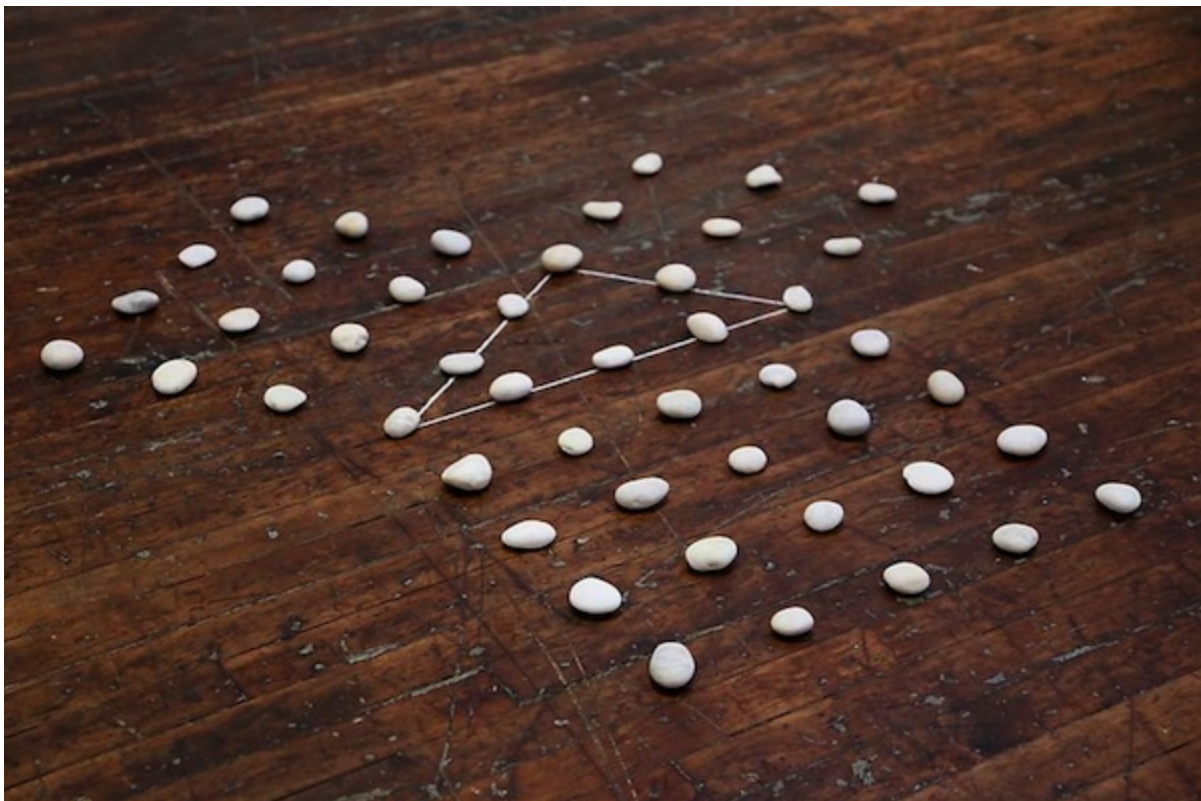


# ARTFORUM

## Interviews **MEL BOCHNER**

As told to Frank Exposito - 24 June 2013



Meditation on the Theorem of Pythagoras, 1972/2013, stone and chalk

*Though the recent work of Mel Bochner has primarily explored relationships between color and language, a group of his early work in the 1970s utilized small stones to destabilize the monumentality and traditions of sculpture. Here, Bochner speaks about his use of humble materials in creating new systems of value. His current exhibition, "Proposition and Process: A Theory of Sculpture (1968-1973)," the largest survey of his sculpture to date, is on view at Peter Freeman, Inc. in New York until July 12, 2013.*

**BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE**, a sculpture is an object-in-the-world, something in our shared space. I use pebbles because they exist at the edge of the continuum between a fully three-dimensional object and dust. Intrinsically valueless and easily replaced, they qualify as an unmediated material.

A second condition must be met for something to count as a sculpture. Some human intervention must occur—an intention, a decision, or an imposed order. One of the earliest ways human beings devised of creating order was through counting. In Latin, the word for counting is *calculus*, which translates literally as “stone,” so as an idea it is already deeply embedded in our language. For my purposes the most important thing about counting is that it changes nothing.

A third aspect of sculpture that needs to be accounted for is the hand. Although nothing in these works has been carved, cast, nailed, welded, glued, or otherwise assembled, the use of the numbers five and ten signify the presence of the hand. (The Latin word for “finger” is *digit*.)

The organizing principle behind this installation is a spiral; the works have been laid out to wind counterclockwise through the space. This leads the viewer through a range of conceptual and phenomenological relationships to the sculptures, as well as to their relationship to the architecture. The strangeness of having to look down and walk around these small configurations of pebbles and chalk in order to “read” them further heightens the viewer’s awareness of his or her own body as another object-in-the-world.

Works of art are more than material entities or luxury goods. These sculptures represent my desire to get as close as possible to an intimate, unmediated, nonideological experience of the world. Implicit in this is a critique of the overblown scale and fetishism of so much contemporary sculpture.

At the end of this exhibition, all of my sculptures will be dismantled and their components will disappear back into their own ordinariness. All that’s left will be an idea, a scratch on the surface of memory. Of course, the irony is that without the object there would be no idea, but without the idea there would be no object.

— *As told to Frank Expósito*