

## PEDER LUND

James Lee Byars: Sphere Is a Sphere Is a Sphere Is a Sphere

19 March – 11 June 2016

Peder Lund is pleased to announce an exhibition with the American artist James Lee Byars (1932-1997). Originally a student of art and philosophy at Wayne State University, Byars stated that his main influences were "Stein, Einstein, and Wittgenstein" After completing his studies in the United States, Byars spent nearly a decade in Japan, where he became influenced by Zen Buddhism, Noh theatre and Shinto rituals and executed his first performances. In 1958, Byars returned to the United States and forged a relationship with Dorothy Miller, senior curator of painting and sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. After meeting Byars, Miller allowed him to hold a temporary exhibition in the stairwell of MoMA, which was the artist's New York debut. Since then, the performative events, sculptures, drawings, installations, and wearable art of James Lee Byars has been widely exhibited internationally. Up until his death at the age of 65, Byars had remained in constant pursuit of the concept of perfection and truth.

Byars shaped his persona and career into a continuous performance in which his life and art merged. Ken Johnson of the New York Times described him as a "dandified hierophant". At the age of 37, Byars wrote a book titled *½ an autobiography* while sitting in a gallery space noting down thoughts and questions as visitors passed through. The book was later published with the additional title *The Big Sample of Byars*. Through what he called "the first totally interrogative philosophy", Byars attempted to make the limits of human knowledge visible, alleging that questions appeared to be the only possible knowledge and "the ultimate statement of reality". Over the span of sixteen years, he sent hundreds of "letters" to various public figures as well as friends and acquaintances. His *Star Letters* consisted of impossibly long scrolls of illegible text, ornamented with stars. Byars' reflections on death, another recurring topic in his art, emerge in one of the few performances documented on video titled *The Perfect Epitaph*. Here the artist is seen dressed in his usual gold-lamé suit slowly rolling a ball made of lava through the empty streets of Amsterdam.

The exhibition *James Lee Byars: Sphere Is a Sphere Is a Sphere Is a Sphere* at Peder Lund features four spherical sculptures made of different materials in various sizes. The sphere has been essential in Byars' art since his thesis exhibition, when he installed a number of large spherical stones in the living room of his family home. The sphere is a literal and simple representation of something absolute and perfect, as well as completely closed and impenetrable. The sculptures on view were executed between 1980 and 1989. The earliest work, *The Lucky Stone* (1980), is intimately sized at 27 cm diameter and carved out of Bernese sandstone. *The Tomb Of James Lee Byars* (1986) sits solemnly in a more human proportion. The twin basalt spheres *Is Is* (1988) cast a dynamic shadow sitting side by side with a tiny space between them. The most recent work, *The Sphere With Stairs* (1989), is the only "open" sphere made of perfectly polished blue African granite with a staircase carved into the top portion of the sculpture. At selected dates during the exhibition, Byars' performance *Be Quiet* will be staged at Peder Lund. An actress wearing a long black dress silently hands a single paper disc to any visitor that approaches her. The performance was last enacted at the Monnaie de Paris in the fall of 2015. In addition to the exhibition at Peder Lund, a program of James Lee Byars' performances is put together in collaboration with Kunstneres Hus, the National Museum and the Astrup Fearnley Museum. The performances will be held at their respective venues, and information on the program, including times and dates, will be announced soon.

James Lee Byars was born in Detroit, Michigan in 1932 and died in Cairo, Egypt in 1997. His work has since been the subject of numerous gallery and museum exhibitions worldwide, including Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; Kunsthalle Düsseldorf; IVAM Centre del Carme, Valencia; Castello di Rivoli/Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Turin; The Henry Moore Institute, Leeds; and Fundação de Serralves, Porto. Important posthumous exhibitions include The Arts Club of Chicago (1998); *The Epitaph of Con. Art is which Questions have disappeared?*, Kestner Gesellschaft, Hannover (1999); *Life Love and Death*, Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt and Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain de Strasbourg (2004); *The Perfect Silence*, Whitney Museum of American Art (2004); *I'm Full of Byars*, Kunstmuseum Bern (2008); *The Perfect Axis*, Schloss Benrath, Düsseldorf; and *Klein Byars Kapoor*, Musée d'art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain, Nice, and ARoS Kunstmuseum, Århus (2012-2013). In 2013, *The Figure of the Interrogative Philosophy* and *The Figure of the Question of Death* were included in the 55th Venice Biennale exhibition *The Encyclopedic Palace*, curated by Massimiliano Gioni. In 2014, MoMA PS1 in New York presented *James Lee Byars: 1/2 an Autobiography*, the most comprehensive survey of Byars organised in North America since the artist's death.