

Mel Bochner

March 3 – April 20, 2007

The Nelson Gallery is glad to present for the first time the American artist Mel Bochner in the context of its new cooperation with Peter Freeman. Bochner, a conceptual artist born in 1940, is interested in the perception of the work of art. The reading of it he offers is very sparse, amounting to a series of calculations and space adjustments. He was one among the first to re-introduce language in the field of painting. He has exhibited ever since the mid-sixties, following academic studies in art and philosophy, then devoting himself to speculations on the nature of the work of art and the phenomena implied in its perception. A first presentation of his work in France in 1994 was followed by his FRAC de Bourgogne exhibition in 2000. The 2006 show "Mel Bochner : Drawings from Four Decades" was a major retrospective mounted in the United States where it was successively presented at the Wynn Kramarsky Foundation (New York) and three museums : the Birmingham Museum of Art (Birmingham, MI.), the Weatherspoon Art Museum (Greenboro, NC) and the San Diego Museum of Art (San Diego). A current Bochner exhibition at the Chicago Art Institute is about to end. The Domaine de Kerguéhennec will devote him an exhibition from 30 June till 1 October 2007.

For this first exhibition at the Nelson Gallery, Mel Bochner has selected some of his most recent works, all dealing with his fundamental preoccupations.

On the first floor, Bochner presents several series of oils on canvas. The series entitled "If the Color Changes" shows the artist's interest in language and words in a mirrored double representation. A first text is painted in German, then an English version of the same is superimposed on the first text. The superimposition at first prevents a transparent reading of the message. The semantic questioning inherent to the perception phenomenon — dealing with sense, form and color — ultimately delivers its content. Likewise, in a construction set, colors, diversely sized canvasses, with their ciphered dimensions fit into one another to bring up a meaning. On a canvas entitled "Lazy", a succession of words, at first sight apparently disconnected, actually conjure up a definition of the lazy disposition: it is not composed of words synonymous with lazy, but instead of words which the artist associates with this particular mood and the perception of it. In other works, numbers, measures or units play the part of visual material. "Event Horizon (Paris)" is a series of oils on canvas lined up on the wall with their dimensions directly inscribed on the canvas: the numbers refer either to the width of the panel or to the distance from one panel to the next.

On the second floor, the artist presents a single installation: the quote of a sentence extracted from *Vermischte Bemerkungen* (*Mixed remarks*; 1914-1951) by Ludwig Wittgenstein, the Austrian language philosopher (1889-1951). The Wittgenstein quote is not innocent since the philosopher thought that the inter-plays of language and words have their own rules and that the philosopher's role was to remind us of these rules. Here, the linear quote follows the angle formed by two gallery walls, but being reversed, the end of the sentence is in the place of its beginning and the reading of it is done from right to left. Mel Bochner endeavors to invigorate, energize words, making their perception confusing so that the viewer has to stop in front of them, take time to carefully read them and fully assimilate their meaning. On the ground, an artifact in the shape of two triangles, suggests a mathematical structure. Next to the lined up colored glass segments, ciphers (from 1 to 8) are inscribed with chalk on the ground.

Mel Bochner is an artist who thinks the world in terms of mathematical, grammatical and philosophical logic. His works often take the shape of calculations, words or even philosophical quotations, all elements which enable him to feature or give shape to cognitive processes. His titles therefore become the missing links or keys, including binding elements such as words or dimensions, which highlight the importance of the structure in the very perception of the work of art itself.