



FROM LEFT:
Bill Bollinger
Exhibition of the
Kunstmuseum
Liechtenstein,
Vaduz, 2011.

Bollinger
installing *Pipe*
Piece at Galerie
Ricke, Cologne,
1968.

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MATERIAL WORLD

Bill Bollinger's oeuvre gets its due

THE ART OF BILL BOLLINGER possessed a visual language that conjured a Zen sensibility through the use of industrial materials. He shows us tension with a thick rope pulled taut; he embodies containment with clear tubes full of water; his slumping metal screen expresses gravity. Odd as it might seem from a man who earned a degree in aeronautical engineering, Bollinger wasn't interested in the aesthetics of form: He was concerned with conditions of being. He once told a Swiss dealer that his art existed only when it was executed, and it ceased to exist when it was taken down. The central problem for viewers who seek out Bollinger's art is that it rarely exists because it's almost never shown. "Bill Bollinger: The Retrospective," on view at **SculptureCenter**, in Long Island City, from April 22 through July 30, provides a unique opportunity to revisit his legacy.

The artist's career essentially spanned the decade between 1965 and 1975, peaking right in the middle. Between 1969 and 1970, Bollinger participated in 37 solo and group shows, both in the United States and in Europe, the most ambitious of which was a site-specific installation that sprawled through an entire floor—16,300 square feet—of the Starrett-Lehigh building, in the Chelsea neighborhood in New York (the same building, coincidentally, that currently houses the offices of *Modern*

Painters). Press materials billed the exhibition, "Bollinger: Sculpture," as "probably the largest non-retrospective one-man show ever organized." It didn't go well, and the artist's career subsequently nosedived. Between 1975 and 1996, his work was shown only once. He died in 1988, at the age of 48, from complications brought on by excessive alcohol consumption.

Christiane Meyer-Stoll, the chief curator of the retrospective—which initially opened at the Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, in Vaduz, last year, before traveling to venues in Germany and the United Kingdom—had access to two prominent European collections that held Bollinger's work, but she cast her net more widely. She collected his letters, notes, and drawings and gathered slides and photographs from institutions and individuals. She also solicited recollections from people who knew the artist personally, including Carl Andre, Shah Aramjani, Rafael Ferrer, and Keith Sonnier. This material became the basis of the exhibition as well as the meat for an authoritative monograph.

No two iterations of the touring retrospective have been the same because, as the SculptureCenter's executive director, Mary Ceruti, observes: "Bollinger's sculptures have a contingent quality in that they are in direct dialogue with the architecture [of their environments]. The support of a wall is necessary

for *Screen Piece* [1968–69] to achieve its gentle curve, and the rope pieces are essentially about the tension over the distance between the floor and the ceiling or the two points on the floor." This type of spatial consideration—more than any effort at chronology—will likely guide installation decisions for the SculptureCenter exhibition.

In addition to approximately 25 drawings, the SculptureCenter show includes major works composed of screens, ropes, pipes, and extruded aluminum channels, as well as Bollinger's only film, *Movie*, 1970, a comical nine-minute piece in which the artist attempts over and over to balance a long beam on its end. Another gem is *Cyclone Fence*, 1968, a work that was first shown at the legendary exhibition "9 at Leo Castelli," curated by Robert Morris. Instructions for its installation might read: Lay chain-link fence across floor, and flip once so that what begins as the right edge ends as the left edge. Observe gravity's torque: A kink comes to rest as a gracefully swooping arc.

Art history wrote off Bollinger, and this exhibition aims to change that. "He was one of the artists most responsible for rethinking an art object as the result of material procedure," muses Ceruti. "Young artists who are engaged with the current discourse will see this work for the first time, and I hope that they find the show inspiring—as I did." —CHARLIE SCHULTZ

