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## JOHN McCracken

### New Works in Bronze and Steel

September 16 – October 23, 2010

Opening reception: Thursday, September 16, 6 – 8 PM



Photo by Gail Barringer

*My works are minimal and reductive, but also maximal. I try to make them concise, clear statements in three-dimensional form, and also to take them to a breathtaking level of beauty.*

– John McCracken

David Zwirner is pleased to present an exhibition of new work by American artist John McCracken, on view at the gallery's 533 West 19th Street space.

McCracken developed his earliest sculptural work while studying painting at the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland in the 1960s. While experimenting with increasingly three-dimensional canvases, the artist began to produce objects made with industrial techniques and materials, including plywood, sprayed lacquer, and pigmented resin, creating the highly-reflective, smooth surfaces that he has become known for.

In 1966, McCracken generated his signature sculptural form: the plank, a narrow, monochromatic, rectangular board format that leans at an angle against the wall (the site of painting) while simultaneously entering into the three-dimensional realm and physical space of the viewer. In addition to the planks, the artist also creates wall pieces and free-standing sculptures in varying geometrical shapes and sizes, ranging from smaller forms on pedestals to large-scale, outdoor structures.

This exhibition consists of three bronze planks, representing the first time McCracken has used the metal for this format, and four square columns in stainless steel. In the artist's words, these reflective works are both "materialist and transcendentalist;" they are luminous objects which border on invisibility as they reflect their surroundings. There is a subtle interplay between their shiny materiality and their immaterial dimension, and by extension between their physicality and meta-physicality: the objects gain a singular and almost otherworldly quality, appearing at once present and concealed.

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The artist's use of color and reflection further underscores this intended dichotomy. Though inherently abstract, these devices are used as "materials," or structural elements in their own right. Titles, likewise, subtly complement the concrete, solid works by referring to intangible or ephemeral phenomena.

The four stainless steel sculptures in this exhibition, *Star*, *Infinite*, *Dimension*, and *Electron*, all from 2010, are polished to produce such a high degree of reflectivity that they simultaneously activate their surroundings and seem translucent and camouflaged. They offer little indication of the intrinsic density of their material, but in line with Minimalist concerns, they contextualize their surroundings and reference and include the viewer. McCracken usually creates these columns for outdoor installation: able to withstand extreme environmental conditions, they will alter their appearance from hour to hour depending on the weather and the time of the day.

Made from bronze, the planks included in the exhibition represent a departure from McCracken's previous, colorful fiberglass and resin works in this format. The tinted appearance of this classic medium subtly alters the appearance of the objects it reflects, and lends these slanted, sharply geometric works an elegant, solemn dimension. Leaning against the wall, the planks negotiate the difference between painting and sculpture, and thereby address another primary concern of Minimalism: the desire to break away from medium specificity and reject the two-dimensionality of the picture plane by "releasing" line and form into real space. As the artist notes, "I see the plank as existing between two worlds, the floor representing the physical world of standing objects, trees, cars, buildings, [and] human bodies, ... and the wall representing the world of the imagination, illusionist painting space, [and] human mental space."<sup>1</sup>

McCracken's seductive, light-emanating surfaces nonetheless occupy a unique position within the context of Minimal art. His planks and geometric sculptures are receptive, approachable, almost playful structures that "respond" to their surroundings and the viewer. As the artist notes in one of his many detailed sketch books, "if the viewer is in motion, the sculptures become in a sense kinetic, changing more radically than one might expect. At times, certain sculptures seem to almost disappear and become illusions, so rather than describing these things as objects, it might be better to describe them as complexes of energies."<sup>2</sup>

**John McCracken** was born in 1934 in Berkeley, California and lives and works in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Since the 1960s, he has exhibited steadily in the United States and abroad, and his early work was included in ground-breaking exhibitions such as *Primary Structures* at the Jewish Museum, New York, 1966, and *American Sculpture of the Sixties* at the Los Angeles County Museum, 1967. More recently, the artist was the subject of solo exhibitions at the Inverleith House at the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh, Scotland, 2009, and the Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (S.M.A.K.) in Ghent, Belgium, 2004. His work has been prominently featured in recent major group shows including *Time & Place: Los Angeles 1957-1968*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 2008; *documenta 12*, Kassel, Germany, 2007; *The Los Angeles Art Scene, 1955-1985*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 2006; and *A Minimal Future? Art as Object 1958-1968*, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2004. From November 2010 to March 2011, a major museum retrospective of the artist's work will be hosted by the Castello di Rivoli, Turin.

1 John McCracken, cited in Thomas Kellein, "Interview with John McCracken. August 1995," in *McCracken*. Exh. cat. (Basel: Kunsthalle Basel, 1995), pp. 21-39, p. 32.

2 John McCracken, sketch book entry from July 1966, published in *John McCracken Sketch Book* (Santa Fe: Radius Books, 2008), p. 77.