

*Films by Robert Morris* by exhibition co-curator David Duncan

In 1961, Robert Morris achieved a breakthrough when recording the sound of cutting, hammering, and sanding within his studio. Captured in real-time and assembled as a continuous audio loop, these sounds were reinserted into the physical result of his labor, the *Box With the Sound of Its Own Making*. In his bid to simultaneously collapse and reveal artistic production Morris questioned the temporal location of art, which at the time was generally believed to lie dormant within a static painting or sculpture.

Over the following years Morris would continue to explore the location of art—or its ontological problem. Quite often, this pursuit led him away from wall and pedestal bound objects redolent with hidden artistic process, to time-based performances either documented by or devised for moving images. Within the exhibition *Films by Robert Morris*, The Hunter College Art Galleries gathers a comprehensive collection of the artist's projected works together for the very first time. Spanning the years 1963 to 2005, these films and videos—some unknown to the general public—represent a crucial part of Morris's artistic output.

Whether adopting the form of a drunken academic lecture, metaphysical dance, or game of cat-and-mouse involving a camera and mirror, Morris's projected works fundamentally court missed-apprehension. In one film, a solo performer's movements are so subtle as to be nearly imperceptible, while in another, a mass of running and tumbling bodies blend battlefield choreography with a contest of "Simon (or Robert) Says". Elsewhere, Morris invokes the information-gathering imperative of a surveillance project, a crash test, and a two-channel video correspondence. Literal feedback occurs when audio and image signals collide, and perceptual feedback occurs when frame rates are slowed, revealing otherwise unseen visual data.

Throughout the exhibition, techniques and themes recall Morris's well-known minimalist and post-minimalist practice, including repetition as a catalyst for perception and a phenomenological exploration of the space between a body and object. But like his overall output, Morris's films and videos were never conceived as a seamless, branded package. As noted by art historian W.J.T. Mitchell, "more than any American artist of his generation," Morris remains "unpredictable, hard to classify, and difficult to label. . . ." Given this difficulty, perhaps the artist's answer to a question concerning his 1993 Guggenheim retrospective offers the best summation. When asked to order his memories of a range of works spanning thirty years, Morris responded, "it was an investigation: There were accidents, desire and fear, loss and memory, repetition and abandonment, theory, speculation, and doubt all accompanied the enterprise."

*Films by Robert Morris* opens October 8 and runs through November 21, 2009, at the Hunter College/Times Square Gallery, 450 West 41st Street, New York. Gallery hours are Tues. - Sat., 1 - 6pm.