

**PRESS RELEASE**

**May 2019**

**Li Yuan-chia**

**Unique Photographs**

18 May - 15 December 2019



Li Yuan-chia, *Untitled*, c1993 Courtesy the Estate of Li Yuan-chia

In his lifetime, Li Yuan-chia (1929-1994) had been part of progressive art movements in Taiwan, Bologna and London but found his home in a house that he bought in 1972 from artist Winifred Nicholson in Banks at the far north of Cumbria on Hadrian's Wall. Now regarded as China's first conceptual artist, Li Yuan-chia made this house into the LYC Museum and Art Gallery - a place for showing innovative international art alongside children's workshops and his own experimental work.

Li Yuan-chia's art encompasses sculpture, painting and poetry but the focus of this exhibition is photography. A group of Li's lyrical hand coloured photographs of himself, his sculpture and garden at Banks is shown alongside the artist's own collection of film cameras. Mostly set in the quiet of autumn and winter, these photographs convey a melancholy beauty from the last years of the artist's life.

# the Whitworth

The LYC Museum was a place where friendship and creativity were central to everything, with artists from near and far showing work and local people making art in Li's workshops. The LYC lasted for ten years, closing in 1982, with Li Yuan-chia concentrating on his own work from then on.

In the last two years of his life Li took black and white photographs of the garden that he had planted, including his sculpture, bricks and logs, flowers and stones – all close to hand and of the everyday. Then he added two things – himself as faceless protagonist, weighed down with thought, and intense washes of colour making all that we see hi-vis, unearthly, Apocalyptic and full of beauty and meaning.

Fourteen of these photographs are shown here, alongside his large collection of cameras from small 35mm compacts to the medium-format Rolleiflex. They are joined by several paintings by his great friend Winifred Nicholson. It was Nicholson who had helped this cosmopolitan artist and migrant find a home in the North of England. Their friendship grew and they spent time discussing each other's art and her investigations into colour through painting overlap with many of Li Yuan-chia's subjects.

## **Notes to editors:**

The Whitworth is grateful for the assistance of the Li Yuan-chia Foundation and for their loan of two photographs, and the University of Manchester Library for the loan of Li Yuan-chia's cameras.

## **About the Whitworth**

The Whitworth is proudly part of the University of Manchester and serves as a bridge between the University and the people of the city; a place to meet, play and learn in public.

Its mission is to use art for social change; founded in 1889 as The Whitworth Institute and Park in memory of the industrialist Sir Joseph Whitworth for "the perpetual gratification of the people of Manchester", with clear practical aims to counteract the malaises of inner-city life and to educate and inspire a city of makers and manufacturing.

# the Whitworth

The Whitworth re-opened to the public in 2015 after a major £17 million redevelopment by architects MUMA. It has welcomed over one million visitors since re-opening, and more than doubled its previous annual records. The redevelopment doubled the public space and created state-of-the-art new facilities to house the collection of over 55,000 works of art and included expanded gallery spaces, a study centre, learning studio, and a collections centre. The gallery was crowned Art Fund Museum of Year 2015, nominated for the prestigious Stirling Prize and named Best Emerging Cultural Destination in Europe. [www.manchester.ac.uk/whitworth](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/whitworth)

The gallery has historically been at the centre of civic and cultural life and this is also its future.

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