

## **Seth SiegelauB in conversation with Bartomeu Mari**

**November 29<sup>th</sup> 2010, 19 h**

**MACBA Auditorium**

### **Biography**

“**Seth SiegelauB** was born in the Bronx, New York in 1941 and grew up in New York City. (...) After working at the Sculpture Center (New York) in the early 1960s, he opened his own gallery, Seth SiegelauB Contemporary Art, in the Fall 1964 which briefly existed through Spring 1966. Later in 1966, he evolved into a private dealer working closely on projects with the artists Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner, in which he tried to expand and open up the exhibition environment to the new possibilities, issues and problems posed by the new forms of art, especially what is now known as ‘Conceptual Art’. Between February 1968 and July 1971 he organized 21 art exhibitions, books, catalogues and projects throughout the USA, Canada and Europe in a wide range of new and original formats, before withdrawing from the art world in 1972.

These exhibitions and projects included the ‘Windham’ exhibition in May 1968 in Windham, Vermont, with works by Carl Andre, Robert Barry and Lawrence Weiner, considered the first outdoor on-site installation exhibition; the ‘January 5-31, 1969’ exhibition, the first group exhibition in which the catalogue was the exhibition, with Robert Barry, Joseph Kosuth, Douglas Huebler and Lawrence Weiner; the ‘March 1969’ exhibition, in which 31 artists each were asked to do one work on a different day of the month; the so-called ‘Xeroxbook’, in December 1968, in which 7 artists each did a 25-page work, including work by Sol LeWitt and Robert Morris; the ‘July, August, September 1969’ exhibition, in which 11 artists each did a work in a different part of the world, including work by Daniel Buren, Richard Long, N.E. Thing Co Ltd, and Robert Smithson; and, the July/August Exhibition Book in 1970, a catalogue-exhibition in the review Studio International (London) in which 6 art critics, David Antin, Germano Celant, Michel Claura, Charles Harrison, Lucy Lippard and Hans Strelow, were each given an 8-page section to edit as they saw fit. During this period, in January 1970, he also began International General to distribute his publications, as well as those of Edward Ruscha, and N.E. Thing Co., among others.

Towards the late 1960s, as part of the politicization of the art world he became active in anti-war activities in the art community as part of the growing mobilization against the U.S. war against Vietnam, including in July 1971 a fund-raising collection catalogue for the United States Serviceman Fund, an organization set up to promote free speech within the U.S. military. This activity led to his increasing involvement in the political aspects of art and in

1971, he originated, and then drafted with lawyer Robert Projansky, what is known as the 'Artist's Contract', The Artist's Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement, which defined and attempted to protect the rights and interests of the artist as their work circulated within the art world system.

In 1972, he left the art world to pursue other interests in France. In 1973-1974 he edited and published the first issue of the 'Marxism and Mass Media' bibliographic series and began publishing left books on communication and culture (...). From 1979 to 1983, he worked with Armand Mattelart on the two-volume anthology *Communication and Class Struggle*, a basic wide-ranging compilation of 128 left and progressive texts on the history and practice of communication and culture.

Since the mid-1980s, he has been involved with research on the production of popular culture.”

[http://egressfoundation.net/egress/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=62&Itemid=77/](http://egressfoundation.net/egress/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=62&Itemid=77/)

#### **A few relevant statements:**

##### **I.**

“Seth Siegelaub:

First I had a gallery, which was a very ordinary gallery, from the fall of 1964 to the spring of 1966. (...) The height of my activities was between 1968 and 1971, when I independently did 25 exhibitions or so. At first I thought of myself as a dealer, linked to the interests of the four artists Robert Barry, Douglas Heubler, Joseph Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner, and to a lesser degree, Carl Andre.

My interests were very closely allied to working with them to devise exhibitions structures and conditions that were able to show their work, which would reflect what their work was about. In other words, it became clear to me that the solution to the problems that were posed by the nature of their work and the ideas behind it, that a gallery was not necessarily the most ideal environment to show it. By that I mean not just the physical gallery but also the social idea of a sort of 'semi-religious' sacred space, everyone knew and visited regularly, a sort of 'art space'. (...)

I was always trying to move away from the individual 'art genius' or the personal quality choices that are essential for an art dealer; to choose what he or she thought was the 'best' art, etc. My history thus moved towards the more and more general, to artists' contracts, to political fundraising, etc., which eventually of course led me entirely away from the art world.

(...) But the first thing I want to say is that all the different art world categories were breaking down at the time: the idea of gallery dealer, curator, artist-curator, critic-writer, painter-writer, all these categories were becoming fuzzy, less clear. In a certain way, it was part of the 1960s political project. (...)

I thought of myself in terms of an organizer, a publisher, exhibition maker, and things like that. Also the word curator at the time didn't have the open meaning as today, as curators were basically people who had jobs working in the museums. (...)"

Paul O'Neill, "Action Man: Paul O'Neill Interviews Seth Siegelau", *The Internationaler*, Issue 1, June 2006, pp. 5-7.

## 2.

"Charles Harrison: Do you think exhibitions affect looking at art?

Seth Siegelau: They can. But usually pejoratively. In a large sense, everything is situation. In an exhibition situation the context –other artists, specific works—begins to imply, from without, certain things about any work art work. The less standard the exhibition situation becomes, the more difficult to 'see' the individual work of art. So that an exhibition with six works of one artist and one of another begins to bring to bear on the art pre-exhibition values that prejudice the 'seeing' process. All choices in the predetermination of the exhibition hinder the viewing of the intrinsic value of each work of art. Themes, judgemental criticism, preferences for individual artists expressed by differences in the number of works, all prejudice art.

C.H.: Can exhibitions ever serve the intentions of the artist, and if so, how?

S.S.: When artists show together their art shares a common space and time. This situation makes differences more obvious –if only by proximity. If all the conditions for making art were standard for all artists –same materials, size, color, etc.— there would still be great artists and lesser artists. The question of context has always been important. The nature of the exhibition situation begins to assume a 'neutral' condition as one standardizes the elements in the environment in which art is 'seen'. I think exhibitions can function to clarify or focus in on certain dominant interests of an artist. As we know now, things that look alike are not necessarily alike. Certain exhibitions present differences better than others. Most exhibitions stress similarities, at the expense of the individual works."

Harrison, Charles; Siegelau, Seth: "On Exhibitions and the World at Large" (1969), reprinted in: Alberro, Alberro; Stimson, Blake (eds.): *Conceptual Art. A Critical anthology*, Cambridge MA and London: MIT Press, 1999, pp. 198-203 (pp. 198-199).

3.

“The three-page Agreement has been drafted by Bob Projansky, a New York lawyer, after my extensive discussions and correspondence with over 500 artists, dealers, collectors, museum people, critics and others involved in the day-to-day workings of the international art world. The Agreement has been designed to remedy some generally acknowledged inequities in the art world, particularly artists' lack of control over the use of their work and participation in its economics after they no longer own it.

(...) It is expected to be the standard form for all transfer and sale of all contemporary art and has been made as fair, simple and useful as possible. (...) We have done this for no recompense, for just the pleasure and challenge of the problem, feeling that should there ever be a question about artists' rights in reference to their art, the artist is more right than anyone else.”

Seth Siegelaub, from the introduction to “The Artist's Reserved Rights Transfer And Sale Agreement (1971)”, *Leonardo*, vol. 6, 1973, pp. 347-350 (p. 347).

4.

“I think in our generation we thought that we could demystify the role of the museum, the role of the collector, and the production of the artwork; for example, how the size of a gallery affects the production of art, etc. In that sense we tried to demystify the hidden structures of the art world.”

Seth Siegelaub, in Paul O'Neill, “The Curatorial Turn. From Practice to Discourse”, in: Rugg, Judith (ed.), *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*, Chicago 2007, pp. 13-28, p. 13.

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### **Publications by Seth Siegelau**

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*Douglas Huebler*, New York: Seth Siegelau, 1968.

*Lawrence Weiner. Statements*, New York: The Louis Kellner Foundation; Seth Siegelau, 1968.

*January 5-31, 1969*, New York: Seth Siegelau, 1969.

*Joseph Kosuth, Robert Morris*, Bradford, Mass.: Bradford Junior College, 1969.

*Catalogue for the Exhibition, Burnaby*, British Columbia: Centre for Communication and the Arts, Simon Fraser University, 1969.

*July, August, September 1969. Juillet, Août, Septembre 1969. Juli, August, September 1969*, New York: Seth Siegelau, 1969.

*Carl Andre. Seven Books of Poetry*, New York: Dwan Gallery & Seth Siegelau, 1969.

*March 1-31, 1969, "One Month", NY: Seth Siegelau, 1969*

*18 Paris IV. 70, Paris: Seth Siegelau, 1970.*

"July-August 1970", *Studio International*, No. 924 (July-August 1970), pp. 1-48, also published as *July/August Exhibition Book* London: Studio International and Seth Siegelau, 1970.

*Jan Dibbets, Roodborst territorium/Sculptuur 1969. Robin Redbreast's Territory/Sculpture 1969. Domaine d'un rouge-gorge/Sculpture 1969. Rotkehlchenterritorium/Skulptur 1969*, New York and Cologne: Seth Siegelau & Verlag Gebr. König, 1970.

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Further information:

[http://egressfoundation.net/egress/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=64&Itemid=310](http://egressfoundation.net/egress/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=64&Itemid=310)

**Compiled by Karin Jaschke**