invented Acoustical Tool* by sandwiching the score in a frame and running a bow along the exposed page edges. As Conrad described it, "I decided to 'play' some compositions by La Monte Young—not by performing the scores' instructions, for which Young ordinarily requires a vast fee, but by bowing the stretched piece of paper on which the scores were printed."

In the mid-1960s Conrad was a member of the musical group the Theatre of Eternal Music with Young (whom he had first met in 1959), John Cale, Marian Zazeela, and Angus MacLise. Although Conrad was friends with Young for many years, the two musicians had a falling-out over the recordings Young had made of those early, radically influential experimental sessions. Young was unwilling to make the tapes public unless he was recognized as the sole author of the compositions on the recordings, however Conrad felt strongly that the group had, from its inception, been a collaborative partnership without any one authorial voice. To this day, almost no recordings from the Theatre of Eternal Music

have ever been heard. This particular *Invented Acoustical Tool* seems to be a clear response from Conrad to his old friend Young, a kind of argument that music will find its public—one way or another.

Phonarmonica, 2003

Drill, pipe, drill press hardware, metal mounting flange, 10-inch LP records, plunger heads, and band clamps

Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

Conrad described this *Invented Acoustical Tool* as his version of the glass harmonica. Invented by Benjamin Franklin in 1761, the instrument consists of a sequence of glass bowls fixed to a horizontal bar; the musician touches the dampened edges of the bowls while rotating the bowls using a foot pedal. In place of Franklin's glass bowls, Conrad used LP records, and in place of a foot pedal's gentle spin, Conrad deployed the powerful motor of an electric drill. When performing with his *Phonarmonica*, Conrad almost parodied the familiar role of a DJ. But if Franklin's spinning bowls were designed to generate beautiful, haunting sounds, Conrad's impossibly fast-spinning records could shatter when touched with the phonograph's needle.

Grommet Horn II, 2005

Plastic bottle and rubber grommets

Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne

Untitled, 2014

Plastic bottle and rubber grommets

Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

Untitled (coke bottle), 2014

Plastic bottle and rubber grommets

Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

Bowstring, 2005

Violin, violin string, wood, and clamps

Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne

Hairstring, ca. 2009

Boomball paddle, wood, screws, tuning key, and fiber string

Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

Untitled bowed objects, date unknown
Plastic drumheads
Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

Quartet, 2008
Wooden bench, music wire, pickups, and four speakers
Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne

This work was categorized by Conrad as an "Amplified Bowed Instrument." It sways gently, suspended just above the floor on four wires along the four corners of the bench. These wires, amplified through four channels, can be plucked or bowed. With this work, Conrad eliminated the composer and transferred that responsibility to anyone who comes in contact with his artwork. You are invited to sit down on the bench and gently "play" the strings.

Conrad demonstrating the *Invented Acoustical Tools*, Galerie Buchholz, Cologne, September 7, 2012
Digital video
Running time: 78 minutes, 10 seconds
Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne