

Essex Street is pleased to present our third exhibition with Fred Lonidier. The exhibition will consist of two works from the early 1980s: *L.A Public Workers Point to Some Problems*, 1980 and *I Like Everything Nothing But Union*, 1983.

Fred Lonidier is a core member of the San Diego group with Martha Rosler, Allan Sekula and Phel Steinmetz that began studying and teaching at UCSD in the early 1970s. These artists activated both the history of social documentary photography and recent conceptual art, but critiqued and attempted to repair their faults and deficiencies. They formulated a combination of the two genres by applying the format of conceptual art to the purpose of social documentary. Their work has always been political.

For over fifty years Fred Lonidier has dedicated his life's work to labor and class struggle. Beginning with a counter argument to the disembodied premise of conceptual art, Lonidier's work proves that everything is made by someone, and rather than alienate the object from its production, the object could be employed to report and demonstrate its production. Lonidier's artwork has always been, as he says, "For Labor, About Labor, By Labor." The vast tide of words covering the surface of Lonidier's installations are largely the words of those workers depicted. Furthermore the venues for his artwork have always included union halls, labor councils, universities, factories, protest sites, and public access television. Lonidier was also a co-founder and president of his union, the American Federation of Teachers Local 2034.

*L.A Public Workers Point to Some Problems*, 1980 was made for a group exhibition *Social Works* at the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art. It is a statement about the fiscal crises of the state, in particular after California's passing of Proposition 13 in 1978, which drastically reduced property taxes on homes, businesses and farms. In a catalogue essay from 1984 Benjamin H.D. Buchloh wrote "The work addresses the questions of the detrimental impact, not to say disastrous consequences of federal and state legislation in favor of corporate and entrepreneurial interests on those sectors of public life and culture, that we would not normally be confronted with as a museum or gallery visiting art audience, since the system of representation that we traditionally refer to as 'the aesthetic' by definition extracts itself – as it seemed – from the economic and political reality of the basis of culture in everyday life, in order to construct the aesthetic mirage that generates pleasure due to its mysterious capacity to disembody and disassociate our perception from the weights and demands of the real. Lonidier's work successfully counteracts that tendency – which is as compulsive in aesthetic production as it is firmly embedded in the conventions of aesthetic reception – by not only systematically exploring the basis of culture, i.e., labor, but also by specifying the connections where the global system of political and economical determinations

concretely manifests itself in the conflicts of individual existence.” Alongside and following the exhibition at LAICA, the work was published in *The Citizen*, the newspaper of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor AFL-CIO, and exhibited at the Service Employees International Union 660 and Union 434, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees District Council 36, the San Francisco Labor Council AFL CIO, the United Teachers of Los Angeles 1021, the American Federation of Teachers Local 61 and eventually many many other places.

*I Like Everything Nothing But Union*, 1983 was made following a request from Joseph Francis, the Secretary-Treasurer of the San Diego Imperial Counties Labor Council, AFL-CIO for a work to hang in the offices’ boardroom. It still hangs there 35 years later. The artwork demonstrates the great diversity of the rank and file members of the affiliated unions: everyone from skilled laborers to college professors, public and private sectors, and including many different genders, races and ethnicities. Lonidier interviewed and photographed approximately 20 different union members who describe their work, its effect on their lives, and their views on the union. It discloses many of the challenges they faced and solidified that their voices would remain present in the union board meetings. The artwork also imparts the dignity of these individuals, their work and their own accounts. In an interview at the time in the LA Times Lonidier says “This is an attempt to put a frame around ideas and thoughts that are already there but that seldom get framed. It is to give workers a chance to be heard.”

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