

# Tony Conrad

Curator  
Balthazar Lovay

12 MAR – 3 JUL 2022  
Culturgest, Lisboa

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## FOYER

From the very beginning of his career in the early 1960s, Tony Conrad sought to lay bare the authoritarian mechanisms that underpin the media. From the mid-1980s to the late 1990s, when he was a professor in Buffalo, he became involved with a community of media activists and co-founded Squeaky Wheel Film & Media, whose aim was to give voice and image to the voiceless and unseen. Squeaky Wheel sought to offer an alternative to the uniformity of both the mainstream media and official art productions. From its beginnings as a documentation of a 1990 protest demanding space and resources for public television in Buffalo, *Studio of the Streets* quickly evolved into a weekly event filmed in front of the City Hall and broadcasted on public-access TV. For three years, Conrad, along with collaborators Cathleen Steffan and Ann Szyjka, sought out and highlighted the concerns and interests of thousands of Buffalo citizens. As with many of his works featured in this exhibition, *Studio of the Streets* showcases Conrad's collaborative experiments in countering dominant media narratives.

### 1 *Studio of the Streets*,

1991–93/2012

Digital transfer of footage from *Studio of the Streets* (1991–93, color, sound) on monitor, with installation of acrylic panel with vinyl lettering, orange traffic cones, orange-and-white plastic traffic barricades, wheelbarrow with dirt, caution tape, and other elements

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

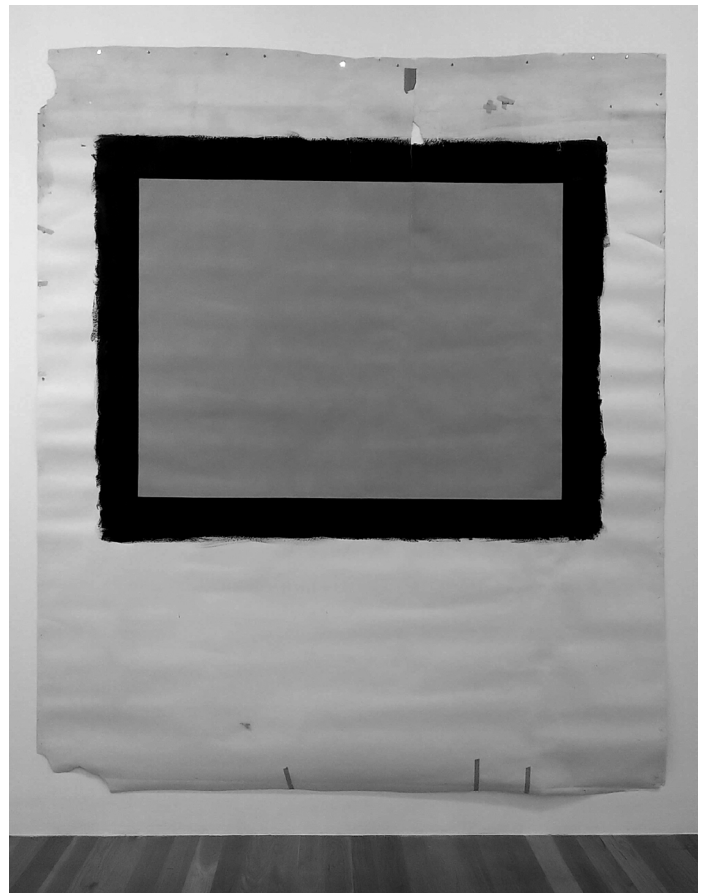
#### ILLUSTRATIONS:

A – *Yellow Movie* 4/3/73, 1973

B – *Fair Ground Electric Horn*, 2003. Courtesy Galerie Buchholz

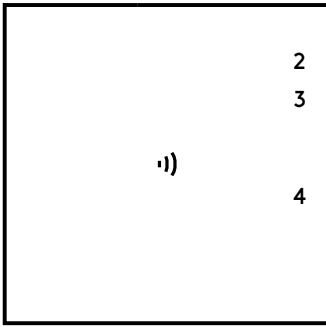
C – Installation view, *WiP*, Greene Naftali, New York, 2013. Courtesy The Tony Conrad Estate and Greene Naftali, New York

D – *This Piece Is Its Name*, 1961. Courtesy the Tony Conrad Estate and Greene Naftali, New York



A

## ROOM 1



This room presents four of Conrad's early artistic endeavours, all of them dealing with the urge to redefine authorship and art. From 1962 through 1965, Conrad played improvised music with La Monte Young, Marian Zazeela, John Cale and Angus MacLise in a group alternately called The Theatre of Eternal Music or the Dream Syndicate. Together, they pioneered the first drone music, playing "just intonation", precise pitch and sustained notes for very long durations, at times giving rise to states of hypnotic trance and aural hallucination.

In *Four Violins (1964)*, Conrad recorded four overdubbed takes of the same precise pitch, reaching the essence of sound and rendering the idea of composition useless. Since none of the recordings of The Theatre of Eternal Music are accessible, *Four Violins (1964)* is a unique testimony of Conrad's radical yet enlightening musical work from that era.

An 18-metre long *Ieporello* printed on IBM computer paper, *H* relates to computer programming, filmmaking (the repetitive rectangular frames), poetry and drone music, encapsulating how Conrad was keen on transferring experiments between media.

*This Piece Is Its Name* is the first known work by Conrad. Inspired by John Cage, Conrad and his friends La Monte Young and Henry Flynt sought new ways to redefine ideas about authorship and art, composing scores made up of written instructions instead of traditional musical notation. Shaped by his study of mathematics, Conrad's scores resembled abstract logic games or puzzles with absurd or even impossible outcomes: "to perform this piece, do not perform this piece."

Playing in this room:

### 1) *Four Violins (1964)*

From the compilation "Tony Conrad, Early Minimalism, vol.1", published by Table of the Elements in a CD format in 1996; 32'30"

Courtesy Table of the Elements

### 2 *This Piece Is Its Name*, 1961

Ink on graph paper, three pages on two sheets

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

### 3 *Three Loops for Performers and Tape Recorders*,

November 8–21, 1961

Ink and pencil on paper

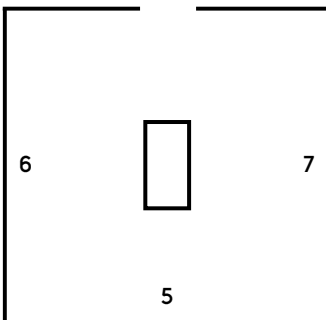
Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

### 4 *H*, 1965

60 pages of continuous-form IBM computer printouts

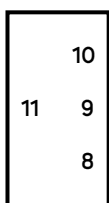
Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

## ROOM 2



After making his acclaimed film *The Flicker*, Conrad expanded the notion of film and long duration with his *Yellow Movies*. On large pieces of photography backdrop paper, Conrad used cheap enamel paint he knew would yellow and darken over time to coat the interiors of black rectangles with the same proportions as movie screens, creating never-ending "films." These films far surpassed previous durational works such as Andy Warhol's movies, insofar as these surfaces record the passage of time endlessly. Soon after, Conrad extended his interest in manipulating the process of filmmaking by adapting culinary recipes to cook film in the family kitchen. His pickled, deep-fried, oven and roasted films were homemade productions that attempted to leave the technology of moviemaking behind. With these films he disrupted traditional cultural categories and common understandings of the spaces in which different types of cultural artefacts are shown.

### SHOWCASE



### 5 *Yellow Movie 12/14–15/72*, 1972

Emulsion: Citron tinted low lustre enamel, Speedflex Latex Colorizer, Brooklyn Paint & Varnish Co.; Base: White seamless paper

### 6 *Yellow Movie 3/5–6/73*, 1973

Emulsion: Clear gloss varnish, Super Valspar No. 10 (thin textured) Base: Studio white seamless paper

### 7 *Yellow Movie 4/3/73*, 1973

Emulsion: Honey beige low lustre enamel (water based), tinted midtone base Base: Studio white seamless paper

### 8 *Deep Fried 7302*, 1973

Fried EK 7302 16mm film stock

### 9 *Roast Kalvar*, 1974

Roasted Kalvar 16mm film stock

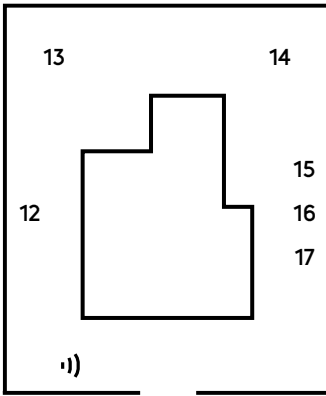
### 10 Conrad performing *7368 Sukiyaki* (1973–74).

### 11 *Selection of five Pickled E.K. 7302-244-0502*, 2006

16mm film stock preserved in pickling jars with vinegar, vegetables, and spices

All works in this room courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York

## ROOM 3



Conrad's exploration of sound extended beyond his work with The Theatre of Eternal Music. It wasn't until 2011 that he began exhibiting the improvised instruments he had been creating since the late 1960s. In that era 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 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," etc. *The Invented Acoustical Tools* encapsulate the economy of means in Conrad's work process. As with the backdrop paper of the *Yellow Movies* or the cooked films, most of these *Acoustical Tools* are created with very cheap and found objects.

1) ***Invented Acoustical Tools***  
1966-2012  
Filmed on September 7,  
2012 at Galerie Buchholz,  
Berlin  
Courtesy Galerie Buchholz

12 ***Metal Harp***, ca. 1998  
Toy piano chimes mounted  
on aluminum sheet

13 ***Quartet***, 2008  
Wooden bench, music wire,  
pickups, and four speakers

14 ***Double Cuirasse Amplified***  
***Wire for two players***, 2010  
4 metal armor breast  
plates, electrical pickup and  
2 bows

15 ***L-Bracket with Three***  
***Strings***, 2002  
Bowed wire (hand  
stretched), L-bracket,  
electric pickup

16 ***Metal Band in Tension***,  
2005  
Metal pipes and metal band

17 ***Ear Bow (with half-size***  
***bow)***, 2000  
Bow, pin, and string

18 ***Electric Cello***, ca. 1994  
Toy piano chimes mounted  
on aluminum sheet

19 ***Stereo Guitar Pickup***, 1970  
Leather strap and electrical  
pickups

20 ***Stove Shield VHS Antenna***,  
ca. 2008  
Aluminum foil and TV  
antenna

21 ***Grommet Horn II***, 2005  
Plastic bottle and rubber  
grommets

22 ***Bowed Film***, 1974/2014  
16mm film  
Courtesy The Estate of Tony  
Conrad and Greene Naftali,  
New York

23 ***Slit Drum***, ca. 2008  
Metal and plastic drum

24 ***Harmonic Keyboard***  
***Oscillator***, 1970  
Electronic devices and wire

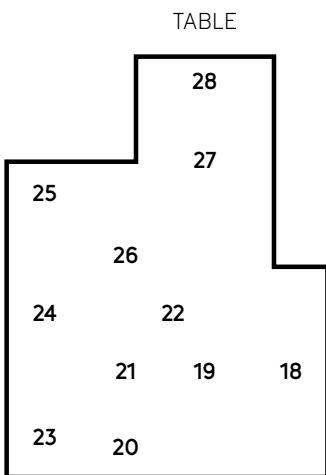
25 ***Slit Drum Head***, ca. 2008  
Metal and plastic drum

26 ***Fair Ground Electric Horn***,  
2003  
Funnel, hose clamps,  
copper tubing, and metal  
mouthpiece

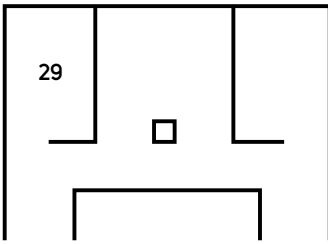
27 ***Ten-channel Analog Audio***  
***Synthesizer***, 2009  
Plastic photo frame,  
electrical wires, tuning  
knobs and cables

28 ***Phonarmonica***, 2012  
Drill, pipe, metal mounting  
flange, vinyl records,  
plunger heads and band  
clamps

All works in this room  
courtesy The Estate of  
Tony Conrad and Galerie  
Buchholz, except otherwise  
mentioned.



## ROOM 4



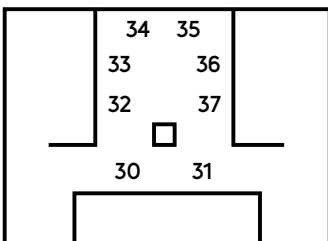
In May 1973, Conrad opened an exhibition entitled *Yellow Movie. A 40 Monitor Show* at The Kitchen in New York City, which consisted of 40 painted wooden boards cut out to mimic the look of cathode-ray tube monitors. Conrad used a fluorescent yellow paint that glows when the room is illuminated with black lights, and hooked up microphones and amplifiers to the bulbs to exaggerate their buzzing sound. The installation breaks down the technological elements into a parody of video art. Like the cooked films, this work is a manifesto for the artist's independence from industrial movie production. As the artist wrote on the handout of the exhibition, "then it is time to take the manufacturing process out of the hands of big corporations and to sit inside of the monitor [that] the creator builds himself."

### 29 *Yellow Movie (video)*, 1973

Twenty four paintings of 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 hardboards; GE F40BL black lights; contact microphones/pickups; and guitar amps with built-in speakers

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

## ROOM 5



The works in this room show further experiments by Conrad with long duration and technological appropriation following his *Yellow Movies*. Indeed, the six pieces on fabric entitled *Yellow TV, February 3* predate the *Yellow Movie (Video)* installation in room 4 by just a few months. The 14 pieces using photo corners are part of a larger series in which Conrad makes use of the potential solarisation of generic paper instead of industrial paint (such as the enamel used for the *Yellow Movies* or the fluorescent ink used for the *Yellow Movie (Video)*). Here Conrad examines the process of photography itself, signalled by the use of the photo corners and by the small sizes of the works recalling amateur photography. He eschews the complex apparatus of the photographic process (camera, film, lab and professional photosensitive paper coated with chemical emulsion) and opts rather for everyday paper (which typically yellows over time when exposed to light) to make these "photographs" which are still developing today. His critical ambition was to appropriate and mimic the technological production of a specific medium. As the artist himself stated: "It seems terribly corny that Kodak had taken all the fun in making the film, making lenses, making cameras, even processing the film for itself."

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

*Untitled*, 1977

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

*Untitled*, 1977

*Quadrilateral*, 1977

Set of 5 photo corners collage on paper

Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Galerie Buchholz

### 31 *Untitled*, 1977

Set of 9 photo corners collage on paper

Courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Galerie Buchholz

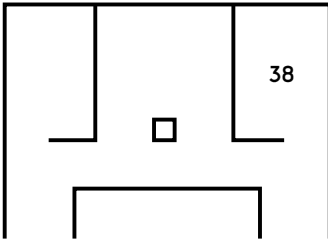
### 32–37 *Yellow TV, February 3*, 1977

*February 3*, 1977

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

## ROOM 6



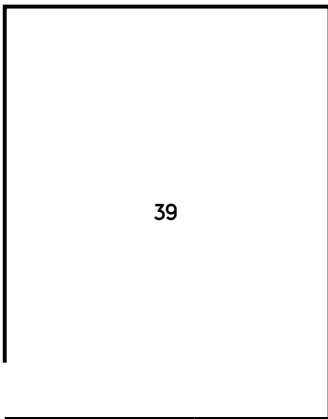
This film is part of Tony Conrad's investigation into authority and his attempts to dismantle structures of power. It focuses on a traditional authoritarian relationship between military officers and soldiers. Conrad filmed the work during his time as a visiting professor at the University of California, San Diego, which is located on the site of a decommissioned Marine Corps base. He asked his friends and students, including the young Mike Kelley and Tony Oursler, to improvise in given situations. *Beholden to Victory* was inspired by the American loose genre of army humiliation initiated by contents such as the comic strip *Sad Sack* (first appearing in 1942), in which a run-of-the-mill soldier experiences the absurdities and humiliations of military life.

### **38 *Beholden to Victory*, 1983**

16mm film (digital transfer),  
color, sound, 25'10"

Courtesy Squeaky Wheel  
Film and Media Art Center,  
Buffalo

## ROOM 7



This installation was conceived at a time when Conrad was involved in counter-mass-media activism and echoes the installation *Studio of the Streets*. In the 1980s, Conrad worried about the growing presence of media in the individual's life, with the public being increasingly subject to both invasive forms of advertisement on their private TV and to technological surveillance in public spaces such as shopping malls and art galleries. The title of the installation refers to Michel Foucault's writing on the panopticon, a very specific type of circular prison designed in the eighteenth-century to make inmates fear that guards could be watching at any moment. *Panopticon* is a satirical work that anticipates today's environment of media saturation and inescapable surveillance — not political surveillance by the government, but by a consumerist system that sees each individual as the target of a sale. On the monitors, Conrad plays the evangelist selling us the excitements of commercial TV and technological surveillance.

### **39 *Panopticon*, 1988**

Five-channel video  
installation on monitors  
(color, sound, digital  
transfer) with painted  
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 Galerie  
Buchholz

## ROOM 8

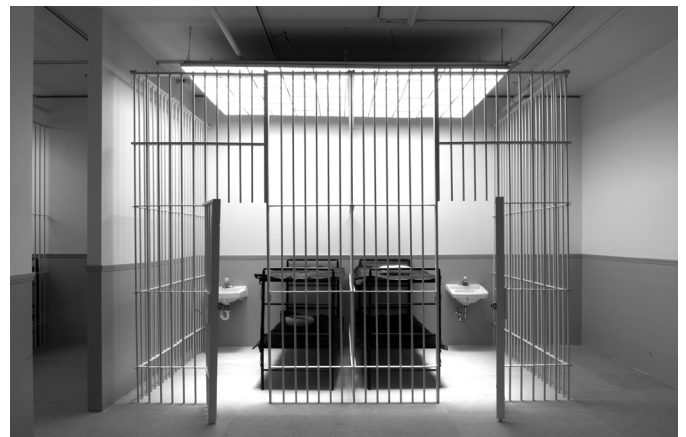
40

Conrad envisioned this work as building directly on his investigation into authority and structures of power at the heart of *Beholden to Victory*, shown in room 6. This time he decided to engage with the tropes of the “women in prison” B-movie genre. He again hired Mike Kelley and Tony Oursler, among other friends, to improvise in his Buffalo studio where he had built an elaborate jail set. All of his actors (male and women) were assigned female characters to play in what would become an unfinished 16mm film called *Jail Jail* (c. 1982–83). The rules of this prison were explained and the actors instructed to improvise within these restrictions to create an imaginary penitentiary. In 2012, Conrad transferred some of the footage to video and used it as part of this installation, *WiP*, which includes a re-creation of the jail cells from the original set and a new flickering overhead light. *WiP*, which stands for both “Women in Prison” and the homophone “whip,” makes mechanisms of control visible and challenges the viewer in their role as spectator. According to Conrad, we are “always already confined in many ways. We’re captured – under conditions of control and authority.”

### 40 *WiP*, 2013

Wooden bars, locks, bunk beds, moving blankets, bedpans, sinks, chair rails, painted walls, and blinking overhead LED lighting, with digital projection (16mm film, black and white, sound, digital transfer; 68’40’’)

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



C

## ROOM 9

51

The *Underwear* works are made with standard-size pinboards, pushpins, various undergarments and acrylic paint. The pinboards display and support the underwear, whose painted frames are reminiscent of the artist’s *Yellow Movies*. Conrad was concerned with the indignities of aging and how this can make one feel imprisoned in one’s own body. He chose mundane, oversize or very small 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 aging, incontinence and the unforgiving passage of time as a rereading of his obsession with long duration. This installation includes a security gate as seen in elderly homes.

### 41 *Untitled (forgotten treasures)*, 2009

Acrylic paint and underwear on bulletin board

### 42 *Untitled (...Having Troubles...)*, 2009

Acrylic paint and underwear on bulletin board

### 43 *Untitled (having trouble)*, 2009

Acrylic paint and underwear on bulletin board

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

Acrylic paint and underwear on bulletin board

### 45 *Untitled (looking swell, dear)*, 2009

Acrylic paint and underwear on bulletin board

### 46 *Untitled (after [thought])*, 2009

Acrylic paint and underwear on bulletin board

### 47 *Untitled (these days, 2009 these days)*, 2009

Acrylic paint and underwear on bulletin board

### 48 *Untitled (female arithmetic [+])*, 2009

Acrylic paint and underwear on bulletin board

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

Acrylic paint and underwear on bulletin board

### 50 *Untitled (female arithmetic [-])*, 2009

Acrylic paint and underwear on bulletin board

### 51 *Gate*, 2016

Regalo Easy Step Extra Tall Walk Thru Gate

All works in this room courtesy The Estate of Tony Conrad and Greene Naftali, New York



PIECE

TO PERFORM THIS PIECE  
DO NOT PERFORM THIS  
PIECE

THIS PIECE IS ITS NAME.  
THIS PIECE IS ITS NAME.

PIECE  
TO PERFORM THIS PIECE,  
COMPOSE IT,  
AT LEAST.  
PIECE

FOR PERFORMING THIS PIECE FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS

Summer '61

D