

VAN DOREN WAXTER

Alan Shields

Worms With Bedroom Eyes

October 29 – December 19, 2020



Alan Shields, *Difference & Excitement*, 1983

Acrylic, thread on canvas cutouts sewn to canvas, 15 1/4 x 15 1/4 inches (38.7 x 38.7 cm)

Van Doren Waxter is delighted to present *Worms With Bedroom Eyes*, a selected survey of intimately scaled wall-based works by the acclaimed visionary American artist Alan Shields (1944 - 2005), on view from October 29 through December 19, 2020 at 23 East 73rd Street. Well known for his idiosyncratic and kaleidoscopic oeuvre of mixed media works, including sculpture, collages, free-hanging constructions, painting and printmaking, this focused exhibition highlights smaller scale works on dyed, painted, and stitched canvas, over a twenty-five year period, from 1975 to 2000. *Worms With Bedroom Eyes* presents a dozen works, including several never-exhibited pieces. The show is Van Doren Waxter's sixth exhibition of the artist's work and marks ten years of collaboration with and representation of the Estate of Alan Shields.

Alan Shields's work often takes the concept and form of a chromatically charged object that occupies and displaces space at the same time. Whether hanging from the ceiling, positioned on the floor or wall, his often large-scale propositions expose and subvert ideas about positive and negative space, fronts and backs, flatness and volume, texture and surface. His monumental beaded and painted canvas work "J + K," from 1972, installed in the Whitney Museum's expansive and long term *Making Knowing* exhibition (on view through 2022), exemplifies his generous, individualistic, and open ended modus operandi. Shields also took this parallel approach, and with the same deliberate eye and touch, in producing smaller, self contained wall based canvases over the course of his career. Created on Shelter Island, where the artist moved to permanently in the early 1970s and lived until his death, the intimately scaled works in this exhibition (ranging in size from 6-1/2 inches tall to 24 inches square) are meant to be seen up close, to study their complex geometry and spatial play, their intricate layering of stitching and thread, and their intuitive and optical use of color. "White Throw," from 1975-83 and "Tuscan," from 1990, both made with acrylic and thread on

canvas, bookend the gallery's focused presentation. While their square and rectangular formats suggest a more self-contained state, their elaborate interiors and structures point to Shields's visionary and endlessly searching eye. In the same vein, two, more elaborated works from 1983, "Upper Crust Spirit Dog" and "Difference and Excitement," are compositionally framed by multiple bands edging the perimeter of their respective square formats; the multi-faceted planes within their pictorial configurations suggest windows, underscoring the artist's lifelong interest in the idea of inside and outside, and the duality and potency of shifting planes and spaces.

In addition to *Making Knowing: Art in Craft 1950-2019* at the Whitney Museum of American Art, NY, Alan Shields has recently been included in important museum exhibitions, including *With Pleasure: Pattern and Decoration in American Art 1972-1985* at Museum of Contemporary Art, LA (2019-2020, traveling); *Artistic License: Six Takes on the Guggenheim Collection* at the Guggenheim Museum, NY (2019-2020); and *Outliers and American Vanguard Art* at National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (2018-2019, traveled). Recent solo exhibitions focused on the work of Alan Shields have included *Alan Shields: Protracted Simplicity*, a survey accompanied by a chronological monograph by Heidi Zuckerman at the Aspen Art Museum (2016); *Alan Shields: A Different Kind of Painting* at Beeler Gallery at Columbus College of Art & Design (2017-18); and *Alan Shields: Common Threads* at the Parrish Art Museum (2018).

Appointment Only

Van Doren Waxter is open by appointment with visits limited to one to four people for 30 minute increments. The public is invited to schedule a visit [here](#). Safety precautions are taken in accordance with CDC guidelines to ensure the health and safety of staff and guests.

Van Doren Waxter

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