CASTELLO DI RIVOLI

Exhibition	*John McCracken*
Curator	Andrea Bellini
Catalogue	SKIRA, Milan
Press Preview	Monday February 21st 2011, 11.30 a.m.
Opening	Monday February 21st, 2011, 7.00 p.m.
Dates	February 22nd – June 19th, 2011
Press Office	Silvano Bertalot, tel.+39/011.9565211 Manuela Vasco, tel. +39/011.9565209 s.bertalot@castellodirivoli.org, press@castellodirivoli.org fax +39/011.9565231
Hours	Tuesday → Friday 10.00 a.m. – 5.00 p.m. Saturday → Sunday 10.00 a.m. - 7.00 p.m.
Entrance	€ 6.50 full price, € 4.50 reduced price
Location	Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Piazza Mafalda di Savoia – 10098 Rivoli (Turin)
Education services and public programs	Education Department tel. +39/011.9565213 – fax +39/011.9565232 educa@castellodirivoli.org
Information	tel. +39/011.9565220 www.castellodirivoli.org info@castellodirivoli.org

The exhibition has been made possible thanks to the support of Fondazione CRT

CASTELLO DI RIVOLI

John McCracken
Curated by Andrea Bellini
Dates: February 22 - June 19, 2011

The Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art is proud to present the largest retrospective to date of the American artist John McCracken (b. 1934, Berkeley, California. Lives and works in Santa Fe, New Mexico).

Among the leading historic exponents of the American Minimalism, together with Donald Judd, Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, and other, John McCracken views art as a means of aesthetic and spiritual emancipation and his works are as prototypes for a world to come, one dominated by pure thought and an absolute form of beauty. Convinced that art can give form to a hidden dimension of matter and the universe, reawakening consciousness and enriching our live, McCracken, through the uniqueness of his artistic vision, reveals the true complexity of what we generically call "Minimalism".
John McCracken became famous for what he refers to as "blocks, slabs, columns, planks. Basic beautiful forms, neutral forms." The starting point for his "neutral form" is a minimalist object or primary structure, such as a cube or a board. Built out of plywood, and subsequently covered with fiberglass and polyester resin imbued with a vivid color, the neutral form transforms into an object that brilliantly combines the anti-illusionism of Minimalism, the colorful effects of car culture, and the idea of an immaterial mental space. Known primarily for these sculptures, McCracken has only recently received attention for his 1970s *Mandala* paintings, which has led to a new valorization of his oeuvre.
Long esteemed among the work of West Coast Minimalists, McCracken's achievement is today understood as exemplifying an approach that defies established categories in order to open new fields of thought, such as the encounter with "presence" (McCracken's term) and speculations about outer space.

The John McCracken retrospective at the Castello di Rivoli, which has been made possible thanks to the support of Fondazione CRT, has been developed in close collaboration with the artist. It presents approximately sixty historical works including early paintings from the 1960s never shown before, early bichrome sculptural works such as *Theta-Two* and *Mykonos*, 1965; his first Plank, *Red Plank*, 1966; rarely exhibited *Mandala* paintings from the 1970s; till his most recent works such as *Wonder* and *Fair*, two stainless steel columns from 2010, created by the artist specifically for this exhibition.

Curated by Andrea Bellini, co-director of the Castello di Rivoli, this exhibition will take place in the Manica Lunga of the museum and it marks the beginning of a series of retrospectives dedicated to key figures in contemporary art.

Published by SKIRA on the occasion of the large retrospective at Castello di Rivoli, the catalogue edited by Andrea Bellini and Marianna Vecellio includes new essays by Andrea Bellini, Alex Farquharson, Director of Nottingham Contemporary in Britain, and Marc-Olivier Wahler, Director of the Palais de Tokyo, Paris; a new interview made to the artist by Marianna Vecellio and a conversation on McCracken between Daniel Baumann and the artist John Armleder.

In addition to images of the most important works created by McCracken, beginning in the 1960s, the catalogue presents a selection of his sketchbooks and, for the first time, a detailed chronology of the artist's exhibitions and his artistic development. This book also features an extensive anthology with texts by Brooks Adams, Roger M. Buergel, Dan Cameron, Frances Colpitt, John Coplans, Donna DeSalvo, Lucy R. Lippard, Jane Livingstone, Kynaston McShine, David Pagel, Peter Plagens, Merle Schipper, Barbara Rose, Harold Rosenberg, Angela Vettese, A. M. Wade, Emily Wassermann, Nicolas Wilder, Eva Wittocx, Adachiara Zevi and by the artist.

In conjunction with the opening of the *John McCracken* exhibition, Robin Clark, Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in San Diego will give a lecture entitled *Phenomenal: Light as a Primary Medium for Art in Los Angeles, circa 1960-1980.* This event will take place on Monday, February 21, 2011, 6 p.m., in the museum Theater, and is open to the public.

Robin Clark is Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, where together with MCASD Director Hugh M. Davies she is organizing the exhibition *Phenomenal: California Light and Space. Phenomenal* is part of the region-wide Getty Foundation initiative, *Pacific Standard Time: Art in Los Angeles, 1945-1980*, and will open at all three MCASD venues in the fall of 2011. In conjunction with the exhibition, Clark is editing the first critical reader on this topic, which will be copublished by MCASD and University of California Press. Clark was the curator of *Automatic Cities: The Architectural Imaginary in Contemporary Art* (2009), an exhibition that showcased new work by fourteen international artists and was accompanied by a catalogue featuring essays by Clark and Giuliana Bruno, Professor of Visual and Environmental Studies at Harvard University. Clark curated site-specific installations by Ann Lislegaard and Sebastian Hungerer & Rainer Kehres for the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts in St. Louis (2008) and contributed an essay to *Danskjävlar*, the catalogue for the inaugural exhibition at the Kunsthal Charlottenborg in Copenhagen (2008). Prior to joining MCASD, Clark was a curator at the Saint Louis Art Museum, where she organized solo shows by Tara Donovan, Ellen Gallagher, Isaac Julien, Julie Mehretu, Roxy Paine, Neo Rauch, and Matthew Ritchie among others. Clark earned a PhD in Art History from CUNY Graduate Center, an MA from Boston University and a BA from Smith College.

Press Office, Castello di Rivoli
tel. +39/011.9565209 - 211, fax +39/011.9565231, press@castellodirivoli.org, s.bertalot@castellodirivoli.org

Press materials and images are available into the JOHN MCCRACKEN folder of our ftp server http://www.selektaweb.com/cgi-bin/ftp/index.cgi [user: rivoliftp02, password: rivoli02]

Biography

John McCracken was born in Berkeley, California, on December 9, 1934. Prior to enrolling at the California College of Arts and Crafts (CCAC) in Oakland, where he studied painting from 1957 to 1965, he worked as a sonar operator on a military minesweeper.
In 1962 McCracken created sculptural objects from an assemblage of trash and detritus; at the same time he was producing oil paintings on canvas, such as *Cathedral*, 1962, *Look*, 1962, and *Bandolier*, 1962, which combine the abstract, geometric element with Surrealist imagination and narration, and which reveal his interest in modernist artists such as Stuart Davis and Gordon Onslow Ford, the latter of whom taught at the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland.
In 1964 he participated in his first group show, at the Richmond Art Center in Richmond, California, where he exhibited a series of geometric paintings and drawings, including *Painting 05*, 1963, and *Untitled*, 1964, which demonstrate how far he had moved from expressionist narration, and anticipate the formal synthesis he would tackle with minimalist reduction and sculpture in the years to come. The graphic elements in the paintings from these years seem to be reduced and distilled to a series of signs, arrows, circles and crosses, accentuated by the chromatic contrast between the background and the mark in the foreground.
In 1964, *Slate*, a wall piece in lacquer and wood, marked his transition from pictorial to sculptural production and the beginning of a vast production of works, first in lacquer and wood and then in fibreglass and plywood, characterised by vivid colours. The geometric elements in his earlier pictorial production seem to have become accentuated in a contrast that emerges in the juxtaposition and combination of separate sculptural elements.
In June 1965 he had his first solo exhibition at the Nicholas Wilder Gallery in Los Angeles, where he exhibited two-tone sculptures in lacquer, fiberglass and plywood, such as *Le Marquis*, 1965, *Shogun*, 1965, and *Theta-One*, 1965. These works are blocks made up of basic and neutral forms whose colour becomes a structural material. This exhibition brought attention to McCracken's work and led to his inclusion in a group show curated by John Coplans the following year, *Five Los Angeles Sculptors*, at the Art Gallery of the University of California, Irvine. On this occasion McCracken exhibited *Yellow Pyramid* and *Blue Post and Lintel I*, works from 1965 that express a relationship with language and the architectural space. McCracken's output came to be interpreted within the context of the California school, along with artists such as Larry Bell, Kenneth Price, Tony DeLap and David Gray, who did not share a programmatic approach but who emphasised refined manual skill and the use of modern materials, earning their work the label *Finish Fetish*.
McCracken's two-toned period was transitional and in 1966 he began creating monochrome works that reduce their impact to the force of their specificity as objects. The point of departure for these "neutral forms" is the minimalist object or the primary structure, such as the cube or parallelepiped. Executed in plywood and then covered in fibreglass and polyester resin in vivid colours, the neutral forms are transformed into an object that combines the anti-illusionistic tendencies of Minimal Art with colours typical of the automobile industry and with the idea of a mental and immaterial space.
1966 was the year when McCracken received official recognition as a Minimalist, with his inclusion in significant exhibitions such as *Primary Structures* at the Jewish Museum in New York. On this occasion the curator Kynaston McShine published a detailed analysis of the artist's work within the context of Minimalism and Land Art.

That same year McCracken had his first solo show in New York, at the Robert Elkon Gallery, where he exhibited his *Blocks* and *Slabs*, monochrome geometric objects that included works such as *Violet Block in Two Parts* and *Brown Block in Three Parts*, both dated 1966.

This reductive approach pushed the artist to experiment with simple materials and forms and to identify the *Plank*, a plywood or wood board rested against the wall, as a territory of coexistence for the individual and defined presence of the sculptural body and the real surrounding space, encouraging the viewer to reflect on the concise dialogue between these two opposites.

In 1967 McCracken showed a series of his *Planks* at the Robert Elkon Gallery in New York, and later at the Nicholas Wilder Gallery in Los Angeles, and his work was included in large-scale retrospectives of American art: *American Sculpture of the Sixties* at the Los Angeles County Museum; *A New Aesthetic* at the Washington Gallery of Modern Art; and *The Art of The Real: USA 1948-1969* at MoMA in New York.

Until this time the artist had been living in Venice, California, but in 1968 McCracken moved to New York, where he would remain for long periods of time until 1972, teaching at both the School of Visual Arts (1968-69) and Hunter College (1971-72).

1969 began with his first solo exhibition at a museum, the Art Gallery of Ontario, Canada, followed by a solo show at Ileana Sonnabend's gallery in Paris, marking the beginning of his professional collaboration with the latter.

During this period McCracken seemed to concentrate on the form of the *Plank* and its variations; he examined the *Plank* as a serial object, as an anthropomorphized object, a sort of self-portrait, a window or a system of communication with otherness; finally it became a symbolic form and a passage toward the monolithic body, seen in his works from the 1980s.

During the 1970s the artist's work attracted less international critical interest; there were considerably fewer exhibitions and he embarked on a period of creative isolation and private research, also marked by a return to painting. McCracken taught at the University of Nevada in Reno (1972-73) and Las Vegas (1973-75) and throughout this period showed his work predominantly in exhibition spaces connected to university campuses, although he continued to maintain a relationship with the Robert Elkon Gallery in New York. In the meantime his research seemed to abandon its reductionist thrust, with an embrace of the expressive and less neutral universe of pictorial language. He first created a series of *Mandalas*, oil paintings on canvas depicting concentric circles, then a series of paintings illustrating abstract motifs, such as *Abritaine* and *Ophirin*, both 1972, which express the relationship with various investigative motifs such as infinity and psychedelia, the languages of Native Americans and the energy and spirituality that characterise the artistic creation of an inner dimension. Toward the late 1970s, professional commitments led the artist, who still resided in Nevada, to go to California, where in 1978 he began collaborating with galleries in Los Angeles, anticipating his definitive return there in the 1980s.

McCracken's sculptural production is also the result of an osmosis with painting. Although he produced a series of monochrome, horizontal wall sculptures, the *Planks* are painted with decorative motifs that shift attention from the idea of the work to its surface.

In 1986 the revival of the artist's career featured his participation in two important exhibitions: the Venice Biennale and a solo exhibition, McCracken *Heroic Stance: The Sculpture of John McCracken 1965-1986*, a travelling show organised by P.S.1 and curated by Edward Leffingwell.

In the late 1980s the artist concentrated on the production of a new series of sculptural works in fiberglass, plywood and stainless steel, entitled *Monoliths*. This new series and two exhibitions in 1986 brought renewed attention to McCracken's activity, and numerous shows followed. In 1989 he participated in the exhibition *Geometric Abstraction and Minimalism in America* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, and he installed a selection of new sculptures at the Galerie Konrad Fischer in Dusseldorf.
In 1991 his works were included in the exhibition *Finish Fetish: L.A.'s Cool School* at the University of Southern California, where curator Francis Colpitt focused on a Los Angeles group of artists. The following year McCracken had a solo exhibition at the Sonnabend Gallery in New York and, in 1993, at the L.A. Louver Gallery in Los Angeles. In 1994 he had two solo shows of his new sculptures, at L.A. Louver in Venice, California, and at the Galerie Art & Public in Geneva, as well as a show the following year at the Hochschule für Angewandte Kunst in Vienna.
In 1995 a selection of new sculptures were included in *Painting Outside Painting: 44th Biennial Exhibition of American Painting* at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. In 1997 the Lisson Gallery in London held a large solo exhibition of works from 1965 to 1990, and David Zwirner in New York presented *John McCracken: Sculpture*, a similar selection that included the artist's historical works.
That same year McCracken was included in *Sunshine & Noir: Art in L.A. 1960-1997*, a travelling exhibition organised by the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebaek, Denmark; travelling at Castello di Rivoli in 1998. McCracken also participated in *View from Abroad: European Perspectives on American Art; 3 American Realities*, curated by Adam D. Weinberg and Nicholas Serota at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York.
In 1998 the gallery Studio La Città in Verona showed recent works by McCracken, in his first large solo show in Italy, followed by A Arte Studio Invernizzi in Milan, which included works from the 1990s.
In 1999 McCracken's early work was included in various group exhibitions, such as *The Museum: Highlights from the Collection; an Archive of the Pasadena Art Museum; Radical Part: Contemporary Art & Music in Pasadena, 1960-1974*, at the Norton Simon Museum of Art, Pasadena, and *The American Century: Art and Culture Part II: 1950-2000*, at the Whitney Museum of American Art. He had solo exhibitions at James Kelly Contemporary, Santa Fe, and at Hauser & Wirth, Zurich.
The following years brought numerous exhibitions that included both the artist's historical production and new works: *Made in California: Art, Image, and Identity, 1900-2000*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2000; *Les anneés 70: l'art en cause*, CAPC Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, 2001; *Primary Matters: The Minimalist Sensibility, 1959 to Present*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2003.
Since 2004 his work has been shown in a series of international exhibitions, including *Singular Forms (Sometimes Repeated): Art From 1951 to the Present*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; *A Minimal Future? Art as Object 1958-1969*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; and *Beyond Geometry. Experiments in Form, 1940s-1970s*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles. He also had a solo exhibition at S.M.A.K. in Ghent and participated in *Los Angeles, 1955-1985. Naissance d'une capitale artistique* at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris.
In 2007 a selection of his works was included in *documenta 12*, Kassel, curated by Roger Buergel and Ruth Noack. The following year his work was featured in the exhibition *John McCracken*, at Inverleith House, Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh.
In 2010 David Zwirner held a solo exhibition that concentrated on McCracken's works in bronze and steel.

The Exhibition

The exhibition, conceived specifically for the large spaces of the Manica Lunga at Castello di Rivoli, covers the entire span of the artistic production of John McCracken, a legendary exponent of West Coast minimalism.
The exhibition basically follows a chronological path through an installment personally conceived by the artist and curator. Through the path set up in the singular museum spaces designed by Carlo and Amedeo di Castellamonte, the passages and different phases of the artist's research are organized, with an emphasis on both the works' differences and their extraordinary coherence.
The exhibition opens with an initial section dedicated to pictorial works, while the second part of the show focuses on two-dimensional works derived from the earlier works, namely McCracken's first sculptures and objects, some of which bring to mind archaic or Egyptian architectural elements. These are followed by an important series of the celebrated *Planks* and an entire section devoted to the *Mandala* series. The selection concludes with recent works, including, among others, wall sculptures and monoliths.
The exhibition path begins and ends with two impressive and emblematic works in reflective steel, *Wonder* and *Fair*, exhibited here for the first time; both dated 2010, they were created specifically for this retrospective at Castello di Rivoli.

List of exhibited works

Cathedral, 1962, oil on canvas, 24 x 36 in., Collection Mrs. Margaret Eibert, New Jersey, courtesy the artist

Look, 1962, oil on canvas, 14 ½ x 14 ¾ in., Collection Mrs. Margaret Eibert, New Jersey, courtesy the artist

Bandolier, 1962, oil on canvas, 24 ½ x 26 ¾ in., Private Collection, courtesy the artist

Painting 03, 1963, oil on canvas, 17 5/8 x 18 ¼ in., Collection Mrs. Margaret Eibert, New Jersey, courtesy the artist

Theta-Two, 1965, lacquer, fiberglass, wood, 21 x 22 x 7 ½ in., courtesy David Zwirner, New York

Mykonos, 1965, lacquer, fiberglass, plywood, 15 x 16 ½ x 7 in., Collection of the Orange County Museum of Art. Gift of Betty Asher, courtesy the artist

Blue Post and Lintel I, 1965, lacquer, fiberglass, plywood, 102 x 32 x 17 in., Norton Simon Museum of Art, Pasadena. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Frederick R. Weisman, courtesy the artist

Untitled (Blue Block), 1966, lacquer, fiberglass, plywood, 11 x 12 ¼ x 7 ¼ in., courtesy Elkon Gallery, Inc., New York

Untitled (Red Block), 1966, lacquer, fiberglass, plywood, 8 x 11 x 10 in., courtesy Elkon Gallery, Inc., New York

Untitled (Green Block), 1966, polyester resin, fiberglass, plywood, 12 ¼ x 7 ¼ x 11 in., Ursula Hauser Collection, Switzerland

Brown Block in Three Parts, 1966, lacquer, wood, 3 elements, overall dimension 35 x 37 ½ x 14 in., Mireille Mosler collection, Long Island City, courtesy the artist

Think Pink, 1967, polyester resin, fiberglass, plywood, 105 x 18 ¼ x 3 ⅛ in., courtesy David Zwirner, New York and Hauser & Wirth, London and Zurich

Nov. 5, 1969, 1969, polyester resin, fiberglass, plywood, 5 7/8 x 6 ¼ x 5 ⅛ in., Hauser & Wirth Collection, Switzerland

Untitled, 1970, polyester resin, plywood, 51 x 51 x 2 5/8 in., courtesy Friedrich Christian Flick Collection im Hamburger Bahnhof

Kapai, 1970, acrylic on canvas, 16 x 16 in., courtesy Elkon Gallery, Inc., New York

Untitled (Red), 1971, acrylic on canvas, 16 x 16 in., Private collection, courtesy Franklin Parrasch Gallery, New York

Untitled (Black), 1971, acrylic on canvas, 16 x 16 in., Private collection, courtesy Franklin Parrasch Gallery, New York

Untitled (Blue), 1971, acrylic on canvas, 16 x 16 in., Private collection, courtesy Franklin Parrasch Gallery, New York

Red Cube, 1971 polyester resin, fiberglass, wood, 16 x 16 x 16 in., Collection of the Orange County Museum of Art. Gift of Avco Financial Services, Newport Beach, California

Tantric, 1971, acrylic on canvas, 16 x 16 in., courtesy Elkon Gallery, Inc., New York

Untitled, 1971, acrylic on canvas, 24 x 24 in., courtesy Elkon Gallery, Inc., New York

Ophirin, 1972, oil on canvas, 30 x 30 in., courtesy Elkon Gallery, Inc., New York

Abritaine, 1972, oil on canvas, 30 x 30 in., courtesy Elkon Gallery, Inc., New York

Mandala I, 1972, [March], felt pen on paper, 10 x 10 in., courtesy Elkon Gallery, Inc., New York

Mandala II, 1972, [March], felt pen on paper, 10 x 10 in., courtesy Elkon Gallery, Inc., New York

Mandala VII, 1972, [March], felt pen on paper, 10 x 10 in., courtesy Elkon Gallery, Inc., New York

Mandala VIII, 1972, [March], felt pen on paper, 10 x 10 in., courtesy Elkon Gallery, Inc., New York

Red Pyramid, 1974, polyester resin, wood, 10 x 16 x 16 in., Gift of Mr. and Mrs. M. A. Gribin, Collection of the Orange County Museum of Art

Untitled, 1974, lacquer, wood, 96 x 19 x 2 ¼ in., Collection Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego. Promised gift of the Ruth Gribin Non-Exempt QTip Marital Trust

Black Resin Painting 1, 1974, polyester resin, wood, 32 ¼ x 48 ¼ x 2 3/8 in., Gift of Mr. and Mrs. M. A. Gribin California, Collection of the Orange County Museum of Art

Untitled, 1974, lacquer, polyester resin, fiberglass, wood, 93 5/8 x 17 7/8 x 2 in., Private Collection, Germany, courtesy Galleria Massimo De Carlo, Milan

Untitled #3, 1974, lacquer, polyester resin, fiberglass, wood, 32 ¼ x 47 7/8 in., Private Collection, Germany, courtesy Galleria Massimo De Carlo, Milan

Pyramid, 1976, acrylic, wood, 12 x 16 x 16 in., Collection Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego. Gift of John Norton

Untitled, 1983, polyester resin, fiberglass, plywood, 108 x 21 ½ x 2 3/8 in., courtesy the artist and David Zwirner, New York

Untitled #V, 1985, lacquer, resin, fiberglass, wood, 114 7/8 x 24 7/8 in., Vanmoerkerke Collection, Belgium

Irydi, 1987, lacquer, resin, fiberglass, wood, 30 7/8 x 118 7/8 x 3 ⅛ in., Heinz Peter Hager - Bolzano/Italy, courtesy Massimo De Carlo, Milan

Alpha I, 1988, stainless steel, 15 x 9 ½ x 9 7/8 in., Ursula Hauser Collection, Switzerland

Mandrake, 1989, polyester resin, fiberglass, plywood, 93 ⅛ x 19 ⅛ x 22 3/8 in., Sammlung Lafrenz, Wesenburg Museum für Moderne Kunst, Bremen

Minnesota, 1989, polyester resin, fiberglass, plywood, 96 x 27 ⅛ x 16 7/8 in., courtesy the artist and David Zwirner, New York

Thor, 1990, polyester resin, fiberglass, plywood, 90 x 32 x 20 in., Vanmoerkerke Collection, Belgium

Rama, 1990, paint, polyester resin, fiberglass, wood, 5 7/8 x 96 ⅛ x 5 ⅛ in., Ursula Hauser Collection, Switzerland

Ra, 1991, polyester resin, fiberglass, plywood, 21 ¼ x 230 x 14 in., L.A. Louver

Spaceway, 1991, polyester resin, fiberglass, plywood, 7 ½ x 106 x 13 ½ in., Ursula Hauser Collection, Switzerland

Alaska, 1991, polyester resin, fiberglass, wood, 15 ¾ x 90 x 9 in., Musée de Grenoble Collection, Grenoble

Guardian, 1995, polyester resin, fiberglass, plywood, 45 ¼ x 48 x 16 in., Ursula Hauser Collection, Switzerland

On Stream, 1998, polyester resin, fiberglass, plywood, 50 3/8 x 13 ⅛ x 7 ¼ in., courtesy Studio la Città, Verona

On High, 1998, polyester resin, fiberglass, plywood, 19 ⅛ x 58 5/8 x 11 ⅛ in., courtesy Studio la Città, Verona

On the Go, 1998, polyester resin, fiberglass, plywood, 36 ½ x 50 ¼ x 11 in., courtesy Studio la Città, Verona

On the Beam, 1998, polyester resin, fiberglass, plywood, 17 ¾ x 30 ½ x 8 ¾ in., courtesy Studio la Città, Verona

Aqua, 2002, polyester resin, fiberglass, plywood, 92 ¼ x 19 7/8 x 3 7/8 in., Vanmoerkerke Collection, Belgium

Cosmos, 2008, polyester resin, fiberglass, plywood, 8 elements, overall dimension 96 x 124 x 13 ½ in., courtesy the artist and David Zwirner, New York

Works never shown before

Wonder, 2010, stainless steel, 116 x 18 x 14 in., courtesy the artist and David Zwirner, New York

Fair, 2010, stainless steel, 116 x 17 x 14 ½ in., courtesy the artist and David Zwirner, New York

A MAXIMALIST OF MINIMALISM
Andrea Bellini

When John McCracken first emerged in the 1960s, he was critically received as part of the Minimalist movement which was then gaining ground in New York and Los Angeles, where he was based. To promote the new movement[1] – whose name was coined by Richard Wollheim in 1965 – critics pointed to the similarities between the various artists rather than to their differences, describing Minimalism in general terms, as sculpture in geometric forms or series, devoid of emotion and allegorical references, and made of industrial materials in factory environments.
Minimalism had acquired a definition, and this contributed to the rapid rise of the group even though it ended up marginalising those artists whose works, in the late 1960s, appeared more unorthodox and eccentric than the style of venerated East Coast Minimal sculptors like Carl Andre, Donald Judd and Robert Morris.
McCracken had begun the decade painting abstract canvases that looked like dreamy variations on Pop – mental landscapes marked with arrows, crosses, dotted lines, and other symbols taken from the street. By the end of 1963, however, he had simplified and reduced these signs, isolating them against geometric backdrops. Thus, when McCracken saw the work of Judd and Andre illustrated in the pages of the art magazines of the time, the New York artists' commitment to a reduced geometry struck a chord with his own interests.[2] Even so, in the next few years McCracken turned to minimal forms seeking something very different from his East Coast peers.
While Judd and Andre, along with Dan Flavin, Sol LeWitt, Carl Andre, Robert Morris and others, published their theories in the pages of *Arts Magazine* and *Artforum*[2] – waging an ideological battle against the previous generation and the gestural art of the Abstract Expressionists – McCracken saved his writing for his sketchbooks, which came in the form of an intimate diary with short texts and queries relating to his own research. He did not think of his art as being opposed to what had gone before: rather, as he moved into sculpture, his work maintained its Pop sensibility and its abstract painterly approach. For McCracken, Minimalism was not a homeland to be defended but a region to be traversed and corrupted. He looked at California street culture, treating the surfaces of his sculptures with coloured resins in the same way that young people in those days customised their cars, and he pursued an idea of beauty and sensuality, of transcendence and the absolute, through the use of form and colour.
After participating in the most important Minimalist exhibitions between 1965 and 1971, McCracken gradually entered a kind of limbo where he remained, forgotten, for the next fifteen years. In the mid-1980s his work again began to attract attention,[3] thanks to a newfound appreciation of the significance of his investigations and of West Coast art in general. A new generation of critics and curators, both in the United States and in Europe, became fascinated by "Finish Fetish"[4], and by these artists' close relationship with the culture and light of Los Angeles, as well as with the 1960s, science fiction, new technology, and also with a kind of Californian utopianism.
In the past few years, McCracken's work has appeared in numerous exhibitions, often outside the context of Minimalist art. In 2007 he took part with several new sculptures as well as older paintings and drawings to documenta 12 in Kassel, Germany, and he has participated in a wide range of shows on themes such as psychedelia, UFOs and design. These include *Martian Museum of Terrestrial Art* (2008) at the Barbican Art Gallery, London; *Take Me to Your Leader! The Great Escape Into Space* (2010) at the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo; *Tomorrow Now: When Design Meets Science Fiction*

(2007) at the Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg; and the large-scale travelling exhibitions *Summer of Love: Art of the Psychedelic Era* (2005) and *If Everybody Had an Ocean: Brian Wilson, An Art Exhibition* (2007) to name but a few. Why is the art of McCracken – of all the artists once grouped as Minimalists – enjoying this second life? And why now?

The retrospective at Castello di Rivoli is the first comprehensive overview of McCracken's work from 1962 to the present. Building upon the recent critical reassessment of the artist, the show highlights the complexity and depth of his fifty-year career and, together with this catalogue, attempts to interpret his work and the reasons for its revival. The aim is not however to offer an esoteric and unilateral reading of his art, as though it were in conflict with a Minimalist view of his work: McCracken undoubtedly remains one of the leading historic exponents of the American movement, together with Judd, Andre, Flavin, Anne Truitt, Morris, Larry Bell, et al. Instead, the uniqueness of his artistic vision reveals the true complexity of what we generically call "Minimalism".

McCracken is convinced that art can give form to a hidden dimension of matter and the universe, reawakening consciousness and enriching our lives. His works have an allusive, metaphysical content and seem to evoke something else – an idea of beauty, energy, perfection and revelation. This, ultimately, is McCracken's heresy: he shares the Abstract Expressionists' belief that abstraction transcends the material world. Shy and cordial, methodical and profoundly coherent, McCracken is one of the last great idealists in the art world.[5] He views art as a means of aesthetic and spiritual emancipation, and his works are as prototypes for a world to come, one dominated by pure thought and an absolute form of beauty. While Morris, Andre and Judd think and theorise about Minimalism, McCracken visualises and dreams it, and where they find truth only in the relationships between empirical phenomena, he believes that truth lies in the invisible and transcendent. While their work is marked by ironic and intellectual detachment, McCracken's art is fundamentally linked to a utopian form of modernism.

This visionary dimension is linked to the artist's belief in the existence of extraterrestrial life forms, and this is an important – and authentically felt and experienced – part of his life and artistic production. Many photos depict McCracken at the sites of alleged Ufo sightings or landings, and some of these are reproduced in this catalogue. He claims to have travelled through space and time, to be capable of out-of-body experiences and to have had close encounters with aliens. He moves between the conscious and the subconscious, between sleep and wakefulness, between a place visible to all and another dimension. And his works similarly occupy this middle ground between two worlds. Unlike other Minimalist artists, McCracken does not consider his sculptures to be inexpressive objects but living, autonomous entities – in other words, true "beings". They have a fundamentally anthropomorphic quality, and hence a subjective dimension, in the sense of an absolute "otherness".

The works are all handmade, and he takes great care to obtain surfaces that are sensual and alive, at once serial and unique. Wooden shapes are varnished with multiple layers of highgloss lacquer to produce warm, sensual objects that reflect and change with the light, which is a fundamental aspect of much of the art of southern California.[6] Whereas the construction method is evident in the work of other Minimalists, in which materials are simply required to represent themselves, McCracken's lacquers disguise the material and the creative process of his work. We thus find ourselves face to face with objects whose nature, constituents and composition we cannot identify. In place of the greys, whites and blacks we find in East Coast works, McCracken chooses a broad chromatic spectrum, ranging from pink to violet, brown to red, lavender to navy blue, sky blue to yellow.

Colour becomes the material itself – an iridescent material that quivers and transforms with the light. The work thus changes state, and is no longer just a sculpture or a painting, but both of those things together, becoming a hybrid, a mass of energy. Although he makes use of a wide variety of forms, he always tries to give his works dimensions that directly relate to the human body. The general public is encouraged to establish a physical relationship with his works. Unlike all the other Minimalists, McCracken will even use the classic pedestal if necessary, calculating its height precisely so that viewers of his smaller works are forced to lean towards them, thereby coming into contact with the energy, or the "aura" as he calls it, that these forms emanate into the space around them.

John McCracken: A Retrospective

This exhibition is Castello di Rivoli's third major solo show dedicated to a leading Minimalist artist, following those of Carl Andre and Donald Judd in the late 1980s, which were curated by Rudi Fuchs. The retrospective features a wide selection of works spanning McCracken's entire artistic career, beginning with his paintings of 1962–63, which have never previously been exhibited, and some of his earliest sculptures, such as *Mykonos* (1965), the first example of his use of a fiberglass coating on a wooden structure. Many of the works on display have rarely been seen in Europe, and these include the *Pyramids* series and *Blue Post and Lintel I* (1965). These sculptures are inspired by antiquity, particularly by the architecture of ancient Egypt, which McCracken has described as transcending its own matter.[7] In these elementary forms, like the 1989 *Minnesota* "monolith" exhibited here, the artist sees an eternal, spiritual quality capable of surviving far into the future.

In 1971 McCracken returned to painting on canvas, using small brushstrokes to create esoteric abstract compositions called *Mandalas*. Several of these extraordinary paintings are on view at Castello di Rivoli. But the artist's most iconic works are no doubt his *Planks* – long, thin wooden boards placed on the ground and leaning against the wall. Although devoid of a sense of depth, the works occupy a three-dimensional space, imposing themselves simultaneously as objects and as planes of pictorial exploration. Included here we see an important series of early *Planks* that were produced in 1966 and presented the following year at the Robert Elkon Gallery in New York. Finally, the retrospective presents a broad selection of sculptures made during the past thirty years, including recent works such as *Cosmos* (2008). These exemplify the coherence and obsessive nature of McCracken's work – aspects which are also underscored by the layout of the exhibition, for although most are organised chronologically, some artworks are placed "out of time," emphasising the circularity and repetition that are features of his career.

This publication, the first in-depth academic monograph dedicated to John McCracken, features scholarly essays as well as primary materials. Marc-Olivier Wahler, Director of the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, looks at how we might discuss McCracken's work outside the confines of Minimalism and the language of art history; and Alex Farquharson, Director of Nottingham Contemporary in Britain, examines the artist's recent visibility and the wide range of contexts in which his work has appeared. Together with these essays there is a discussion between Daniel Baumann, curatorial advisor for the exhibition, and artist John Armleder on McCracken's legacy. In addition, a large anthology of earlier essays, articles and reviews are reprinted, along with a chronology of solo and group exhibitions, a list of exhibited works and an extensive bibliography. A lavishly illustrated section includes rare archival photos and portraits, material from the sketchbooks and a series of exhibition invitations and posters.

Rounding out the catalogue is a recent interview with McCracken by Marianna Vecellio, assistant curator at Castello di Rivoli. Like the exhibition itself, this monograph has been produced in close collaboration with the artist, to whom we extend our warmest thanks.

1) The term "Minimalism", which has never been precisely defined, generically refers to an artistic movement that emerged in New York and Los Angeles during the 1960s. Its leading exponents, including Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, John McCracken and Larry Bell, principally work in sculpture, creating single geometric forms or series of objects with a modular rationale. Usually made with industrial materials, minimalist objects are geometrically defined, literal presences, characterised by rigorous execution techniques and the absence of decoration or any kind of allegorical reference. In spite of these generic attributes, Minimalist artists have never published a true "manifesto" like other historic avant-garde movements. On the contrary, they have always refuted the idea of a coherent movement, considering their practices to be not only very different from each other, but often contradictory.
2) The first text about Minimalist art is generally considered to be Carl Andre's entry on Frank Stella, *Preface to Stripe Painting*, written for the exhibition catalogue *Sixteen Americans* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959), 76.
3) See D. Cameron, "High-Tech Redux: LA Art of the Sixties Is Being Re-Assessed in Terms of the Art of the Late Eighties," in *Flash Art International* (Summer 1988), 102–8.
4) Starting in the 1960s, East Coast critics labeled West Coast Minimalism "Finish Fetish" or "The L.A. Look" for its polished and oftentimes coloured sculpture made from non-traditional art materials such as glass, plastic, and polyurethane resin.
5) Dan Cameron first expressed this idea in "A Perfect World (Notes on the Art of John McCracken)", in *John McCracken: Sculptures* (Geneva: Art & Public, 1994), 6.
6) This is seen not just in the sculpture of other so-called "Light and Space artists", such as Larry Bell, Robert Irwin and James Turrell, but also in the work of artists Ed Ruscha, David Hockney, Billy Al Bengston and Robert Ackerman.
7) T. Kellein, "Interview with John McCracken", op. cit., 36.

Extraordinary Guides
Curated by Marcella Beccaria

Extraordinary Guides is a program intended to showcase the holdings of the permanent collection and the exhibitions underway at Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea. During each meeting, the Museum's rooms are animated by the presence, intuitions and ideas of artists, writers, art historians, travelers and intellectuals.

The *Extraordinary Guides* play the role of contributing new viewpoints, using their different areas of expertise and professionalism to bring the Castello closer to the public. To date, the Extraordinary Guides have included, among others, the art historian Achille Bonito Oliva, the television journalist Giovanni Minoli, the writer and poet Nanni Balestrini, the curatorial collective a.titolo, artists Massimo Bartolini, Roberto Cuoghi, Lara Favaretto, Christian Frosi and Massimo Grimaldi, the group A12 and the editorial staff of the magazine "Mousse."

In conjunction with the John McCracken exhibition, curated by Andrea Bellini, the following *Extraordinary Guides* are scheduled:

March 25, 6:30 p.m., Manica Lunga
Gianni Caravaggio, artist, Simone Menegoi, art critic, and Alessio Ascari, editor of "The Kaleidoscope"
Sculpture, Minimalism and the works of McCracken

April 15, 6:30 p.m., Manica Lunga
Francesco Poli, art historian, and Rä di Martino, artist
McCracken, the legacy of Minimalism and the cinematographic imagination

May 13, 6:30 p.m., Theater and Manica Lunga
Giovanni Battista Judica Cordiglia
Turin at the center of space: research by the Judica Cordiglia brothers
In conjunction with the McCracken exhibition and Judica Cordiglia's interest in sidereal space, a special meeting is devoted to the unusual story of Achille and Giovanni Battista Judica Cordiglia, who, beginning in the 1950s, developed a center in Turin for listening to transmissions from space, through which they intercepted communications from the first artificial satellites and cosmonauts.
The evening includes a premiere for the screening of *Banditi dello Spazio. Dossier Sputnik 2* (*Space Bandits. Sputnik 2 Dossier*, 2010), a documentary created by the Judica Cordiglia brothers, offering evidence of their "incredible adventure."

Skira editore

Exhibitions

John McCracken

Edited by Andrea Bellini and Marianna Vecellio

Among the leading historic exponents of Minimalism, together with Donald Judd, Carl Andre and Dan Flavin, John McCracken (b. 1934, Berkeley, California), through the uniqueness of his artistic vision, reveals the true complexity of the American movement. Convinced that art can give form to a hidden dimension of matter and the universe, reawakening consciousness and enriching our life, McCracken views art as a means of aesthetic and spiritual emancipation and his works as prototypes for a world to come.
A world dominated by pure thought and an absolute form of beauty.

Published on the occasion of the large retrospective at Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art, the catalogue includes essays by Andrea Bellini, Alex Farquharson, and Marc-Olivier Wahler; an interview with the artist by Marianna Vecellio and a conversation on McCracken between Daniel Baumann and John Armleder.

In addition to images of the most important works created by McCracken beginning in the 1960s, the catalogue presents a selection of his sketchbooks and a detailed chronology of the artist's exhibitions and his artistic development. This book also features an extensive anthology with texts by Brooks Adams, Roger M. Buergel, Dan Cameron, Frances Colpitt, John Coplans, Donna DeSalvo, Lucy R. Lippard, Jane Livingston, Kynaston McShine, David Pagel, Peter Plagens, Barbara Rose, Harold Rosenberg, Merle Schipper, Angela Vettese, A. M. Wade, Emily Wasserman, Nicholas Wilder, Eva Wittocx, Adachiara Zevi and by the artist.

2011, English and Italian editions
24 x 28 cm, 264 pages, 232 colour illustrations, hardcover
ISBN 978-88-572-0775-9 I, -0776-6 E
€ 49,00 $ 65.00 Can $ 74.00 £ 45.00

Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art, Rivoli-Turin
22 February – 19 June 2011

Lucia Crespi
Ufficio stampa Skira
via Francesco Brioschi 21
20136 Milano
t. +39 02.89.41.55.32
+39 02.89.40.16.45
f. +39 02.89.41.00.51
lucia@luciacrespi.it

Skira editore spa
Palazzo Casati Stampa
via Torino 61
20123 Milano
t. +39 02.72.444.1
f. +39 02.72.444.219
www.skira.net

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volume 00008515
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