



ARTIST

Rita Hammond

TITLE

House and Electrical Wires

DIMENSIONS

16 in H x 20 in W

MEDIUM

Watercolors

CATALOGUE NUMBER

2013.314

CURRENT LOCATION

RH19

RITA HAMMOND

BORN

1924

DIED

1999

BIRTHPLACE

New York, NY

GENDER

Female

CITIZENSHIP

United States

CULTURAL HERITAGE

European-American

LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP

Light Work Grant, 1976

Light Work Retrospective Exhibition, 1985

Robert B. Menschel Gallery, 1995
Light Work Gallery, 2008
Other, 2008

Light Work assists SU Press in publishing a Hammond Monograph, Images of a Girl, Images of a Woman

LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS

Contact Sheet 5
Contact Sheet 102
Menschel Gallery Catalogue 40
Menschel Gallery Catalogue 41
Menschel Gallery Catalogue 39

BIOGRAPHY

'I was born in New York City in 1924. When I was young, my family moved to Saratoga Springs where my mother ran a small hotel. I have spent most of my adult life in Syracuse, New York raising a family. While attending Syracuse University and studying English I saw an exhibit of Harry Callahan's photographs at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Shortly after, I decided to become a photographer. I was 38.'

Light Work enjoyed a friendship of many decades with Rita Hammond. She received a Light Work Regional Photographers' Grant in 1976, when she was an instructor of photography at Cazenovia College in Cazenovia, NY. In spring of 1995 she exhibited a group of photographs entitled 'Making Connections' at the Robert B. Menschel Photography Gallery. She died in 1999 and left almost 900 works of art to the Light Work Collection. The massive collection includes silver gelatin prints, collages, and shadow boxes.

In 2003, the book 'A Due Voci: The Photography of Rita Hammond' was published by Syracuse Press, edited by Julie Grossman, Ann M. Ryan, and Kim Waale. And in 2008 Syracuse Press published the book 'Images of a Girl. Images of a Woman,' edited by Gina Murtagh. In September 2008 Light Work featured a panel discussion 'Pastiche, Performance, and Portraiture (and the imponderable hazards of publishing photographs)' with Gina Murtagh, Kim Waale, Ann Ryan, and Julie Grossman in conjunction with two exhibitions of work by Rita Hammond: 'A Due Voci' and 'Images of a Girl, Images of a Woman.' The event celebrated the exhibitions, the book release, and the completion of the accessioning process that makes all works by Hammond searchable online in Light Work's Collection.

ESSAYS

Rita Hammond, a nationally known artist who taught at Cazenovia College from 1975 to 1998, died May 1 in Seattle, less than a month before her 75th birthday. She is survived by her daughter, Deborah, of Rochester; her son, Edward, of Carpinteria, CA., and her ex-husband, Charles, of Cazenovia. Hammond, who won a Light Work Grant, a New York Foundation for the Arts Photography Fellowship and a Diverse Forms Project Grant from the Rockefeller Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, participated in many group shows and was awarded a number of solo exhibitions. Her first solo show, 'Images of a Girl,' was at the Dana Arts Center, Colgate University, in 1967. Her series of life-size cut-out figures, 'The Cocktail Party,' was shown at the Everson Museum of Art in 1974; that same year she had a show at the Colby College Art Gallery in Colby, Maine, and two years later, at Light Work Gallery, Syracuse. A retrospective of her work was mounted at Wells College, Aurora, in 1978. A survey called 'Making Connections' featuring her self-portraits in many guises was presented at the Robert B. Menschel Photography Gallery at Syracuse University in 1995. Hammond was a dynamic and greatly admired presence in the Central New York art community, not only as a photographer but as a writer, teacher, arts activist, and a generous friend. Despite her rugged individualism, she loved to collaborate with other artists. Among them were photographer Lynn Moser, sculptor Kim Waale and photographer Rayburn Beale. It was with Moser, with whom Hammond maintained a deep friendship for more than 30 years, that some of her most significant work was created. Moser was the subject of 'Images of a Girl' and, 20 years later, 'Images of a Woman.' She and Hammond were pictured together in many of the works from those two series. Each summer Hammond would join Moser, who lives in Washington, to work on nature-based photography projects. The rest of the year, they continued their collaboration like Japanese renga poets completing each other's haiku, one would create an image and send it to the other, who would add a further image which would then be completed to form a triptych. 'Our collaboration began as an exploration of personal feelings but has extended out beyond the personal,' Moser wrote for the catalog that accompanied Hammond's exhibition at the Menschel Gallery. 'In spite of the difference of our ages and the difficulties of living on opposite ends of the country we still manage to provide a perpetually rich mix of energy and imagery. We are interdependent but the collaboration has allowed us to experience so much more. . . the connections have made us whole.' Hammond's sense of humor was legendary, and many of her works are filled with puns and ironic associations. In her self-portraits she often dressed as a Commedia dell'arte jester, and in her collages she inserted images of herself into reproductions of famous paintings, holding a pipe and peering over the shoulder of one of Cezanne's 'Card Players,' or sipping through a straw from a bowl in Bellini's 'Feast of the Gods.' In another self-portrait she stands in a corner of her studio beneath the text 'Rita Hammond wore khakis' in a pretend GAP ad. In one of her most poignant triptychs, titled 'They Would Be My Age Now,' she looks out at us just as she is, without costume or artifice, at the age of 70. On the left panel is a 1939 photobooth self-portrait of Anne Frank; on the right panel, a 1957 portrait by Richard Avedon of Marilyn Monroe. Hammond is also known for her remarkable photographs of old houses and inns in resort towns (born in New York City, she grew up in Saratoga Springs, where her mother ran a small hotel). Her architectural photographs were published in the books 'Landmarks' of Madison County and 'Cazenovia, The Story of an Upland Community,' and in many publications, including Camera, Progressive Architecture, The New York Times and the Los Angeles Times. The Central New York art community will celebrate Hammond's life on her birthday May 30 at 5:30 p.m. at Stone Quarry Hill Art Park, Cazenovia, with a loan exhibition of works by the artist in friends' collections and a memorial service. Half of her ashes will be scattered beneath a totem Hammond carved on a wilderness preserve owned by Moser in Port Townsend, WA. The other half will be buried at Stone Quarry Hill marked by Hammond's original Leica, which she bronzed before leaving for Washington. The Rita Hammond Endowment to support visiting artists has been established at Light Work, a non-profit photography organization that runs the Menschel Gallery and maintains an important collection of American photographers. Contributions in her honor may be made to Light Work, 316 Waverly Avenue, Syracuse, NY 13244. Sherry Chayat (c)1999At the time of her passing in 1999, Rita Hammond had long been a valued and beloved member of the Central New York art community. Nowhere was this more true than at Light Work. Shortly after Hammond began making photographs, Community Darkrooms was born. Hammond became a regular presence at the Darkrooms, and she often brought her unique voice and presence to Light Work openings and other events over the years. She was the recipient of a Light Work Grant in Photography, and an exhibition featuring her work, entitled 'Making Connections', was held at the Robert B.

Menschel Photography Gallery in 1995. After being diagnosed with cancer, Hammond called Jeffrey Hoone to see what kind of plans could be made to create an archive of her work. Slowly, over the next few months, items started to arrive at Light Work for the creation of this archive. After Hammond's death, friends and fellow artists Kim Waale and Gina Murtagh were instrumental in collecting, organizing, and delivering a large portion of Hammond's work to Light Work. Eventually, almost nine hundred prints, shadow boxes, and other objects formed the basis of the Rita Hammond Collection. It took a number of years to organize, survey, catalog, accession, and finally store the archive. This monumental process was completed in 2008 when we posted a digital record for each item from the collection to the online database available at our website, <http://www.lightwork.org/>. This resource makes a career's worth of Hammond's art available anytime online to research scholars, museum professionals, artists, friends, and fans. Indeed, she had many. Perhaps her best-known work is 'Images of a Girl/Images of a Woman', a two-part project that spanned twenty years. In 1967, when Hammond was just beginning to work in photography at the young age of forty, Lynn Moser asked Hammond for a portrait sitting. That simple request became a series of portraits that included over 1,000 images. A lifelong friendship developed between the women, and twenty years later, Hammond revisited Moser as a subject in Images of a Woman. Together, the images made over two decades present a comprehensive and loving portrait of Moser and a testament to their enduring relationship. Comparing original prints from both phases of this project shows how a photographic archive can enhance and enrich our understanding of images. Many of the prints from the 1967 phase of the project do not exhibit "proper" photographic technique—dust abounds in corners, burns and dodges leave behind unexplainable areas of smudge, and so on. But unexpectedly, these so-called imperfections only add to the raw power, the tangible excitement emanating from the surface of the paper. Looking at the original prints, you can see so clearly that these images were made at a tempestuous time for both photographer and subject, a time when capturing the magic of Lynn's youth and their early friendship and getting it on paper was all that mattered. Perfect technique be damned. Prints from the second phase of the project in 1987 tend to be more standardized in terms of technique and treatment—the images are more uniform sizes and are printed much more evenly and cleanly. Whether this difference in the prints can be attributed to a change in the photographer's eye or technique, or to a change in the women's friendship (or both) is impossible to tell. But the difference is there, and if nothing else, it heightens the electric vitality of the 1967 prints. It is also an aspect of the work that you appreciate more when you view the prints in person. Of course, not everyone can make an appointment and travel to Syracuse to visit the archive. Our online searchable database is a wonderful help for those just getting to know Hammond's art and our collection in general. Bringing Hammond's materials into the Light Work Collection presented us with many challenges, from the sheer number of items to their variety. We had never cataloged a shadow box with real working light bulb before and were not exactly sure how to go about it. Many issues came up for the first time, such as just how archival is a color Xerox, anyway? Figuring out questions like these was just as much a privilege for Light Work as becoming an important center for the preservation, research, and remembrance of Rita Hammond's work. Mary Goodwin (c) 2009 Light Work Annual. The exhibition 'Rita Hammond: Images of a Girl, Images of a Woman' was on view in Light Work's Hallway Gallery from August 25 to October 23, 2008. A book of the same name, edited by Gina Murtagh, was published concurrently by Syracuse University Press. To search the Rita Hammond Collection online, go to http://www.lightwork.org/Images_of_a_Girl was conceived in 1967 when Rita Hammond, forty years old and a beginning photographer, was approached by Lynn Moser to shoot her portrait as a gift to her parents. Shortly thereafter a long-term relationship as friend, muse, and artistic collaborator evolved between photographer and model. Twenty years later Hammond photographed Images of a Woman when Moser turned forty. Photographs 1 through 22 in the book were selected and scanned from black and white, silver gelatin prints in the Rita Hammond Archive stored and managed by Light Work. The last image, of Rita's and Lynn's hands in 1995, is a collaboration by Hammond/Moser on loan from Kim Waale. The two portraits of Lynn and Rita together were exposed by shutter release. Images of a Girl was shot primarily in Cazenovia, New York, in 1967, and Images of a Woman was photographed in and around Seattle, Washington, in 1987 where Moser has lived for the last forty years. I wish to extend my thanks to everyone who helped to make Rita's project a book, and especially to the following for their assistance and support: Howard Bernstein, Mary Selden Evans, Mary Lee Hodgins, Lynn Moser, Kim Waale, and Rainer Maria Wehner. Gina Murtagh Utica, New York, 2008. In 1967, only a short time after taking up photography, Rita Hammond spent the year photographing her friend Lynn Moser. In this series of portraits titled Images of a Girl, Hammond established several themes that informed the work she would produce over the next 28 years. In Images of a Girl, Hammond creates a representation of a young woman who claims her youth, beauty, and independence for herself. Twenty years later, Hammond photographed Moser again for the series Images of a Woman. With the passing of time, we are drawn into the personal histories of both women and witness their sustained friendship and the endurance of Hammond's initial observations. In Images of a Girl and Images of a Woman, Hammond looked inward at a close friendship to find confidence and comfort. With these lessons learned, Hammond continued to look outward to make connections between her personal observations and the larger world of images and ideas. Hammond's sustained method for making these connections has been her use of self-portraits. In one series, Hammond collages images of herself into reproductions of renowned paintings. By placing carefully considered photographs of herself into these revered works of art, she makes them more accessible for herself and the viewer. It's as if she has crashed an exclusive annual party, only to discover that she has always been on the guest list. When we see Hammond peering over the shoulder of one of Cezanne's Card Players, or taking a sip from a bowl in Bellini's Feast of the Gods, we can't help making the connection that Hammond is allowing herself to be included in the larger frame of art history — a history that for the most part has excluded women. Hammond's approach is playful and humorous as if to say, 'there is room in these great paintings for me to enter, to absorb their genius and make them part of my experience.' In another group of self-portraits in which she emulates portraits of other artists, Hammond continues to press on with the conviction that art, culture, and history are processes to participate in and not just observe. In one image, Hammond pays homage to the tough and independent actress Louise Brooks, in another she bends our perception of gender and sexuality as she casts herself as Robert Mapplethorpe. Hammond has been influenced by the Commedia dell'arte, a tradition of free spirited satire that was initiated in 16th century Italy by street performers poking fun at politicians and aristocrats. Charlie Chaplin and Woody Allen are examples of performers who have captured the spirit of this tradition by directing a satirical look back at themselves. Hammond continues the tradition of the Commedia as she portrays Nijinsky and Debereau, in a somber mix of humor, pathos, and carefully measured self-deprecation. Hammond brings her experience as an artist full circle in the triptych titled They Would Be My Age Now, which she made in 1994 just after her 70th birthday. In this piece Hammond's self-portrait is flanked by a photobooth self-portrait of Anne Frank and publicity portrait of Marilyn Monroe. Between Monroe's glamorous and unabashed sexuality, and Frank's unflinching innocent perseverance, Hammond is poised as the survivor who pays homage to her fateful contemporaries, and embraces the diversity of their independence and weight of their sacrifices. A sage African proverb warns — "Until the lions have their historians, tales of hunting will always glorify the hunter." We sense that Rita Hammond has heard that warning and taken it to heart as she encourages us to reclaim the records of art, culture, and history for ourselves so that they may never become the exclusive story of the hunter. Jeffrey Hoone Director, Light Work