

ARTFORUM

Hollis Frampton

by Sean O'Toole

ROOM EAST

41 Orchard Street

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This exhibition of [Hollis Frampton](#)'s last major series of photographs, "ADSVMVS ABSVMVS," 1982, an austere portfolio of fourteen color pictures of desiccated animal and plant remains, represents a belated debut of sorts for the artist. Frampton, a creative polymath whose achievements in film tend to overshadow his writing and photography, has never been the subject of a solo exhibition in New York. "I felt he was someone who was in but uniquely apart from the working art world," wrote his friend [Michael Snow](#) in 1984, shortly after Frampton's death. Snow, who famously narrated Frampton's autobiographical film about his early photography, (*nostalgia*), 1971, has characterized this melancholic late-career work as a "beautiful, stop-time, memento mori."

Frampton's subject matter here ranges from flattened roadkill to dehydrated seafood and plant matter, all photographed with the same dispassionate formality against a black backdrop. A note of mourning undergirds the series as well: *XIV. ROSE (rosa damascene)* depicts a flower taken from his father's funeral wreath. A Frampton-designed handout offers textual addenda to each photograph. The artist's absorption with the sensate world of food and nature is palpable in his descriptions (as is his good humor—[Constantin Brancusi](#)'s elevation of toads above [Michelangelo](#)'s sculptures is mentioned in relation to *IX. GARDEN TOAD (Bufo americanus)*). Various textual ephemera related to the portfolio's production are displayed in the basement gallery; they reveal the arc of Frampton's impish conceptualism. While abstractly interested in photography's "symmetry with natural processes of mummification," as Frampton writes in a funding proposal, his project is, as he reminds a colleague in a letter, "a serious parody of a nineteenth-century scientific treatise of a certain kind."



Hollis Frampton, *XIV. ROSE (Rosa damascena)*, 1982, Ektacolor photograph, 12 x 16".

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