

For summer, VW (VeneKlasen/Werner) is pleased to present *James Lee Byars: The Poetic Conceit and Other Works*. This exhibition is one of three James Lee Byars shows simultaneously on view this summer, alongside *The Figure of Death and The Moon Column* at Michael Werner Gallery, New York and *The Diamond Floor* at Michael Werner Gallery, London.

Throughout his prolific career Byars pursued with tireless curiosity his life-long obsessions with ideal form and a personalized notion of “perfect”. This exhibition traces issues of perception, language, and contemplation in Byars’ oeuvre: “*The Capital of the Golden Tower*” (1991), “*The Poetic Conceit*” (1983) and the performative “*Hole for Speech*” (1981) each exemplify the artist’s philosophical ideals and his quest for a new, spiritual form of pure communication. On view in the gallery’s cinema is the 16mm film “*Autobiography*” (1970), a rare example of James Lee Byars’ use of film in which the artist appears on screen for a fraction of a second. Together, these four pieces form a distinct body of work that explores and questions the ethereal nature of language and communication.

James Lee Byars was born in Detroit in 1932 and studied art and psychology at Wayne State University. He presented his first museum exhibition in 1958, a legendary event that took place in the stairwell of New York's Museum of Modern Art and lasted only one day. Over the following decade Byars lived and worked in Japan where he presented many performances and exhibitions, including *The Performable Square* in the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, in 1962. In 1964 he was invited to present three performances at the Carnegie Museum of Art. Byars returned to America in 1967, dividing his time between New York and Los Angeles; by the 1970s he began to spend increasing amounts of time in Europe. Since that time Byars has been the subject of numerous gallery and museum exhibitions worldwide, including Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; Kunsthalle Düsseldorf; IVAM Centre del Carme, Valencia; Castello di Rivoli/Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Turin; The Henry Moore Institute, Leeds; and Fundação de Serralves, Porto. Byars died in Cairo in 1997. Important posthumous exhibitions include *The Epitaph of Con. Art is which Questions have disappeared?*, Kestner Gesellschaft, Hannover (1999); The Arts Club of Chicago (2000); *Life Love and Death*, Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt and Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain de Strasbourg (2004); *The Perfect Silence*, Whitney Museum of American Art (2005); *I'm Full of Byars*, Kunstmuseum Bern (2008); *The Perfect Axis*, Schloss Benrath, Düsseldorf; and *Klein Byars Kapoor*, Musée d'art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain, Nice and ARoS Kunstmuseum, Århus, Denmark (2012-2013). In 2013, *The Figure of the Interrogative Philosophy* and *The Figure of the Question of Death* were included in the 55th Venice Biennale exhibition *The Encyclopedic Palace*, curated by Massimiliano Gioni.

Last summer, MoMA PS1 in New York presented *James Lee Byars: 1/2 an Autobiography*, the most comprehensive survey of Byars organized in North America since the artist's death in 1997.

Organized in cooperation with Museo Jumex in Mexico City, where it debuted in spring 2013, the exhibition featured a selection of sculptures, fabric works, performable paper pieces, ink paintings, live performance and ephemera.

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