

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TOWARDS INFINITY: 1965-1980



VITO ACCONCI | GIOVANNI ANSELMO | JOHN BALDESSARI | MEL BOCHNER | ALIGHIERO BOETTI | MARCEL BROODTHAERS | STANLEY BROUWN | DANIEL BUREN | ANDRÉ CADERE | LUCIANO FABRO | HANS-PETER FELDMANN | GILBERT & GEORGE | MICHELANGELO PISTOLETTO | PAUL THEK | KEJI UEMATSU

2 MAY – 23 JUNE 2018

PRIVATE VIEW: WEDNESDAY, 2 MAY, 6 – 8 PM

Simon Lee Gallery New York is pleased to present *Towards Infinity: 1965-1980*, an exhibition of major works conceived by artists from across the international scope of the Conceptual art movement, with special focus on the period between 1965 and 1980. During the 1960s and 1970s a disillusionment with pervasive movements in art and the influence of radical European theoretical thought inspired a re-evaluation of long-held attitudes towards formal and material conventions. Taking its title from Giovanni Anselmo's seminal work of the same name, *Verso l'infinito* (1969), the exhibition explores the dematerialization of the art object and the dismantling of concepts that had bolstered the definition and context of traditional art-making well into the 20th century. Working across a wide range of media, including photography, film, video, performance and installation, the artists in the exhibition all demonstrated an anti-hierarchical approach to both subject and material that positioned the idea first and form second. All the works presented adhere to the fundamental premise put forward by Anselmo's *Verso l'infinito*, challenging the constructs of time and space to create an art that is at once forward-looking, in flux and without limits.

The years between 1965 and 1980 marked a period of major social and political upheaval, including significant civil unrest and global conflict – not least the intensification and ultimate conclusion of the Vietnam War. Conceptual art offered socio-political critique via an interrogation of traditional forms of representation. The 1969 exhibition, *When Attitudes Become Form* at the Kunsthalle Bern, curated by Harald Szeemann and the publication of Lucy Lippard's book, *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972* four years later in 1973 indicated a sea change in artists' approaches to the role of their medium in society. Leaving behind the tabula rasa of Minimal art, across Europe and America a diverse stable of artists developed distinct yet related practices that were critical of the very nature of art and that prioritized process over the completed art object.

The 1960s saw the advent of the Italian Arte Povera movement – coined as such by Germano Celant in 1967. In works such as *Verso l'infinito*, *Infinito* (1971-1973) and *Cielo Accorciato* (1969-1970), Anselmo addresses the limits of representation as put forward by established art practices, aiming to demonstrate the ways in which infinity can be conceived by the viewer, although not materially quantified. The reconciliation of opposites is crucial to the work of Luciano Fabro, whose *Foro da 8 mm. Tautologia* (1967) is concerned with the rationale of perception.

Works by Michelangelo Pistoletto and Alighiero Boetti demonstrate a similar concern with mimesis, as well as with performance and collaboration. While Boetti's ballpoint pen picture, *Fame di Vento* (1979) was made by a team of art students, Pistoletto's *Cane allo Specchio* (1971) directly involves the viewer, who becomes part of the work, reflected in its mirrored surface.

During the 1960s and 1970s artists became increasingly critical of institutional convention. Romanian artist, André Cadere used his *Barres de bois rond* (1970-1978) – poles handmade from primary-colored wooden cylindrical components – to liberate himself from the confines of the gallery space. Daniel Buren's *in situ* striped artworks interrogate the relationship between art and the spaces in which it is installed. Akin to Cadere's nomadic practice, Stanley Brouwn's work captures movement and time. From the 1970s, Brouwn obsessively recorded his own footsteps on index cards archived in metal filing cabinets, making impersonal the subjective experience of the journey.

Central to many Conceptual artists' practices was the intersection of linguistic and visual representation. John Baldessari's *Word Chain: Faucet (Ilene's story)* (1975) builds a narrative from a fragmentary database of words and images. Collaged together, the cyclical nature of the work hints at events and memories from the eponymous Ilene's life, while the words guide the viewer's understanding of its timeline. While his later work went on to explore language, Mel Bochner's early practice probes the ways in which we receive and interpret information. In *Forgetting Is The Only Continuum*, first conceived of in 1970, Bochner questions the essential relationship between an idea and the means of its communication; this body of work marked a critical moment in the history of early conceptual art. Challenging the traditional relationship between an idea and its visual explanation, Marcel Broodthaers' *Roule Moule* (1967) sets out the title of the work beneath a panel of varnished mussels, leading the viewer to consider the structural connection between language and image.

Throughout this period, photography assumed a central role in Conceptual art. In Europe, Hans-Peter Feldmann developed his *Time Series*, in which he took a sequence of consecutive images of a single subject. Displayed as a group, the photographs have little or no narrative, drawing on everyday life as a source of inspiration. In their *Drinking Pieces*, including *Staggering* (1972-1973) Gilbert & George likewise grouped photographs that conjured a lived experience. Japanese artist, Keiji Uematsu developed an approach to photography that explores the invisible forces at work between body and object, using the photographic medium to explore both sculptural conventions and the act of perception. Similarly, in the US, Vito Acconci merged performance and photography with works including *Lay of the Land* (1969), in which a simple directive to take pictures from five different points on the artist's body while lying down in Central Park results in a collection of photographs that challenge the camera's point of view. Painted in the same year, while Paul Thek's landscape on newspaper seems comparatively traditional, it is no less subjective than Acconci's performance-based art, and in many ways just as subversive, made at a time when many artists had turned away from such outdated modes of representation.

Image: Mel Bochner, *Forgetting Is The Only Continuum*, 1970 / 2018, Acrylic paint and oil pastel on wall, 180.3 x 121.9 cm (71 x 48 in.), Edition 1 of 3.

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