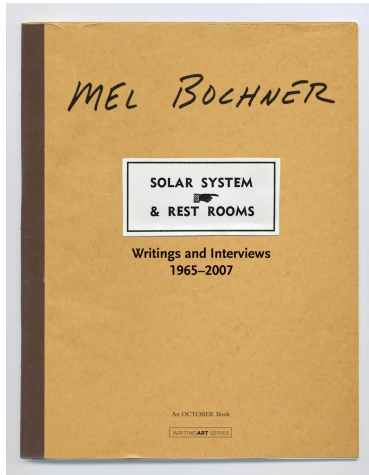


Solar Systems & Rest Rooms: Writings and Interviews, 1965-2007 / Mel Bochner.—(The MIT Press writing art series).--Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, June 2008.—235 p.: ill.—ISBN 978-0-262-02631-4 (cl., alk. paper): \$39.95.



In the mid 1960's, Mel Bochner blurred the boundaries between the practices of writing and making art. In his role as a critic for *Arts Magazine*, he penned remarkably witty and prescient reviews of gallery exhibits occurring around New York. As a faculty curator, he organized *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant To Be Viewed as Art* (1966), which featured four identical Xeroxed binders of drawings and notes that were placed on pedestals within an otherwise empty gallery space. As an artist, he published works camouflaged as magazine articles—such as *The Domain of the Great Bear* (1966) with collaborator Robert Smithson—in an attempt to question the nature of artistic reproduction.

Solar Systems & Rest Rooms reproduces more than fifty examples of Bochner's writings covering a span of forty years. Included are reviews, criticism, interviews, language-based works and theoretical texts. Presented chronologically, the selections trace the arc of Bochner's passage from occasional reviewer to an artist whose works erase distinctions between image and text, iconology and semiotics. Many of the published works are reproduced in facsimile, allowing one to consider

them both for content and as historical artifacts. Other inclusions such as lectures and interviews frequently are illustrated with black and white images of individual works or installations. The volume also contains a comprehensive index.

Along the way, Bochner's writings offer a glimpse into the emergence of conceptual art. In an unpublished essay from 1997, Bochner writes "[a]t a certain point, I had realized what was at stake in *Working Drawings* was not only a new type of object (the book), and a new concept of a work (the installation), but a radical redefinition of an author." Bochner consistently documents his desire to push the limits of how language can be used as a genesis of visual works, giving an individual voice to the spirit and circumstances of conceptualism that sought to give precedence to ideas over form.

While Bochner's examinations of his own works and processes are illuminating, his analyses of the works of others are often equally insightful. In a review of the "Primary Structures" exhibit at the Jewish Museum in New York in 1966, penned by Bochner at the ripe age of 25, he cites the works of Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Sol LeWitt, Donald Judd, Robert Morris, and Robert Smithson as demanding of "a new critical vocabulary." From an artist whose working process is intrinsically tied to linguistic exploration, Bochner's perspective and proximity allow his writings to be both authoritative and engrossing, and *Solar Systems & Rest Rooms* is recommended to augment collections that support studies in the post-1945 period.

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