

CRISTIN TIERNEY

MUSÉE

VANGUARD OF PHOTOGRAPHY CULTURE

**FEB 14 | EXHIBITION REVIEW: VICTOR
BURGIN | PHOTOPATH**



Installation view of *Victor Burgin: Photopath* (Cristin Tierney Gallery, New York, January 20 - March 4, 2023).
Photograph by Elisabeth Bernstein. Courtesy the artist and Cristin Tierney Gallery, New York.

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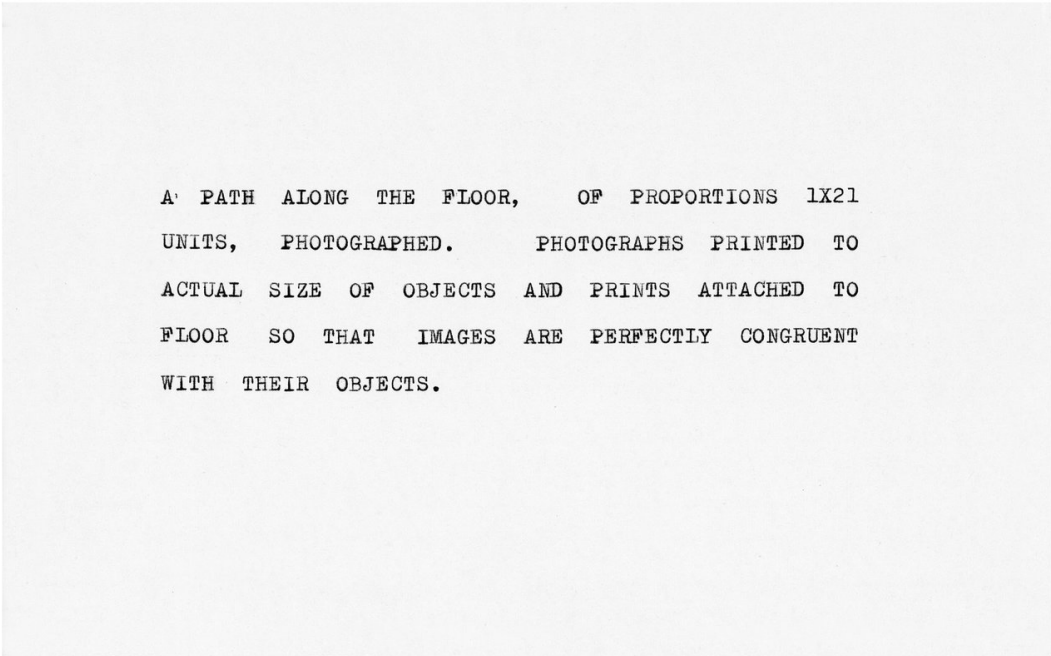
Twenty-one photo units combined and stitched into a *Photopath* unwinded at the Cristin Tierney Gallery in the Bowery last month. The Paris-based senior conceptual artist Victor Burgin's *Photopath* debuted in 1967 and was considered highly impactful among the trendsetters in Conceptual Art of that time. The installation view at Cristin Tierney marks Burgin's first exhibition of *Photopath* in 50 years. It will be on view until March 4, 2023.



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Burgin's *Photopath* breaks with our traditional understanding of art. Site-specific, self-reflective, and seamlessly connected, *Photopath* perfectly replicates the gallery's original pine floor and uses a slightly lighter color to draw the viewer's attention. The most remarkable difference between his work and other installations is that Burgin's *Photopath* is flat, hardly occupying any three-dimensional space, and blends in with our environment.

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A PATH ALONG THE FLOOR, OF PROPORTIONS 1X21
UNITS, PHOTOGRAPHED. PHOTOGRAPHS PRINTED TO
ACTUAL SIZE OF OBJECTS AND PRINTS ATTACHED TO
FLOOR SO THAT IMAGES ARE PERFECTLY CONGRUENT
WITH THEIR OBJECTS.

Victor Burgin, typed instruction for *Photopath*, 1967. Card, 8 x 5 in. Artist's proof copy. Courtesy the artist and Cristin Tierney Gallery, New York.

Stretching from a standing wall to the window, *Photopath* is not invasive in any way, as if it already exists and belongs in the space it is displayed in. The typed instructions on index cards also symbolize the prominent features of Conceptual Art, as noted by Sol Lewitt in 1967, that the artist's planning and idea are made beforehand, and the execution is a perfunctory affair:

“A path along the floor, of proportions 1×21 units, photographed. Photographs printed to actual size of objects and prints attached to floor so that images are perfectly congruent with their objects.”

But how should we, as viewers, understand his concepts? Burgin seems to be playing a visual game with us, with how we perceive and understand what we see. The image-object substitutes itself for the world. The thin existence and congruence on the floor direct our attention to the corners and places of our mundane lives that have been neglected. *Photopath* exists in the space between critical theory, art history, and audience perception. It engages with several polemical topics, such as colonialism's desire to “map” everything and the anti-utility (or anti-commodity) of art along with anti-consumerism. The visual jigsaw inquires about our so-called “objective reality” and “subjective judgments,” allowing the edge of the absolute to melt away gradually.

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The idea rooted in Burgin's *Photopath* is communicative, reproducible, and unrestricted by time, space, and people. The physical and material expression is not the most important because his instructions can be recreated by anyone. The reproduced photo units will also be recycled after the exhibition. This disappearance is not an extinction either, since his index card and ideas are always there.

Despite the passage of time, *Photopath* can appear in any form, in any location, in the nearest or farthest future. It differs from traditional photography: Burgin uses photography as a nexus to connect the viewer to the environment instead of presenting a fixed scene in time and space. As an unusual path that is built upon ideas, images, and psychological perception, *Photopath* steers the audience's mind to rethink the relationship between artistic production, value, and authorship.

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