

## Gordon Matta-Clark in 700 words

Gordon Matta-Clark was born in New York in 1943. He spent his childhood in New York, California and Paris. As the son of the surrealist painter Roberto Matta, he grew up in the company of international artists and intellectuals, including such legends as Max Ernst, André Breton and Marcel Duchamp, but also leftwing critics and the upcoming abstract expressionists. It is not just his drawings that are highly reminiscent of Surrealism; this component is present in his entire oeuvre. Dadaism, with its penchant for language and absurd wordplay, is another thread that runs through his work.

From 1962 to 1968 Matta-Clark took a course in architecture at Cornell University in New York, one of the top American architecture schools. It is not unlikely that he was influenced by one of his lecturers, the renowned architectural theorist Colin Rowe, who advocated that more attention should be paid to the historic fabric of the city. The time he spent in Paris also had a profound effect. He studied French literature at the Sorbonne in the iconic year of 1968, and probably came into contact with French philosophers of the deconstructionist school (Derrida) and situationists (artists and philosophers who create situations that can give rise to social revolution) such as Guy Debord. Further influences included Minimalism (the reduction of the picture and the problematisation of the support) and Land Art, particularly the work and ideas of Robert Smithson, whose concept of entropy fascinated him. Finally, there is the arrival of the idea of performance (the work exists only in the here and now).

Although Matta-Clark was educated as an architect, he continued to work in the art world and from the 1970s onwards he was very active on the New York avant-garde scene. He conducted performances, made spatial works in which temporariness and recycling were key elements, and experimented with textures, such as in *Photo-Fry* (a performance in 1969 in which he bakes photos of Christmas trees, later adding gold powder and sending the alchemistic objects to his friends). Matta-Clark documented his interventions and experiments in many different ways; in addition to drawings and texts, he mainly used the media of film, video and photography. His most well-known works are the so-called *cuttings*. In derelict buildings in run-down neighbourhoods he made monumental incisions laying bare the innards of the building. He approached buildings as the raw materials with which to work, as in sculpture. He cut into buildings, creating openness and transparency.

Although the work of Matta-Clark is deeply rooted in the art of the late 1960s and 1970s, Minimal, Concept and Land Art, it certainly had more than just an aesthetic significance. Like many of his generation, he wanted to make art as far away from museums and the art market as possible. He was a rebel, a hippy of the Woodstock generation, who protested against certain political and social situations. His work was characterised by great idealism and social involvement: the belief in the ability to change society and improve it through art and action. Gordon Matta-Clark was a charismatic figure, a leader and somebody who made things happen. He was an artist who was surrounded by a large network and many friends. New York in the 1960s and 1970s was an artistic magnet. With a number of other artists, Gordon Matta-Clark set up the anarchitecture group, whose hang-out was the FOOD restaurant that Matta-Clark helped establish; it became a meeting place for artists, musicians and dancers. In 1975 he got to know Jane Crawford, whom he later married. In 1976 his twin brother Batan committed suicide; this left a deep impression on him and also left its mark on his work.

Matta-Clark completed projects in Italy (*A W-Hole House*), New Jersey (*Splitting*), New York, Berlin, Kassel, Paris (the famous *Conical Intersect*), Antwerp (*Office Baroque*), and Chicago (*Circus* or *The Caribbean Orange*).

In 1978 Gordon Matta-Clark died of cancer. He left a deep impression on his contemporaries. Although his career only spanned 10 years, he continues to inspire artists with his work and actions, and his works are exhibited all around the world.