

BACKSTORY

FROM THE ROOFTOPS

BY VIRGINIA DWAN



Virginia Dwan and Robert Smithson, ca. 1969, on the roof of the Dakota, New York. Photo Roger Prigent. Courtesy Dwan Gallery Archives.

THE YEAR WAS PROBABLY 1969. Bob Smithson and I were having a drink on the roof of the Dakota in New York. I had asked the photographer Roger Prigent to photograph the works in my collection that were installed in my apartment. I wanted the pictures so that I could demonstrate how art looks in a personal environment rather than in a gallery setting. I allowed Prigent to direct the shoot as he wished. When he finished

VIRGINIA DWAN was the owner of Dwan Gallery Los Angeles (1959-67) and Dwan Gallery New York (1965-71). She currently lives in New York and Santa Fe.

in the apartment he extended his shoot to the roof, where he captured this image. It was fortuitous that Bob had happened by that day. I think it was the time he came by to give me a copy of Vaughan Williams's *Antarctica* [the composer's seventh symphony, from 1953]. Some of Bob's earlier ideas about monuments involved the landscape of Antarctica.

Bob brought many things into my life. He had a way of lightly referring to works, books or films that teased my imagination and made me eager to find their sources.

That same year, Bob, Nancy Holt (Bob's artist wife) and I were to travel to the Yucatán. So we were inculcat-

ed with Yucatán lore. Bob was going to place and photograph mirrors in Yucatán locations, creating works that are known today as the Mirror Displacements. He had yet to build the *Spiral Jetty* and the *Spiral Hill*, and Nancy had yet to make her *Sun Tunnels* and other major earthworks. Little could I guess at the time the extent of Smithson's influence on me or my gallery or his far-reaching influence on young artists today.

This photo was simply a quiet, in-between moment of a precious friendship. ○

AS TOLD TO BRIAN BOUCHER.

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