

GAGOSIAN



Extended through March 23, 2019

WALTER DE MARIA

Idea to Action to Object



Opening reception: Thursday, January 24, 6–8pm
January 24–March 9, 2019
20 Grosvenor Hill, London

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January 21, 2019

If the Large Earth Sculpture is an expression of myself only . . . then it is a failure. It must express the feelings of most of the people, not only in Germany, but in the world. It must have universal interest and meaning.
—Walter De Maria, on the *Olympic Mountain Project*, 1971

Gagosian is pleased to present *Idea to Action to Object*, an exhibition of over forty works on paper and several related sculptures by the late Walter De Maria. The drawings, sourced from the Estate of Walter De Maria, are on view for the first time, revealing various unrealized projects and philosophical explorations, and suggesting a tender humanity behind De Maria's geometric precision.

In De Maria's wide-ranging oeuvre, objects emerge from a transitional zone between idea and action. Like sounds coming from an instrument, shapes appear, overlap, and repeat in infinite permutations—drawing attention to the limits of gallery spaces, prioritizing bodily awareness, and examining the relationship between the relative and the absolute.

The title of this exhibition comes from a sketchbook page, *Abstract Concept* (c. 1960–61), in which De Maria mapped out a cyclical relationship between a work’s conception, actualization, and perceived meaning—a cycle that he believed to be rooted in the real (as opposed to illusory) world. Themes of causality and performance run throughout the drawings, providing more intimate backstories for his minimalist sculptures and installations. The early editioned sculpture *Ball Drop* (1961–64) comprises a tall plywood box with two square holes cut into its face. A wooden sphere sits in a compartment framed by the lower hole. When it was originally shown at the 9 Great Jones Street gallery in 1963, the viewer was invited to take the ball and drop it through the top hole, causing a sharp bang. Here, however, the ball remains static, charged with potential energy, like the solid stainless-steel ball in *14-Sided Open Polygon* (1984).

In De Maria’s later works, it could be argued that the ball is replaced by the viewer, who must consider herself in relation to both abstract ideas and physical space. This is powerfully illustrated in the preparatory drawings for his unrealized *Olympic Mountain Project* (1970–71). For the 1972 Olympic games in Munich, De Maria proposed to drill a 400-foot shaft through a mountain of rubble from World War II, covering the top of the hole with a bronze disk. To think about the dark void beneath the metal disk imbues his other disk-shaped sculptures with a sense of precariousness. Standing over *The Equal Area Series: Pair Number 24* (1990)—steel outlines of a square and a circle occupying the same surface area of the gallery floor—the viewer may imagine falling through the square hole in *Ball Drop* or through the circular one in the *Olympic Mountain Project*.

Some drawings attest to De Maria’s lighthearted, improvisational spirit. In *Stand Up Comedian* (c. 1961–63), a bowling pin-like man occupies the center of the page with “talks for two hours about cigarets [sic] and smokes” written above his head and “diskothek” appearing beneath him; and in the *Flying Saucer* (1974) drawings, loosely rendered ellipses float across the page. This suggests that De Maria’s geometries are not entirely fanciful, but rather combine the serialization of Minimalism with the sublime scale of land and sky, and the electrifying tremors of the unknown.

Walter De Maria was born in 1935 in Albany, California, and died in 2013 in Los Angeles. Collections include Dia Art Foundation, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Menil Collection, Houston; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main, Germany; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; and Centre Pompidou, Paris. Recent exhibitions include *Silver Meters, Gold Meters*, Dia:Beacon, NY (2010); *Large Red Sphere*, Museum Brandhorst, Munich (2010); *Trilogies*, Menil Collection, Houston (2011); *The 2000 Sculpture*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2012–13); *Equal Area Series*, Dia:Beacon, NY (2013); *Counterpoint*, Dallas Museum of Art (2016); *360° I Ching / 64 Sculptures*, Dia:Beacon, NY (2016); and *Surface Waves*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2017).

De Maria’s permanent installations around the world include *The New York Earth Room* (1977), New York; *The Lightning Field* (1977), Quemado, New Mexico; *The Vertical Earth Kilometer* (1977), Kassel, Germany; *The Broken Kilometer* (1979), New York; *Monument to the Bicentennial of the French Revolution 1789–1989* (1989–90), Assemblée Nationale, Paris; *Time/Timeless/No Time* (2004), Chichu Art Museum, Naoshima, Japan; and *Large Red Sphere* (2010), Türkentor, Kunstareal München, Munich. His sculpture *Apollo’s Ecstasy* (1990) was included in the 55th Biennale di Venezia in 2013.

De Maria’s *Truck Trilogy* is on view at Dia:Beacon, NY, through summer 2019.

#WalterDeMaria

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