

BRUCE SILVERSTEIN

For Immediate Release

**Frederick Sommer: Circumnavigation**  
**Drawings, Paintings, Photographs, Collage and Musical Scores**  
**February 4 – March 20, 2010**  
**Opening: Thursday, February 4th, 6 – 8pm**  
**Special improvisational performance by musical ensemble FFEAR**

Bruce Silverstein is pleased to announce *Circumnavigation*, an exhibition of the various media mastered by the artist Frederick Sommer. While well-known throughout his lifetime as an accomplished photographer, Sommer also maintained a lifelong passion for drawing, painting, collage, poetry and prose. This exhibition, comprised exclusively from works held by the Frederick & Frances Sommer Foundation, is the first attempt to represent the complete artistic oeuvre of Sommer in over 50 years, and is organized to expand upon the knowledge and understanding of a truly complex and prolific artist. With artworks selected by Naomi Lyons, Sommer's assistant from 1985 to 1999 and a trustee of the Foundation, *Circumnavigation* is an exploration of the interrelationships between the various media utilized by Sommer, and brings to light the evolution of themes, structure, and line developed over time.

Frederick Sommer (1905 –1999) was born in Italy, raised in Rio de Janeiro, and exposed to art and landscape architecture at an early age. He completed his formal studies at Cornell University, graduating with a Masters of Arts degree in Landscape Architecture. By his early 30s, Sommer began painting with various techniques, drawing in pencil, glue-color (pigment suspended in hide glue), or pen and ink, and photographing in earnest. After viewing a display of original musical scores, he began to formulate his own surrealist theories correlating the graphic design to the sound of musical scores, noting, "One thing I became convinced of, and that has proven to be quite the case: that only the really great composers...are the ones who have good looking scores." Beginning in 1941, Sommer created his own scores typically rendered through an intuitive "automatic" process initiated in his other works, always in a single session. A handful of these rare scores are included in *Circumnavigation*.

By the mid-1930s, from locations as diverse as New York, Brazil, Italy and Paris, Sommer attended lectures by Le Corbusier, investigated works by Paul Cezanne and Henri Matisse, and met such luminaries as Alfred Stieglitz and Georgia O'Keeffe. Even after relocating to Prescott, Arizona in February 1935, where he resided for the next 60 years, Sommer was rarely geographically isolated. In 1936, the Sommer's visited Edward Weston, where an 8 x 10 view camera was recommended. In 1940 he visited Charles Sheeler in New York. In 1941, on a trip to California, he met Man Ray, Peggy Guggenheim and most importantly Max Ernst, with whom he began an important friendship. This was clearly a period of great growth for Sommer, who further drifted toward the pursuit of the avant-garde, and whose work bridged the influences of surrealism and abstract expressionism.

Beginning in 1937, it was clear that Sommer's works were receiving substantial support and recognition on both the west and east coast—he displayed his drawings, glue-color paintings, watercolors and collages in a solo exhibition at the Howard Putzel Gallery, Los Angeles. In 1941, the Museum of Modern Art began its long track record of support for Sommer's photographs with an acquisition for *Images of Freedom* and exhibited Sommer's work six times between 1946 and 1952 leading to his inclusion in *Diogenes with a Camera*. In 1949, Sommer showed his drawings and photographs at the Charles Egan Gallery in New York, where the drawings were described by the New York Times as "first-rate design intelligence that is somewhat marred by the suggestion of Dadaist inspiration."

In 1957, after numerous exhibitions and further exploration into multiple artistic disciplines, Sommer's drawings, paintings and photographs were exhibited together at the Institute of Design, Chicago, inexplicably, for the last time. *Circumnavigation* represents the fullest exploration of Sommer's creative abilities since this Chicago exhibition, and includes extraordinary collages created during the last ten years of his life.

The improvisational ensemble FFEAR featuring saxophonist Ole Mathisen and trombonist Chris Washburne will interpret the musical scores of Frederick Sommer during the opening on Thursday, February 4<sup>th</sup> from 6 – 8pm.

Upcoming Exhibitions:

Silverstein Photography Annual  
10 Curators / 10 Photographers  
March 27 – May 8, 2010  
Opening: Saturday, March 27<sup>th</sup>, 6 – 8pm