

MAR 13-APR 17, 1994

AFTER AND BEFORE



LAWRENCE WEINER, AS LONG AS IT LASTS, 1994.

Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Hanne Darboven, Julia Fish, Günther Förg, Gaylen Gerber, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, On Kawara, Elsworth Kelly, Jeff Koons, Sherrie Levine, Brice Marden, Bruce Nauman, Hirsch Perlman, Stephen Prina, Gerhard Richter, Adrian Schiess, Richard Serra, Jeff Wall, Andy Warhol, Lawrence Weiner, Thomas Struth

The inspirations for this show are three-fold: as an historical exhibition *After and Before* anticipates the completion of The Renaissance Society's long-awaited publication *A History of The Renaissance Society: The First Seventy-five Years*, due out in early May. Three years in the making, this catalogue thoroughly chronicles The Society's history from its founding in 1915 through the 1990-91 exhibition season. With its completion, the Society is indeed poised at a privileged place in time: "after" the accomplishments of its first seventy-five years and "before" whatever accomplishments are to come.

After and Before will also re-examine the tenure of Susanne Ghez, who will celebrate her twentieth anniversary as Director of The Renaissance Society in May. Over the years she has worked with the majority of the artists in the exhibition, many of whom enjoyed their first midwestern exposure at The Society.

Time as a concept is obviously broad, but in retrospect, it is one of the few traits that profoundly connects the range of Ghez's artistic concerns, particularly conceptual art and installations. The literal time required for Hanne Darboven to script eight hundred pages by hand and the narrative time required to navigate a Jessica Stockholder installation are both palpable to us as viewers. We become aware of the duration of our experience

with the artwork and how our perception of it changes in the process. And while this richness of duration might be attributed to any complex artwork—say, a Cezanne painting or a Cassavetes film—it has been incorporated into the very structure of much recent art: as in the marathon films of Andy Warhol, the *Date Paintings* of On Kawara, or the “endless” paper stacks of Felix Gonzalez-Torres.

Material time and gravity present time on a scale that is much greater than the bodily, “real” time of lived experience. The sculptures of Richard Serra, Carl Andre, and a rare painting on marble by Brice Marden all belie one of the more classical virtues of art—the notion of permanence—and create a sense of physical frailty in us as viewers. There is a relative timelessness in the formal presence of their steel and stone works that heightens the sense of mortality in us, as well as our desire to make and preserve similar traces of our own lives.

A striking contrast to the natural permanence evoked by these artists works is the artificial lifespan of consumer products, which many postmodern artists of the 1980s sought to highlight and define in contradistinction to their minimalist and conceptualist mentors. Jeff Koons vacuum cleaners—the “new” Hoover Upright or the “new” Shelton Wet/Dry Triple Stack—are all gleaming with the seduction of the here and now, ironically reveling in the marvelous product innovations that next year’s models will render obsolete. A new work by Los Angeles artist Stephen Prina expounds on this phenomenon of inflated ephemera. The work consists of an oversized industrial clock that chimes every hour; instead of bells the clock plays one of Billboard magazine’s top hit singles to mark each hour of the day.

Lastly, positioned somewhere between these two object-extremes, is memory. Thomas Struth's photographs of urban architecture do not capture time so much as they capture its compression through architecture. Struth's carefully framed mishmashes of real, local, and imported architecture speak not only to the global transportation of cultures and ideas, but to photography's ability to isolate and scrutinize phenomena which otherwise go unnoticed. Memory is also a component of perception and cognition, not only seeing a picture but remembering its details and comparing them to others. This sensual process is made evident in the serial paintings of Gaylen Gerber, extremely subtle renderings of the same still life in the same three shades of gray on same sized canvases which the artist has executed over the last ten years. Gerber's method allows a surprisingly playful range of recognition and memory loss to develop in us as we move from painting to painting, retaining some details about the objects depicted while others seemingly evaporate.