

PEDER LUND

Dennis Oppenheim - Broken Record Blues

27 January – 17 March 2018

Peder Lund is pleased to present an important installation by the artist Dennis Oppenheim (1938-2011). Oppenheim was one of the most adventurous American artists working during the post-minimalism, postmodernist period of the mid-1960s, all the way until his death in 2011. A pioneer of earthworks, body art and Conceptual art, Oppenheim later moved to making tangible installations and public sculpture. His eclectic body of work, from large-scale installation pieces, to performance and video art, to three-dimensional moving machine pieces, all metaphorically linked by their continued investigation of the dialogue between art and the self.

Belonging to a generation of artists who saw painting and sculpture as obsolete, he explored early on the idea that became popular during the mid-1970s: the absent artist. Oppenheim deals in strong metaphors for the absent artist in *Broken Records Blues* (1976). The installation uses two surrogate figures, their heads cast in the artist's likeness. One sits facing a blank wall, another lies face down in an opposite corner, as if dragged across the room. The artist is present in his likeness, in different psychological states.

By using sound as a means of sculptural expression and extending himself in the "surrogates," of his post-performance works, Oppenheim creates a new kind of self-portrait. He responded to what he saw as artists' of the day "extreme paranoia" in the re-evaluation of their work after the incredible velocity of work produced in the 1960s. From the beginning, Oppenheim felt that "art was always a thing to be attacked."

After tiring of the physical demands of body art, Oppenheim turned to the custom-made, sometimes motor controlled or voice activated marionettes. This shift brought out his dark humor and theatrical proclivities and led to increasingly elaborate sculptural narratives. Coupled with soundtracks, the post-performance pieces also sought to deepen Oppenheim's assertion of sound as sculpture.

The soundtrack for *Broken Record Blues* uses two audio tracks. One simulates the effect of a broken record. The notes are then plotted with light on five drag marks in blue sand, representing the musical bars. This track fades in and out of the second track, a monologue, describing conditions of stagnation, repetition and the eventual deterioration of creative process. The five musical bars are sometimes referred to as "scratches on my face that never go away" or "lines of expression that remain the same, but deepen."

Dennis Oppenheim's practice employed all available methods: writing, action, performance, video, film, photography, and installation with and without sound or monologue. He used mechanical and industrial elements, fireworks, common objects and traditional materials, materials of the earth, his own or another's body. He created works for interior, exterior and public spaces. Few of his contemporaries worked in a broader range of mediums or methods.

Dennis Oppenheim was born in 1938 in Electric City, a small town about four hours outside of Seattle, Washington. Although access to art was limited, his mother encouraged his early interest. His father was an engineer, which may have been a motivation for Oppenheim's later forays into sculpture with primitive engines and moving parts. After high-school he attended the California College of the Arts in Oakland, then Stanford University. He moved to New York in 1966, later acquiring a house and a studio, plus several assistants, in Manhattan.

Broken Record Blues has been included in a number of important solo and group exhibitions including the Dennis Oppenheim retrospective at Museum Boymans-van-Beuningen, Rotterdam (1976); *Carmina Urbana* at Musei de Spoleto, Spoleto (1992); *Presenze* at Centro Espositivo della Rocca Paolina, Perugia (1993); and *Forty* at MoMA PS1, New York (2016). Oppenheim received a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship in 1969, National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships in 1974 and 1982, an Excellence in Transportation award from the State of California in 2003, and a Lifetime Achievement Award at the Vancouver Sculpture Biennale in 2007. His work is included in dozens of international public art collections, including the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago; Centre d'Art Plastique Contemporain, Bordeaux, France; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit; Emanuel Hoffmann-Stiftung, Basel; The Institute for Contemporary Art, P.S.1 Museum, Long Island City; Israel Museum, Jerusalem; Kunsthaus Zurich, Zurich; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Modern Art, New York; and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, among many others.