

CORRISPONDENZA
DA NEW YORK

a cura di
Matilde Alessandra

ANTHONY MCCALL
Installation view of Five
Minutes of Pure Sculpture
at Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin
April 30 - December 8, 2013
Courtesy of the artist and
Sean Kelly, New York

Anthony McCall L'opera è nel contenuto non nella tecnologia



English text

Anthony McCall is a busy artist these days, traveling the world over to exhibit his work. He has just come back from Tasmania where he has installed a large exhibition and did a performance called 'Night Ship', commissioned by the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) for their annual "Dark MoFo" winter festival. Each night of the festival the performance took place on the fjord-like River Derwent, and could be watched all along its banks. The elements of the performance consisted of a ship, a foghorn, and a searchlight. The passage of the ship, the sounding of the foghorn, and the rotation of the searchlight followed a tightly constructed temporal and spatial "score". The full work had a duration of two hours, during which time the ship traveled up-river until it reached the museum. Observers were lining the river banks, on both sides, all the way up. Having started off as a performance artist, McCall talks very enthusiastically about this last project.

"In the early days I was drawn to the happenings movement," he tells us, "After Art School, in England - where I studied graphic design, art history, photography and philosophy, the kind of things one took at art school in the 60's - I was living in London with Carolee Schneemann (performance artist and painter, exponent of the Feminist Art Movement, ndr) so I was introduced to that culture. I was interested in dance performances but also in conceptual artists, though ultimately the one I found most exciting was John Cage. As a consequence I naturally got involved in performance art, and that lasted a few years. I made performances in the wilderness, using smoke and fire and documenting them on video. But I quickly found out I was more interested in the the process of the film-making itself; not so much what went on in front of the camera, but what happens in projection. Five films and a year later I was making Light Describing a Cone, the first of a series that I'm still working on now."

As in his latest performance, in McCall's work everything is subjected to the structure of time. The 'Solid Light' works for which he is so well known are structured projections that engulf the viewer in ever changing space. The pieces are disarmingly simple, consisting of the projection of white lines in a light mist. "I use either one or two projectors placed horizontally or vertically. They cast the image of a simple line drawing, slowly rotating in repeated cycles from 5 to 10 minutes long onto the wall or floor. A light mist in the air produced by an haze machine makes the beam of light become visible and palpable. So you have three main elements: the darkness, the projection, the mist that create the volumetric sculptural form".

At a first his projected pieces seem perfectly still, but after being engaged in them for a while you start noticing that things have changed. You don' t see it happening at first because everything moves so slowly. Their constant movement brings the viewer to experience rather than merely view the piece, inviting him to enter the cone of light that it's subtly circling, giving the perception that the planes are moving, changing the space in which they stand. "I want my works to be approached with thoughtfulness, I don't have any rules of engagement but the ideal observer ought to be absorbed in it, exploring the space. You need to move around to understand the form. But also be captured long enough in it to explore the structure over time, because the art is in the time, not in the structure itself."

Ironically MCall is not that concerned with light - but rather with the projection process and the time of the cycles of movement. "Light is purely a by-product: what I was thinking about when it all started was the cinematic aspect of the works.

With *Light Describing a Cone* I was only trying to make a film, but as a consequence I found myself working with light, within the performance tradition as well as in the sculpture tradition. But I was never making 'light-art', in fact I dislike the term, it has no meaning just like 'video-art' has no meaning. The artwork is about the content, not the technology, so I don't consider my work fitting neither of them "

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Meticulous drawings chart the development of several projects: each one starts with a small note-book, moving on to bigger books and then to diagrams, and sometimes to small paper machette. "In some cases the paper model become necessary. I can imagine something in my mind quite easily, but when I use two projectors and a two-sided screen it becomes difficult to have it all in your head, so a three-dimensional model becomes necessary. I sometime do small scale 'try-outs' using a projector above my desk to do quarter-sized models".

There are also proposals for public works, something that McCall approaches with cautious enthusiasm: "Inside a museum the viewer is focused in the calm and quietness of the purpose-built place; when you do something in a public context is not like that at all, you have 'accidental spectators' plus you might have noise and movements around, you're competing with planes, traffic, crowds. Those are interesting challenges, is definitely a thrilling scale. But the most difficult part of public art projects is that the work become unpredictable, subjected too much to politics and changing administrations"

The exhibition coincides with a book, called *Anthony McCall: Notebooks & Conversations* that contains images of his notebooks and drawings and several interviews taken over a ten year period.

Anthony McCall (Regno Unito, 1946 - vive a New York), artista di fama internazionale molto indaffarato, giramondo per curiosità e per mostre di *Solid Light*, opere in bilico tra installazioni, performance multimediali e sculture. È appena tornato dalla Tasmania dove ha realizzato una grande mastra e una performance intitolata *Night Ship*, commissionata dal Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) per il festival invernale "Dark MoFo".

La performance è stata messa in scena tutte le sere durante il festival lungo il fiume Derwent, e poteva essere guardata da entrambe le rive. Il tutto consisteva in una barca, un faro issato sulla stessa, una sirena anti-nebbia: il percorso della barca, il suono della sirena, e la rotazione del faro seguiva un percorso temporale e spaziale ben definito. La performance completa ha una durata di due ore, durante le quali la barca viaggiava per il fiume dalla foce sino a raggiungere il Museo, mentre il pubblico sostava lungo le due sponde.

McCall racconta quest'ultimo progetto con entusiasmo, avendo iniziato la sua carriera proprio come performance artist. "All'inizio ero molto attratto dagli happenings" spiega l'artista "dopo la Scuola d'Arte in Inghilterra, dove ho studiato grafica, storia dell'arte, fotografia e filosofia - il genere di cose che si approfondiva nelle scuole d'arte negli anni Sessanta - vivevo a Londra con Carolee Schneemann (performance artist e pittrice esponente del movimento artistico femminista, ndr), così sono stato

introdotto a quel tipo di cultura. Ero interessato alla danza sperimentale, ma anche agli artisti concettuali; la più grande ispirazione per me era John Cage. Di conseguenza ero attratto naturalmente dalla performance art, che feci per alcuni anni. Ho fatto spettacoli in aperta campagna usando fumo e fuoco, documentandoli su video. In breve ho scoperto che ero più interessato al processo cinematografico di per sé, non tanto ciò che succedeva davanti alla lente, ma ciò che accadeva dietro alla mia telecamera. Cinque film e un anno dopo stavo già lavorando a *Light Describing a Cone*, il primo di una serie cui mi sto ancora dedicando".

Come nella sua ultima performance, nel lavoro di McCall s'incrina sul concetto del tempo. Le sue opere di *Solid Light*, per la quale è famoso, sono proiezioni che avvolgono lo spettatore nel loro spazio in continua evoluzione. Le opere sono di una semplicità disarmante, e consistono nella proiezione di linee bianche in una leggera foschia. "Usò uno o due proiettori posti orizzontalmente o verticalmente, producendo l'immagine del disegno di una semplice linea bianca, che ruota lentamente in cicli ripetuti da cinque a dieci minuti di lunghezza, sulla parete o sul pavimento. Una nebbia simulata prodotta da una macchina rende il fascio di luce visibile e palpabile. Ci sono quindi solo tre elementi: il buio, la proiezione e la nebbia che creano la forma scultorea e volumetrica.

Quando ci si avvicina danno l'impressione di essere solidi immobili, e s'impiega qualche minuto prima

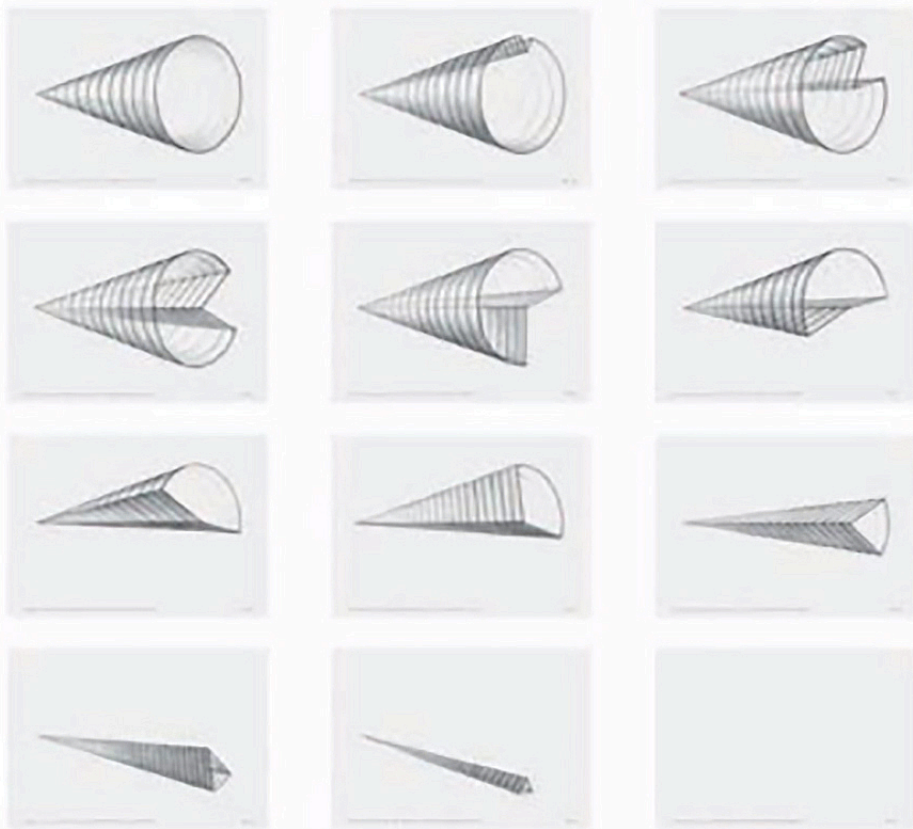
**ANTHONY MCCALL
THE WORK IS THE CONTENT,
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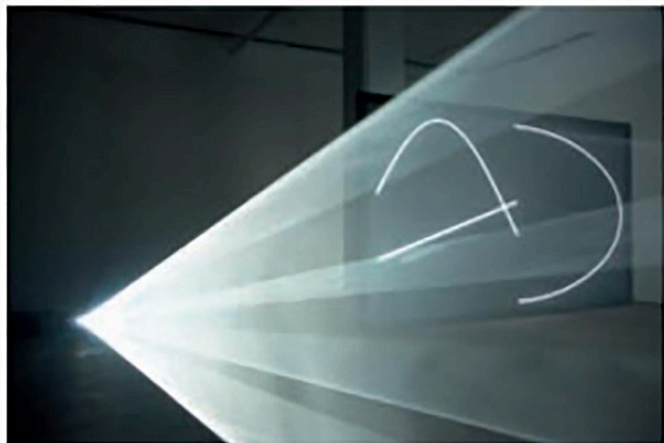
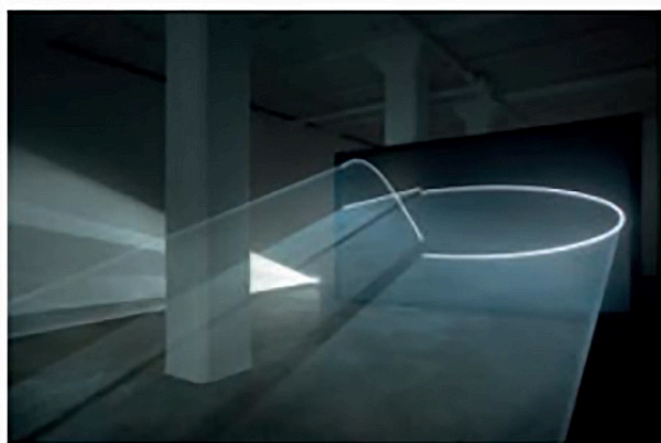
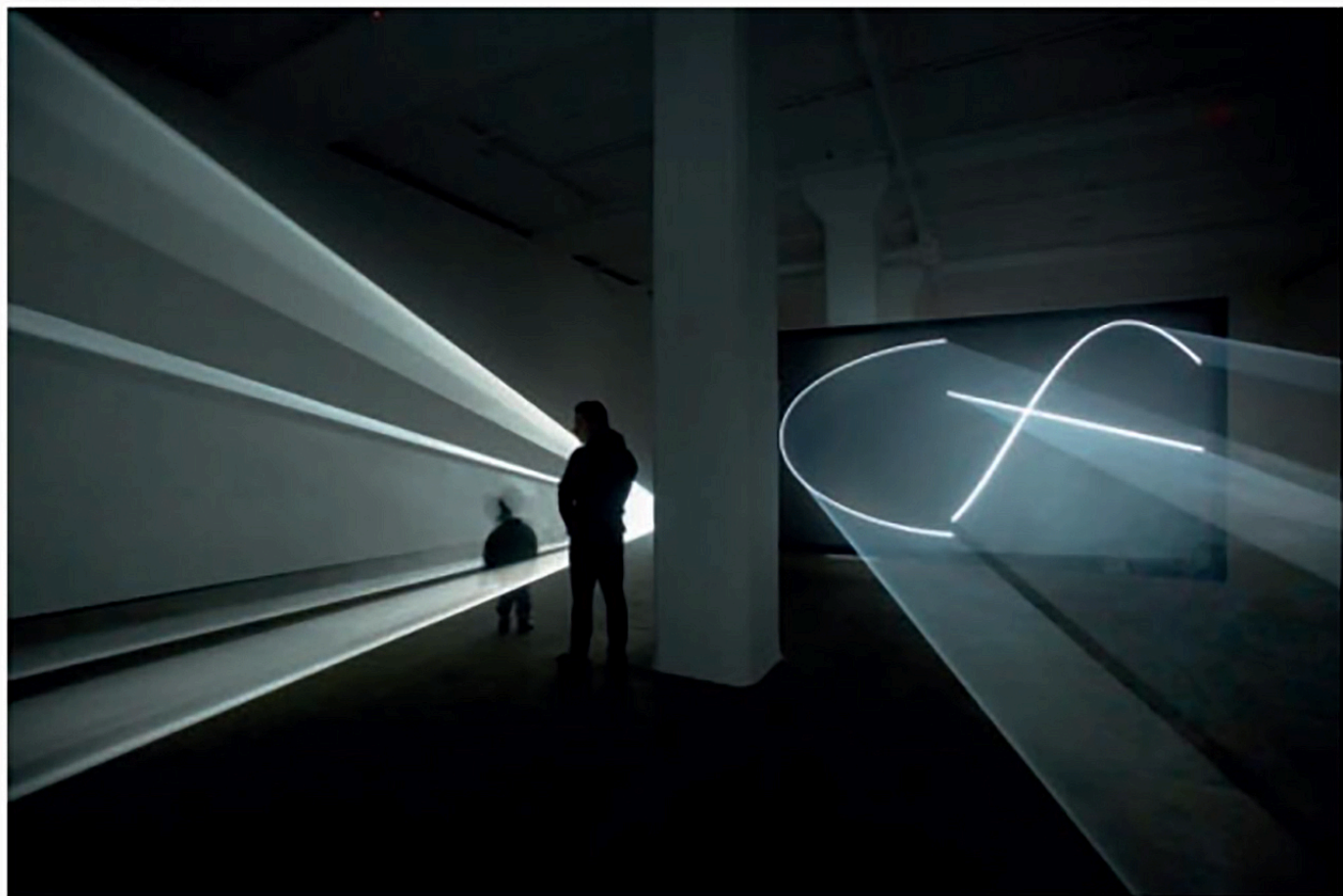
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ANTHONY MCCALL
Study for "Leaving"
(360° rotation, seen
from the left), 2006
suite of 12 pencil
drawings on paper
paper: 12 1/2 x 17 inches
(31.8 x 43.2 cm)
each framed: 14 1/8 x 10 1/8
inches (35.9 x 46 cm)
each titled, signed
and dated, recto
© Anthony McCall
Courtesy of Sean Kelly,
New York





ANTHONY MCCALL
Installation view of Face to
Face at Sean Kelly, New York
February 16 - March 23, 2013
Photography: Jason Wychie,
New York
Courtesy of Sean Kelly,
New York



che si notino dei cambiamenti, perché tutto si muove in modo lentissimo. Il loro movimento costante porta lo spettatore a sperimentare piuttosto che semplicemente a visualizzare l'opera, invitandolo a entrare nel cono di luce che girando su se stesso dà la percezione che i piani sono in movimento, cambiando lo spazio in cui si trovano. "Voglio che i miei lavori siano approcciati con attenzione" ci dice McCall, "non ho delle regole specifiche, ma l'osservatore ideale dovrebbe essere assorbito in essi, esplorando lo spazio in cui si trovano. È necessario muoversi per capirne la forma. Ma anche restare abbastanza a lungo da esplorarle nel tempo, perché si esprimono nel tempo, non nella struttura stessa". Paradossalmente McCall non è interessato alla luce ma piuttosto alla proiezione e il tempo del ciclo di movimento. "La luce è puramente un sotto-prodotto: sin dagli inizi ero preoccupato solo dall'aspetto cinematografico delle opere. Con *Light Describing a Cone* stavo cercando di fare un film, e la conseguenza di ciò è che stavo lavorando con la luce, all'interno della tradizione della scultura e nella tradizione delle performance. Non faccio Light-Art, infatti non mi piace questa definizione, non ha alcun significato, proprio come Video Art non ha alcun significato. L'opera è nel contenuto, non nella tecnologia". In questi mesi McCall ha una mostra alla galleria Sean Kelly di New York; questa volta non delle sue sculture ma dei suoi taccuini e bozzetti, che esplorano, presentano le origini e i concetti iniziali delle sue opere. Disegni meticolosi che raccontano lo sviluppo di diversi progetti: ognuno di questi comincia su piccoli taccuini, per passare a libri più grandi e poi a schemi e talvolta a delle piccole macchiette. "In alcuni casi il modello di carta diventa necessario. Posso visualizzare le cose abbastanza facilmente, ma quando uso due proiettori e uno schermo bi-la-

terale diventa difficile avere tutto nella testa, quindi un modello tridimensionale diventa necessario. Alcune volte faccio delle prove utilizzando un proiettore appeso sopra la mia scrivania per fare dei campioni in scala 1:4".

Nella mostra ci sono anche le proposte per opere pubbliche, cui McCall si avvicina con cauto entusiasmo: "Dentro a un museo lo spettatore si concentra nella calma e nella tranquillità del luogo appositamente costruito; mentre quando si fa qualcosa in un contesto pubblico, non è per nulla così, si potrebbe avere rumore o movimenti di "spettatori accidentali"; sei in competizione con gli aerei, il traffico, la folla. Queste sono sfide interessanti, ed è una scala emozionante. Ma la parte più difficile delle opere pubbliche è che l'arte diventa imprevedibile, troppo soggetta alla politica e al cambiare delle amministrazioni".

La mostra coincide con un libro, *Anthony McCall: Notebooks & Conversations*, con immagini dei suoi taccuini, disegni e interviste nel corso di dieci anni. "Esistono solo due o tre spazi al mondo che possano contenere le mie installazioni verticali, e Hangar Bicocca è uno di questi". Così aveva detto Anthony McCall in occasione della sua grande mostra a Milano nel 2004: serie di installazioni composte di solidi geometrici all'apparenza concreti, ma in realtà frutto di una combinazione di luce e vapore acqueo. Disegni che giungevano da videoproiettori collocati a dieci metri di altezza producendo coni di luce che si susseguivano longitudinalmente nello spazio totalmente oscurato del grande capannone, e non distante l'installazione di Kiefer *I Sette Palazzi Celesti*. Una mostra indimenticabile per suggestioni indescrivibili, e questa intervista a LUCE rappresenta metaforicamente un ritorno virtuale in Italia del grande artista.

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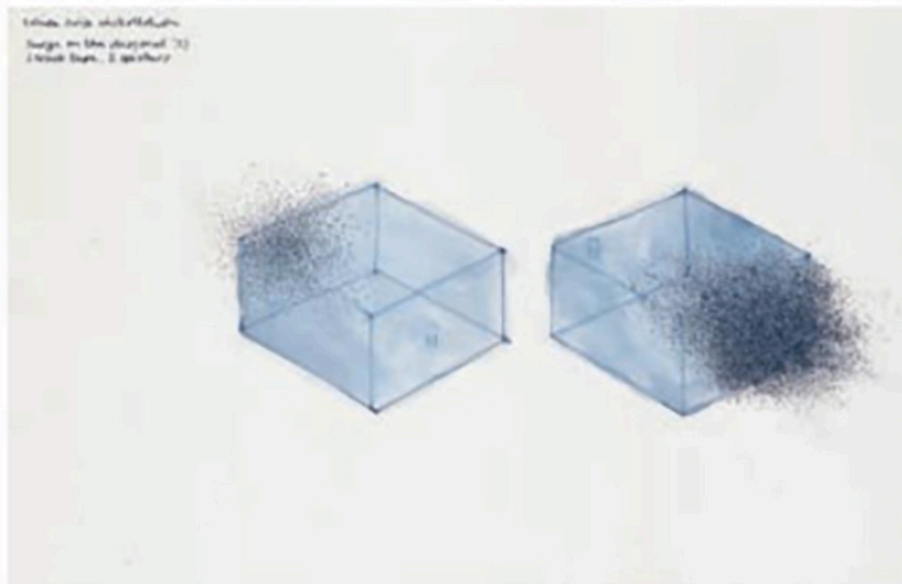
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There are only two or three spaces in the world able to contain my vertical installations, *Hangar Bicocca* is one of these". So Anthony McCall said in occasion of the Milan exhibition in 2004: a series of installations composed by geometric solids, in appearance, but actually a light and steam combination. Drawings came from projectors located ten meters height, producing light cones in longitudinal succession along the totally obscured big shed space, and near the Kiefer's installation *The Seven Heavenly Palaces*. An unforgettable, indescribable and suggestive exhibition, and this interview with LUCE metaphorically represents a virtual return to Italy for the great artist.



ANTHONY MCCALL
White Noise Installation,
Surge on the Diagonal (I),
1973/2000
Ink and wash on paper
paper: 16 1/8 x 23 inches
(41.9 x 58.4 cm)
framed: 16 3/4 x 25 1/8 inches
(42.5 x 64.5 cm)
© Anthony McCall
Courtesy of Sean Kelly,
New York