

SPRÜTH MAGERS BERLIN LONDON

ROBERT MORRIS

10/02/12 – 17/03/12

Monika Sprüth and Philomene Magers are pleased to present the second solo exhibition by Robert Morris in Berlin. The American artist is displaying a selection of space-related works which offer an historical overview of his involvement with sculpture.

The interdisciplinary work of Robert Morris, which extends from objects, sculptures, and drawings through performances all the way to films and texts, has exercised a strong influence on developments in art ever since the 1960s. As an important thinker at the end of the avant-gardes of modernism, proceeding from Minimal Art, he detached himself early on from a rigid concept of the work of art and from the autonomous aura of the object, addressing above all the process of artistic production, which he displayed as an essential component of his works. During the 1960s, he was involved with the Judson Dance Theater in New York, where he participated in performances by Yvonne Rainer and Simone Forti and conceived his own choreographies. The engagement with postmodern dance gave rise to a significant constant within his sculptural works: The investigation of an inclusion of the viewer which focuses on the temporal perception of sculpture by means of bodily movement through space, and which furthermore directs the view from the institutional space out onto social aspects in the real world. Thus in the current exhibition as well, Robert Morris activates, through a specific spatial arrangement of his works, performative and self-reflective modes of perception in the viewers.

Prominently placed in the Garden Room at the beginning of the exhibition is *Scatter Piece* (1968), whose setting gives the viewer control over how he experiences the objects by moving through the space. The elements made of felt, copper, steel, lead zinc, and brass aluminum unfold a confrontation between industrial and biomorphic materials, and they lay out a sculptural production site whose arrangement reacts directly to the site which it occupies at the moment. In this way, the installation manifests a temporary and changeable state of completion. The bringing to light of a processual artistic activity, such as Morris called for in his theoretical texts *Notes on Sculpture, Part 1-4* (1966-69) and *Anti-Form* (1968), likewise addresses the social context of production and labor, a perspective which is also to be seen against the background of the institutional criticism of Concept Art as well as the social expectations during the 1970s with regard to art production.

Situated in the Main Room are *Untitled (Corner Beam)* and *Untitled (Floor Beam)*, which are made out of plywood and painted with gray paint. Along with the works *Untitled (Corner Piece)* and *Untitled (Wall/Floor Slab)*, presented on the Upper Floor, they were first shown by Morris in 1964/65 at the Green Gallery in New York as components of a seven-part group. The objects trace out simple actions in space: They connect architectural structures with each other, emphasize corner situations, or lean against walls. They are reminiscent of stage props such as *Column*, which Morris used in 1960 as a substitute for the human body in one of his first performances at the Living Theater in New York.

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Morris' early Minimal Art works, to which *Untitled (Ring with Light)* (1965-66) also belongs, are closely linked to his dance compositions such as *Site* (1964) or *Waterman Switch* (1965) in which the dancers executed onstage task-oriented movements with geometrical objects.

Also in another work on display, *Steel Mesh Ls* (1988), the different positioning of the three identical L-shapes can be read as anthropomorphic movements such as sitting, lying, or standing. Whereas Morris conceived of the plywood sculptures from 1964 as temporary objects which can be taken apart and reproduced on site at any time, the *Steel Mesh Ls* are made out of metal mesh. Thus they conform on the one hand to industrial production and to the solid, cool surfaces of Minimal Art, but they contradict this correspondence through the semi-transparent grid which renders unstable and disconcerting perspectives onto the objects. Morris often works with interchangeable structures, inasmuch as he reconstructs and repeats forms such as the L-Beams in materials as wood, aluminum, or steel mesh and thereby dissolves the notion of original or seriality within his own work.

In addition, part of the exhibition consists of selected works made of felt: *Lead and Felt* from 1969 spreads out in the Main Room as a sculptural mass made from pieces of lead and felt and creates a structure which oscillates between positive and negative forms, between light-reflecting and light-absorbing textures. In this work, Morris directs attention to the relationship between material and gravity as well as between spatial arrangement and random indeterminacies. This turning away from permanent sculptures by means of temporary formations is achieved through fleeting and mutable materials such as felt, steam, or soil. Morris thereby aims at functional and economic considerations, in order to introduce social connotations of everyday life into the exhibition space, which has also been pursued by artists such as Eva Hesse, Robert Rauschenberg, and Claes Oldenburg. The works *Untitled* (1976) and *Untitled* (2010) belong to a series of wall works in felt which the artist developed from 1974 onward. As an important aspect of the works, the metal grommets imply the possibility of mounting the felt pieces onto the wall which Morris realized in pocket- or diamond-shaped folds. Here, too, the artist follows the force of gravitation: In his arrangements, he integrates the flowing physical movement of the material as a factor determining how it hangs from the wall and into which forms it is directed. By further endeavoring to compel the flexible texture of felt into rigid, geometrical forms, Morris reflects ironically upon the formal severity of the visual icons of abstract art or Cubism.

Furthermore, there are two installations which use sound to create an altered spatial situation. Both works take up the aspect of an assembly or an inner dialogue whose speakers, however, remain absent. *Chairs* (2001), one of Morris' more recent works, consists of a circle of small-sized chairs which are covered by lead elements that are shaped by hand into the form of textile sheets. In contrast to the older works, there ensues here a narrative scene which indicates a possible meeting of children who, accompanied by a sonnet, exchange their thoughts. The 8-track sound installation *Voices* from 1974, which can be heard for the first time as a digitally synchronized version, consists of a complex choreography of several voices and soundtracks emanating into the empty space from eight loudspeakers. The abstract audio-play lasts three-and-a-half hours and brings together spoken texts, some of which were written by Robert Morris while others comprise excerpts from Emil Kraepelin's *Dementia Praecox* (1919) and *Manic Depressive Insanity and Paranoia* (1921) which he edited. *Voices* consists of four sequences, whereby each differs from the next with respect to the subject matter and the editing technique. The mental, introspective narrative space built up by the speakers is connected with a discontinuous experience of the real space, inasmuch as the voices from the various sources of sound can only be followed through a physical movement.

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In his exhibition, Robert Morris combines various spatial conceptions which emphasize the experience of art as a process and employ sculptural works to create situations of change, displacement, and disorientation so as to initiate for the viewer constantly unexpected and evolving possibilities of perception.

Robert Morris (born 1931 in Kansas City, Missouri, USA) lives and works in New York State. His works have been presented throughout the world in solo exhibitions at such institutions as the Green Gallery, New York (1965), the Whitney Museum, New York (1970), the Tate Gallery, London (1971), the Art Institute of Chicago (1980), and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (1986). Morris was represented with his works at the documenta 6 (1977) and the documenta 8 (1987), as well as at the Venice Biennials in 1978 and 1980. In 1994, the Guggenheim Museum in New York organized the extensive retrospective *The Mind/Body Problem*, which was displayed further at the Deichtorhallen in Hamburg and at the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris. Recently, the artist has shown his work in solo exhibitions at the Tate Modern, London (*Bodyspacemotionthings*, 2009); at the Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach (*Notes on Sculpture – Objects, Installations, Film*, 2009/2010) as well as in a group exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, London (*Move: Choreographing You – Art & Dance*, 2010/2011).

For further information and press enquiries please contact Silvia Baltschun (sb@spruethmagers.com).

Opening reception: 09.02.2012, 6 - 9 pm

Hours: Tue - Sat, 11 am - 6 pm