Martin Beck
The details are not the details

Orchard
47 Orchard Street
New York, NY 10002
(212) 219–1061
contact@orchard47.org

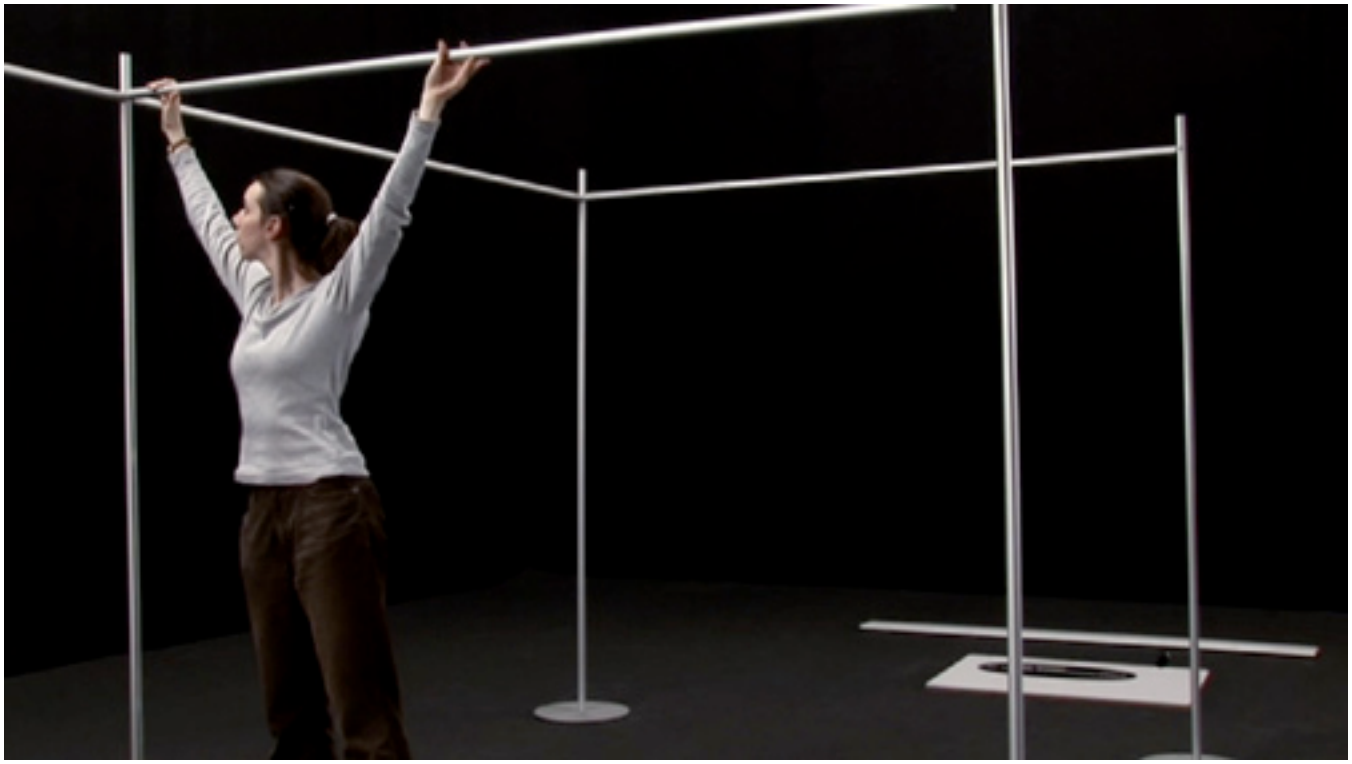
Exhibition dates: May 6 – June 10, 2007
Gallery hours: Thursday – Sunday 1 – 6 PM
Opening reception: Sunday, May 6, 6 – 8 PM

Martin Beck's exhibition *The details are not the details* investigates a shift in exhibition formats in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In the development of modernism, the art sector had been the primary field within which experimentation with display strategies and new forms of perceiving and relating to visual culture were developed. However, during this period commercial exhibiting – trade fairs, corporate, and government exhibits – increasingly became the site where new presentational formats and techniques appeared.

Key to this moment is the concept that "information" (and access to it) is integral to a modernizing drive in which emancipatory practices, propaganda and corporate advertising started to freely flow into each other. Much experimentation within the commercial field was driven by the idea of indexing and structuring with a special emphasis on making information visible as well as portable. On a practical level this took the form of modularized exhibition systems based on connector joints which allow for quick, unskilled assembly and endless rectangular expansion. Many exhibition systems developed in this period bear striking resemblance to visual strategies that surface only a few years later within minimalism and conceptual art practices. Such systems submit information and its dissemination to a geometric matrix, the social logic of which can be described as one of the ultimate tools of modernity's exercise of power. At the moment when the exhibition seems to become a mobile emancipatory agent it succumbs to the symbolic logic of control.

The centerpiece of Beck's exhibition is a new filmic installation titled *About the Relative Size of Things in the Universe*. The work consists of a twelve minute tracking shot showing the assembly and disassembly of a historic exhibition system by the designer George Nelson, which Beck had reconstructed from archival documentation. The film's precisely choreographed details lay out a field of references to modern exhibition history, to minimalist dance performance, to filmic techniques in Michael Snow's as well as Jean-Marie Straub / Danièle Huillet's work, and also to contemporary consequences of rationalized production.

A series of silk-screened drawings that address spatial possibilities of exhibiting complements the film work and, together with a curated arrangement of period books on exhibiting, are the key for opening up a series of connections to minimalism and conceptual art. The arc Beck's *The details are not the details* lays out is further defined by inclusion of the seminal 1967 *Aspen Magazine* curated by Brian O'Doherty, a multiple and poster by Sol LeWitt, and a photographic plate by Eadweard Muybridge.



Martin Beck, still from *About the Relative Size of Things in the Universe*, 2007

Martin Beck is an artist living in New York City. His recent exhibitions include *an image guide* (2006) at the Museum Moderner Kunst Vienna, *an Exhibit viewed played populated* (2003) at the Grazer Kunstverein, and, in collaboration with Julie Ault, *Installation* (2006) at the Vienna Secession and *Information* (2006) at Storefront for Art and Architecture in New York. In 2005 he co-curated the exhibition *Mirage* at Alexander and Bonin Gallery in New York. An anthology of his (and Ault's) writings has been published as *Critical Condition* in 2003.

On May 25, 2007 at 6:30 PM a conversation between Felicity D. Scott and Martin Beck will address issues of exhibition systems, administrative logics and notions of spectatorship.

The exhibition is funded, in parts, by the Austrian Cultural Institute, New York, and the BMUKK, Vienna.