

Mel Bochner

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MASSIMODECARLO is pleased to announce a solo exhibition dedicated to the oeuvre of American artist, Mel Bochner. As an eminent figure in the movements of Conceptual and Post-Minimal Art, Bochner's illustrious career spans over six decades. His work, which rigorously interrogates the intersections of language, mathematics, and diverse representational systems, takes centre stage in this exhibition. The show presents Bochner's latest body of work from 2023, inviting viewers to delve into the latest chapter of his artistic journey.

Since the 1960s, Bochner has been at the forefront of exploring the intricate relationship between imagery and language. In 1962, he obtained his degree in art from Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, before briefly venturing into the field of philosophy at Northwestern University in Chicago, Illinois.

Commencing in 1970, Bochner's work garnered significant recognition in Italy. He played a pivotal role in prominent exhibitions, notably *Conceptual Art*, *Arte Povera*, *Land Art* in Turin in 1970, under the curatorship of Germano Celant. His Italian connections also led to valuable friendships with artists such as Alighiero Boetti and Lucio Fontana. They all explored language as a form of illogical representation, delving into the interplay between space and language as foundational elements shaping our comprehension of the world.

Returning to Italy, Bochner found inspiration for this exhibition in Casa Corbellini-Wassermann, and the impact of this environment is beautifully evident in his art. He sought to seamlessly integrate his works with the space, establishing a harmonious connection with the architecture and its vibrant colours.

Speaking about the exhibition and Casa Corbellini-Wassermann, Bochner commented, "In today's art world, most showcases are set within sterile, white-cube environments. However, the eccentricity of this Milan space, with its unique fusion of period aesthetics, including Art Deco and fin-de-siècle motifs, along with the remarkable chimneys, left a profound impression on me. I was eager to embrace this extraordinary setting and considered it a perfect

opportunity to present an exhibition in Italy, with the intention of surprising and challenging viewers' expectations. The forthcoming body of work may well diverge from what many have come to anticipate from me."

While Casa Corbellini-Wassermann undeniably influenced the American artist in this exhibition, this latest body of work presents a distinctive materiality that is not commonly associated with Bochner's work. The paintings are crafted from velvet canvas, imparting an additional layer of materiality and dimensionality to the works. Though the medium has changed, Bochner's signature subtle subversion and his exhilarating, slightly menacing humour remain central to his artistic expression.

Drawing from everyday complaints, enthusiastic exclamations, and colloquial expressions, Bochner sources his work from overheard phrases and conversations. These words find a home in his notebook, expanding his warehouse of words. As a result, his paintings encapsulate contemporary life and its linguistic nuances. This approach is partly inspired by his father's profession as a sign-painter.

In the gallery's final room, Bochner's prominent artwork, *HA HA HA*, is displayed in two distinct iterations: a horizontal strip and a traditional canvas. "Ha" serves as an onomatopoeic expression denoting laughter, a usage that has become increasingly prevalent in today's digitally-driven society, where communication trends toward brevity. Through this phrase, Bochner toys with the sincerity of his creative endeavour, playfully acknowledging the lasting impact he has made on the world of conceptual art.

The exhibition also presents his renowned *Measurement Paintings*. These works consist of monochrome canvases with arrows and numerical notations indicating arrow lengths in inches. Paradoxically, the *Measurement Paintings* quantified nothing beyond their own existence, revealing the essence of their artistic process. This process, somewhat controversially, gravitated toward the notion of art's dematerialisation. Bochner's artistic expression radiates irreverence, conflict, and a pronounced sense of rebellion. Through his choice of words, such as "Blah, Blah,"

and "\$#!+" (alluding to the word "shit"), he positions his paintings as a form of influence, subtly shaping our thoughts and engaging in intricate manipulations that toy with our emotions and desires.

In the exhibition at MASSIMODECARLO Bochner introduces vibrant palettes, further enriched by their velvety texture. The interplay between these brightly coloured, almost cheerfully adorned backgrounds and words conveying a sardonic undercurrent of shallow positivity provocatively extends the boundaries of conventional artistic expression.

Mel Bochner

Mel Bochner was born in 1940 in Pittsburgh, PA. He lives and works in New York, NY.

Bochner is recognized as one of the leading figures in the development of Conceptual art in New York in the 1960s and 1970s. Emerging at a time when painting was increasingly discussed as outmoded, Bochner became part of a new generation of artists which also included Eva Hesse, Donald Judd, and Robert Smithson - artists who, like Bochner, were looking at ways of breaking with Abstract Expressionism and traditional compositional devices. His pioneering introduction of the use of language in the visual, led Harvard University art historian Benjamin Buchloh to describe his 1966 Working Drawings as 'probably the first truly conceptual exhibition.'

Bochner came of age during the second half of the 1960s, a moment of radical change both in society at large as well as in art. While painting slowly lost its preeminent position in modern art, language moved from talking about art to becoming part of art itself. Bochner has consistently probed the conventions of both painting and language, the way we construct and understand them, and the way they relate to one another to make us more attentive to the unspoken codes that underpin our engagement with the world.