

ROBERT BROWNJOHN COLLECTION AT THE V&A

Robert Brownjohn (1925-1970)

Photographs of London street signs from the series *Street Level*

137 black and white gelatin-silver prints

8 x 10 inches (20.3 x 25.4 cm)

Museum no.s E.608-2012 – E.744-2012

Robert Brownjohn was born to British parents in 1925 in Newark, New Jersey. He studied at the Institute of Design in Chicago and became the protégée of László Moholy-Nagy who recognised his outstanding talent for design. Brownjohn spent six years in Chicago teaching and working with Serge Chermayeff, (who succeeded Moholy-Nagy) before moving to New York in 1950. After several years as a freelance designer he established the design firm Brownjohn, Chermayeff & Geismar Associates (BCG). The firm produced exciting design and advertising work, fusing theories of modernist design with the graphic language of the street and jazz culture.

Brownjohn moved to London in 1960 at a time when Britain was emerging from a period of post-war austerity and there were opportunities for talented designers. After a successful few years working in advertising, Brownjohn shifted into film-making, forming a new company in 1963. His outstanding title sequences for the Bond films *From Russia with Love* and *Goldfinger* became the signature pieces of his career. His work was highly influential upon a younger generation of American and British designers. A continuing struggle with drug addiction led to Brownjohn's early death from a heart-attack at the age of 44 in 1970. Brownjohn was the subject of a solo exhibition at the Design Museum in London (October 2005 – February 2006) and a monograph by E. King, *Robert Brownjohn Sex and Typography* (London, 2005). The archive of his typographic and design work was acquired by the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

The *Street Level* series represents both the vernacular and consciously designed typographic environment of London as it emerged from post-war austerity into the 1960s. Brownjohn took the photographs as a personal record, to use as source material and inspiration for his design process. He used them as a resource throughout his later career and they also formed the basis of his lectures and articles. The most expansive record of the project within his lifetime is the thirty-one page picture story 'Street-Level' published in the fourth issue of Herbert Spencer's occasional magazine *Typographica* (1961), a copy of which is held in the National Art Library (NAL PP.44.L). Brownjohn's short introduction offers an explanation of the relevance to graphic design: 'The photographs on the following thirty-one pages were harvested on one trip around London. The things they show have very little to do with Design, apart from achieving its object. They show

what weather, wit, accident, lack of judgment, bad taste, bad spelling, necessity and good loud repetition can do to put a sort of music into the streets where we walk’.

This group of photographs links to many key V&A collecting areas in photography, architecture, design typography, publishing and calligraphy. It is a methodical and coherent record of typography and its use within historical, architectural settings. The photographs relate to the V&A’s holdings of photographs by László Moholy-Nagy, Brownjohn’s earliest mentor, who also had a passion for the idea of ‘chance art’ as seen in these images. The group of photographs make interesting formal and conceptual connections with other serial or taxonomical photographic recording projects represented in the collection, such as the photographs by Sir Benjamin Stone, Eugene Atget or Bernd and Hilla Becher. Comparisons can also be made with Walker Evans photographs that include elements of vernacular street signage. The images also relate to the V&A’s holdings of photographs of London and to the graphic design archives.



E.608-2012

From the series *Street Level*
Robert Brownjohn



E.609-2012

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E.610-2012

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E.611-2012

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E.612-2012

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E.613-2012

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E.614-2012

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E.615-2012

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E.616-2012

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E.617-2012
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E.618-2012
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E.619-2012
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E.620-2012
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E.621-2012
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E.622-2012
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E.623-2012
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E.624-2012
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E.625-2012
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E.626-2012

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E.627-2012

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E.628-2012

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E.629-2012

From the series *Street Level*
Robert Brownjohn



E.630-2012

From the series *Street Level*
Robert Brownjohn



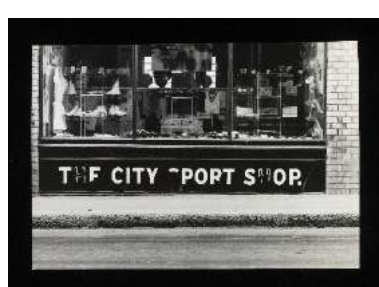
E.631-2012

From the series *Street Level*
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E.632-2012

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E.633-2012

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E.634-2012

From the series *Street Level*
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E.635-2012

From the series *Street Level*
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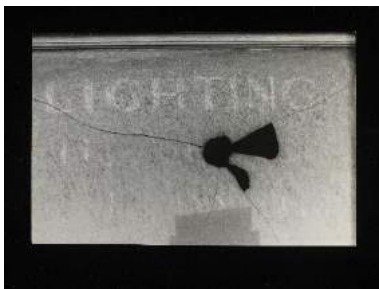
E.636-2012

From the series *Street Level*
Robert Brownjohn



E.637-2012

From the series *Street Level*
Robert Brownjohn



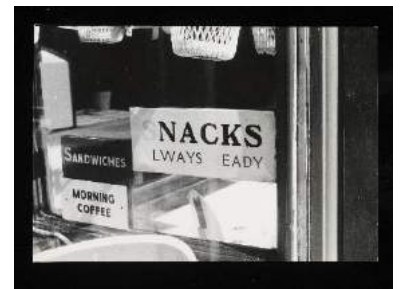
E.638-2012

From the series *Street Level*
Robert Brownjohn



E.639-2012

From the series *Street Level*
Robert Brownjohn



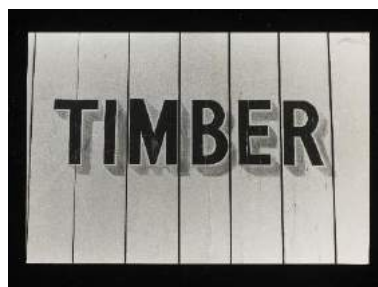
E.640-2012

From the series *Street Level*
Robert Brownjohn



E.641-2012

From the series *Street Level*
Robert Brownjohn



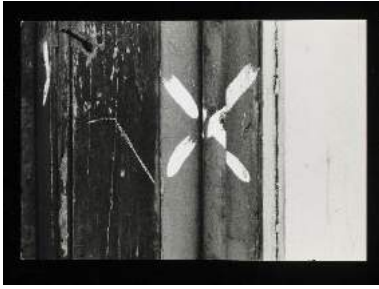
E.642-2012

From the series *Street Level*
Robert Brownjohn



E.643-2012

From the series *Street Level*
Robert Brownjohn



E.644-2012

From the series *Street Level*
Robert Brownjohn



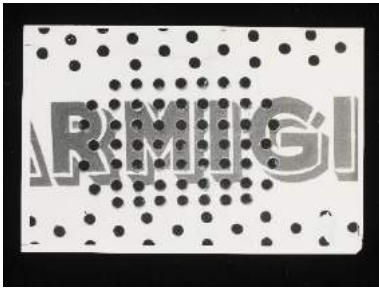
E.645-2012

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E.647-2012

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E.665-2012

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E.667-2012

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E.668-2012

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E.669-2012

From the series *Street Level*
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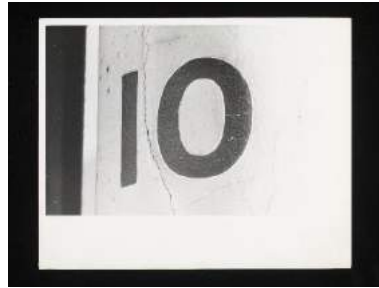


E.670-2012

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E.671-2012
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E.672-2012
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E.674-2012
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E.675-2012
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E.676-2012
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E.677-2012
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E.681-2012
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E.682-2012
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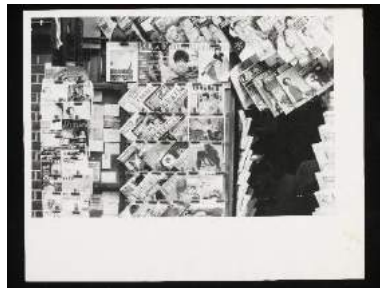
E.684-2012
From the series *Street Level*
Robert Brownjohn



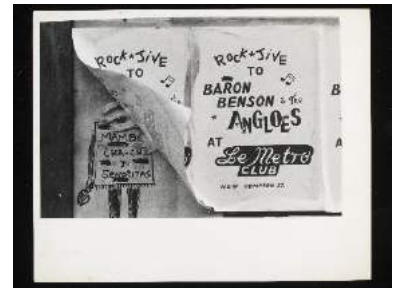
E.685-2012
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E.686-2012
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Robert Brownjohn



E.687-2012
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Robert Brownjohn



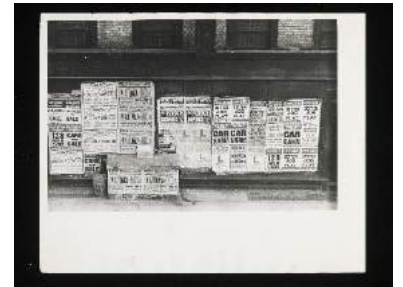
E.688-2012
From the series *Street Level*
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E.689-2012
From the series *Street Level*
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E.690-2012
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E.691-2012
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E.692-2012
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E.693-2012
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E.694-2012
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E.695-2012
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E.696-2012
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E.697-2012
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E.698-2012
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E.699-2012
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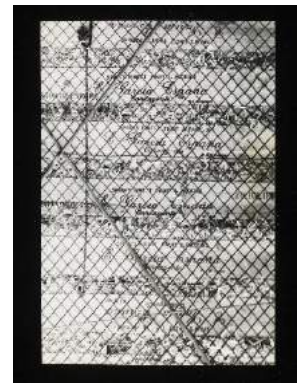
E.700-2012
From the series *Street Level*
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E.701-2012
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E.702-2012
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E.703-2012
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E.704-2012
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E.705-2012
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E.706-2012
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E.707-2012

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E.708-2012

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E.711-2012

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E.712-2012

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E.713-2012

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E.714-2012

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E.715-2012

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E.716-2012

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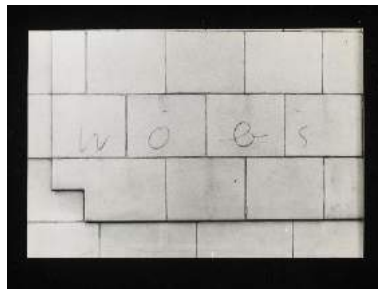
E.718-2012

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E.719-2012

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E.720-2012

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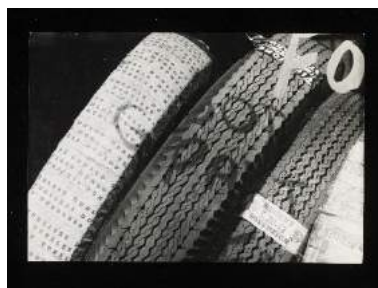
E.721-2012

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E.722-2012

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E.723-2012

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E.724-2012

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E.725-2012

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E.726-2012

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E.727-2012

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E.728-2012

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E.729-2012

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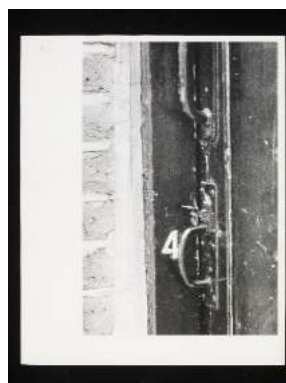
E.730-2012

From the series *Street Level*
Robert Brownjohn



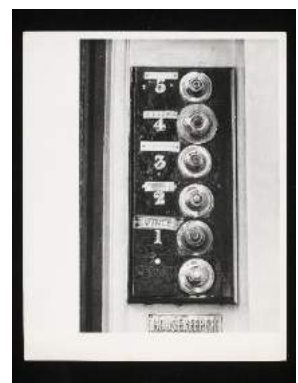
E.731-2012

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E.732-2012

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E.733-2012

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E.734-2012

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E.735-2012

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E.736-2012

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E.737-2012

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E.738-2012

From the series *Street Level*
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E.739-2012

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E.740-2012

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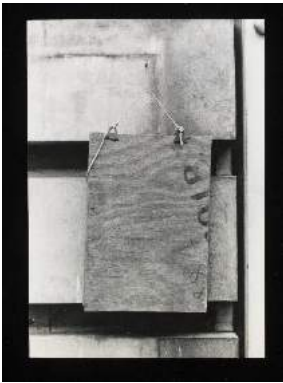
E.741-2012

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E.742-2012

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E.743-2012

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E.744-2012

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