



**ARTIST**

Nathan Lyons

**TITLE**

Untitled

**DATE**

2004

**DIMENSIONS**

5 in H x 7 in W

**MEDIUM**

Platinum Prints

**IMAGE NOTES**

Light Work Fine Print Program

**CATALOGUE NUMBER**

2005.006

**CURRENT LOCATION**

1620-31B

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**NATHAN LYONS**

**BORN**

1930

**DIED**

2016

**BIRTHPLACE**

Jamaica Queens, NY

**GENDER**

Male

**CITIZENSHIP**

United States

**CULTURAL HERITAGE**

European-American

**LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP**

Light Work Gallery, 1983  
Main Gallery, 2003  
Platinum Editions, 2005  
Book Collectors Program, 2015  
Fine Print Program, 2005

## LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS

Contact Sheet 123  
Contact Sheet 35

## BIOGRAPHY

**Nathan Lyons** has played a leadership role in all facets of contemporary art since 1957. His contributions as a photographer, educator, lecturer, author, and curator are unparalleled and universally respected. From 1957 to 1969 he curated numerous important exhibitions and edited ground-breaking publications at the George Eastman House in Rochester, NY while serving as Associate Director and Curator of Photography, Editor of Publications, and Director of Extension Activities. After leaving the Eastman House, he founded the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, NY in 1969. The Workshop is one of the oldest remaining alternative arts organizations in the country, and hundreds of its graduates are making major contributions to the field as teachers, artists, writers, curators, and media specialists. In 2001, he became Director Emeritus at the Workshop and Distinguished Professor Emeritus, SUNY Brockport.

Lyons is a consummate organizer, and in addition to the numerous panels and symposia he has organized to address important issues in the field, he is the founder of the Society for Photographic Education; a founding trustee of the New York Foundation for the Arts; a founding member of the Media Alliance of New York State; and he initiated Oracle, an annual meeting of international curators and directors of photographic organizations. His list of public service is extensive, including membership on the Board of Directors of the Center of the Eye in Aspen, CO and the New York Foundation for the Arts. He served on New York State Governor Hugh Carey's Task Force on the Arts, and as a consultant to the National Endowment for the Arts and the International Center for Photography. Lyons recently received the International Center for Photography's Infinity Award for Lifetime Achievement.

His photographs have been exhibited internationally, and are included in numerous collections around the world. An exhibition of photographs from his latest book, *After 9/11*, is currently touring (Yale University Press and the Yale University Art Gallery, 2003).

Recent projects include *Riding 1<sup>st</sup> Class on the Titanic* (MIT Press and the Addison Gallery of American Art, 1999). It is composed of two hundred black-and-white sequenced images, and represents the continuation of an earlier project, *Notations in Passing* (MIT Press and *Light Impressions*, 1974), which was organized into an extended sequence as well. Nathan Lyons lives in Rochester, NY with artist Joan Lyons, his wife of forty-four years.

## ESSAYS

Language is only a system of symbols until a poet makes the combination of words, cadence, punctuation, and rhythm sing, while struggling to find meaning in the chorus. In *After 9/11* Lyons has found perfect pitch and illuminated layers of meaning about our collective selves in one of our nation's darkest moments. Like most people, he experienced the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 through the television. He immediately began to photograph the unconscionable pictures off of his television screen as a gut response to an inconsolable reality. Over the next thirteen months Lyons would make hundreds of photographs in New York City, as well as in other cities and towns across the country, in order to focus his initial personal response to the tragedy into a penetrating look at America's response to this life-changing moment of modern madness. Lyons believes that the marriage of form and function creates complex meaning in a sequence of photographs. The symbol of the flag is present in many of his photographs, and he has constructed the majority of the images to, in fact, look like flags. Every picture is horizontal and has its own flag-like structure waving from left to right. The visual language (how the photograph is structured) becomes the device used to communicate the more complicated analysis of our collective response to the tragedy, which ranges from unimagined loss to knee-jerk patriotism to crass commercialism. When you look at each image in this exhibition from first to last, you will find a complex range of emotions, responses, and realities. Throughout his career, and particularly in this body of work, Nathan Lyons is not after better answers, only better questions. Jeffrey Hoone Lyons is currently Director Emeritus of the Visual Studies Workshop, Distinguished Professor Emeritus, SUNY Brockport, and recently received the Infinity Award for Lifetime Achievement from the International Center for Photography in New York. In 1995, he received an Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts (honoris causa United States) from the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, DC. Nathan Lyons is in the company of Alfred Steiglitz, Edward Steinchen, Walker Evans, John Szarkowski, and Cornell Capa—photographers who have created institutions, forged movements, and defined photography as we know it—as a companion to their achievements as artists. At fifty pages, Lyons' curriculum vitae is thicker than many town phone directories. Yet, simply reading his significant accomplishments, without reading between the lines, will only give you a partial understanding of the impact his efforts have had on the fields of photography, media, education, and public arts policy over the past forty-six years. His resume documents his work at the George Eastman House from 1957 to 1969 as Curator and Associate Director. He organized an invitational teaching conference in 1962 which led to the founding of the Society for Photographic Education in 1963. In 1969, he founded the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, NY. Reading further you will find that Lyons was a regional editor for *Aperture* in 1960, and as early as 1962, he was lecturing on the significance of the snapshot. In 1968, he curated an exhibition using multi-screen projection and sound presentations about contemporary social issues based on the photographs of Benedict J. Fernandez, while also designing the graduate program in photographic studies at SUNY Buffalo. Lyons was also a founding member of the Media Alliance of New York State, and developed a museum studies program at RIT. He convened a meeting of photography curators and directors of photography organizations at the Oracle resort in Arizona in 1983. Twenty years later, this "non-organization," which also came to be named Oracle, has greatly expanded into an international group that meets informally every year in various locations around the world. Lyons is currently Director Emeritus of the Visual Studies Workshop, Distinguished Professor Emeritus, SUNY Brockport, and recently received the Infinity Award for Lifetime Achievement from the International Center for Photography in New York. In 1995, he received an Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts, (honoris causa) from the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, DC. Since becoming Emeritus at the Visual Studies Workshop, he has had fourteen solo exhibitions of his work in Europe and North America—and that's just a summary with a lot of lines to read between. Among the back room conversations, the countless classes and lectures, the numerous insightful and often infuriating editions of *Afterimage*, a publication of the Visual Studies Workshop, and the personal counsel given to his many students who can be found at every level of

influence throughout the art world, Nathan Lyons deserves a closer read. In 1974, MIT Press and Light Impressions published his monograph, *Notations in Passing*, where he staked his claim on exploring photography as a medium with its own unique visual language. Using the diptych as his meter and the sequence as his signpost, Lyons has created a visual signature that is as nuanced and complex as it is clear and present. Language is only a system of symbols until a poet makes the combination of words, cadence, punctuation, and rhythm sing, while struggling to find meaning in the chorus. In *After 9/11*, Lyons has found perfect pitch and illuminated layers of meaning about our collective selves in one of our nation's darkest moments. Like most people, he experienced the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 through the television. He immediately began to photograph the unconscionable pictures off of his television screen as a gut response to an inconsolable reality. Over the next thirteen months Lyons would make hundreds of photographs in New York City, as well as in other cities and towns across the country, in order to focus his initial response to the tragedy, into a penetrating look at America's response to this life-changing moment of modern madness. It is important to look at the language of *After 9/11* in order to extract the full impact of its voice. Each image is precisely paired with another, and the sequence from first to last is carefully considered, not in the initial making of the pictures, but in the presentation in the form of this catalogue and exhibition. Lyons believes that the marriage of form and function creates complex meaning in a sequence of photographs. The symbol of the flag is present in many of his photographs, and he has constructed the majority of the images to, in fact, look like flags. Every picture is horizontal (the cover is a detail of a horizontal picture) and has its own flag-like structure waving from left to right. The visual language (how the photograph is structured) becomes the device used to communicate the more complicated analysis of our collective response to the tragedy, which ranges from unimagined loss to knee-jerk patriotism to crass commercialism. But the genius of Lyons' work is that he is not simply documenting this span of emotions and responses, he is commenting on and critiquing them as well. As much as the pairing of the diptychs are well thought out, the sequencing of the images is critical. While the observation in each image is his personal response to the tragedy of 9/11, this catalogue and exhibition represent his observation and interpretation of our nation's response to the attacks. When you look at each image in this catalogue from first to last, you will find a complex range of emotions, reactions, and realities. Throughout his career, and particularly in this body of work, Nathan Lyons is not after better answers, only better questions. Jeffrey Hoone Director Light Work