

ARTFORUM

“Bill Beckley: Ping-Pong Dialogues”

06.06.08

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05.14.08-06.14.08 CHELSEA space

Jo Melvin, curator of “Ping-Pong Dialogues,” provocatively anticipates that the exhibition “will encourage ping-pong, hopping, and sucking as tangible routes to aesthetic process and experience.” And it does—by way of the sculptures and performances that American artist Bill Beckley first presented in SoHo in the 1970s. The show’s central work is *Silent Ping-Pong*, 1971, Beckley’s installation of three Ping-Pong tables, from an original group of four, whose tabletops and paddles he clad with foam to eliminate the sound of the ball against the surfaces. When the work was first shown at 112 Greene Street in New York, the silence of the game rivaled the energy and animation of the players. Here, the work is shown alongside documentation of several other performances by Beckley: *Song for a Chin Up*, 1972, and *Song for a Sliding Board*, 1971. Both involved singers who combined physical actions (lifting and sliding, respectively) with vocal reactions, testing the call and response between body and voice. Originally performed in Holly Solomon’s loft, another seminal downtown space, the works demonstrated how the relationship between performance and sculpture motivated both performers and audience, as well as instigating impassioned transatlantic dialogue, much of it documented in the defunct periodicals *Avalanche*, an American magazine, and *Interfunktionen*, a German one, both of which are also on view. In the spirit of Beckley’s original performances, viewers are invited to hop on the flat vinyl board in *Short Story for Hopscotch*, 1971, and to eat (or just suck) a Popsicle from *Get Them by the Bunch*, 1971, their contact with the objects, once again, adding sound and meaning to otherwise still tableaux.

Martin, Courtney J. “Bill Beckley: Ping-Pong Dialogues,” *Artforum*. June 6, 2008.

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