

For immediate release

## AL TAYLOR

### Pass the Peas and Can Studys

September 7 – October 27, 2012

Opening reception: Friday, September 7, 6 – 8 PM



*Untitled (Dole Pineapple Juice)*, ca. 1993. Pencil, gouache, and ink with collage on paper. 13 1/8 x 10 1/8 inches (33.3 x 25.6 cm).

© 2012 The Estate of Al Taylor

David Zwirner is pleased to announce the gallery's third solo exhibition of drawings and three-dimensional works by Al Taylor. On view at the gallery's 519 West 19th Street space, the exhibition will present a comprehensive examination of two individual series by the artist: **Pass the Peas** (1991-92) and **Can Studys** [sic] from 1993, as well as a related group of works entitled **Cans and Hoops** (1993) which bridge the evolution between the two series.

Al Taylor was an artist whose intimate observations of the world were explored using any media at hand to investigate and expand the interrelationships of vision and fluid space. He deftly abstracted simple objects and imagery into a unique body of work that is both complex and starkly honest. In the history of contemporary art, Taylor is a singular figure not easily assimilated into any exclusive movement or school, although recent scholarship often cites Marcel Duchamp as a significant touchstone for his work. Taylor's art was inspired by an amalgam of influences ranging from mathematical theories and art historical precedents to his own studies of everyday minutiae, alongside personal references from his life. The artist drew upon these diverse influences to create systematic rules that he set up to be broken, providing unexpected paths to research and develop the possibilities of visual experience.

While Taylor began his studio practice as a painter, in 1985 he started making three-dimensional constructions to open up the boundaries of the pictorial plane, eventually devising a uniquely innovative approach to process and materials that embodied a dimensional flux between drawings and objects. Taylor saw no distinction between his three-dimensional assemblages and his works on paper and resolutely resisted using the term "sculpture" for his constructions, referring to them instead as "drawings in space." During an interview in 1992, when he was asked by curator Ulrich Loock about the relationship between drawing and three-dimensionality in his work, the artist responded, "It's one and the same. Working on paper or on pieces really is the same thing; it's all one activity that I am not interested in separating."<sup>1</sup> Later, in sketchbook notes from 1998, the artist wrote, "Goal: To make an object that maintains the directness and ease of a pencil line."<sup>2</sup>

The fluidity of Taylor's oeuvre was mirrored in his creative process as he moved back and forth between two and three dimensions. In his search to find unexpected connections between reality and perception, the artist pursued an animated flow of ideas instead of static conclusions. As a consequence, some drawings precede the objects, while others follow. His three-dimensional works, delicately fashioned out of unconventional and often humble materials, provided him with opportunities to "see more" by investigating multiple viewpoints. These objects facilitated further explorations on paper using the visual perspectives that were opened up in real space, and the resultant drawings, in turn, could inspire the spatial development of the three-dimensional constructions. In notes from 1990, Taylor wrote, "This work isn't at all about sculptural concerns; it comes from a flatter set of traditions. What I am really after is finding a way to make a group of drawings that you can look around. Like a pool player, I want to have all the angles covered."<sup>3</sup>

(continue to next page)

Although distinctly individual, both of the series presented in this exhibition examine Taylor's ongoing explorations of the circle. Instigated by curiosity, the artist studies the inside and outside of circular forms and investigates the multi-dimensional possibilities that could be revealed by conceptually and physically moving "around" them, exposing the mutable perception of their intrinsic shape. Taylor playfully explores these permutations in the body of work he collectively titled **Pass the Peas** from 1991-92. Using tubular materials, such as hula hoops, rubber garden hose, and plastic-coated cable, he created three-dimensional spirals and coils, interlocking loops, and dissected circles that were mounted on the wall, left freestanding, or hung by wires from the ceiling to activate changing perspectives. Recycled plastic bottle cap rings, which the artist affixed at random intervals, were meticulously oriented to "balance" atop the tubing and appear to follow the trajectories of the spiraled forms—almost as if they are acrobatic "peas" propelled by gravity, traveling at different velocities along a track. In the drawings from this series, the artist conveys the movement through time and space of spheres rolling on rounded "edges" of ascending and descending loops and coils or flowing down the inclined course of imaginary puddles. Taylor realistically renders conceptual ideas about the dimensionality of linear curves, the role of gravity and chance on motion, and the passage of time in these elegant and humorously idiosyncratic works on paper.

The artist's investigations into the infinite possibilities of a circle were further pursued during 1993 in his **Can Studys** series, when he expanded his "research" by exploring the play of light that would theoretically be reflected off of the exterior—or projected out of the interior of cylinders. In a group of wall-mounted constructions that he created out of grocery store tin cans (fastidiously stripped of labels), wood, hot-rolled steel bands, and asymmetrical lengths of wire, Taylor characteristically "draws" in real space—opening up the visual perception that these objects vacillate between three and two dimensions. Consistent with the dual nature of the artist's practice, Taylor's facility as a draftsman is evidenced in an array of works on paper that run the gamut from still lifes to pure abstraction. With a focus on minute detail, he rendered the cylindrical contours of tin cans, using dense layers of nuanced shading in graphite and washes, or sometimes simple pencil lines, to reveal the dimensionality of their structure, imply surface reflectivity and shadows, and define the theoretical shapes of emanated light. There is an element of humor in some of the works, where the artist collages newsprint reproductions of labeled food cans that appear to be suspended from scrupulously drawn wires. In other drawings, he collages generic bar code strips to conceptually represent the demarcations of light and shadow at play on the embossed ridges that wrap around the cans. The two- and three-dimensional works that comprise this series were developed from a matrix of ideas generated by the artist's investigations into the surface and depth of real and imagined space. In these agile studies of tin cans, Taylor explores the formal concerns of composition, mathematical proportionality, linear movement between multiple, angled perspectives, and the spatial possibilities of light.

**Al Taylor** was born in 1948 in Springfield, Missouri and studied at the Kansas City Art Institute. He moved to New York in 1970, where he would continue to live and work until his death in 1999. His first solo exhibition took place in 1986 at the Alfred Kren Gallery in New York. His work would go on to be shown in numerous exhibitions in America and Europe, including solo exhibitions at the Kunsthalle Bern (1992) and the Kunstmuseum Luzern (1999), both in Switzerland. A retrospective of Taylor's drawings was organized posthumously by the Staatliche Graphische Sammlung at the Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich in 2006. His work is found in a number of prominent public collections, including The Museum of Modern Art, New York; the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Glenstone, Potomac, Maryland; and the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. A retrospective of the artist's prints opened at the Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich in September 2010, and travelled to the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark in Spring 2011. The Santa Monica Museum of Art, California, presented a focused overview of two bodies of work by the artist, *Wire Instruments* and *Pet Stain Removal Devices*, in 2011.

On the occasion of the exhibition, the gallery will publish a catalogue in collaboration with Steidl, Göttingen, which will feature new scholarship on the artist by Klaus Kertess.

## Notes

- 1 Al Taylor, in Ulrich Loock and Al Taylor, "A Conversation," in *Al Taylor*. Exh. cat. (Bern, Switzerland: Kunsthalle Bern, 1992), p. 34.
- 2 Al Taylor, in Michael Semff, ed., *Al Taylor: Drawings/Zeichnungen*. Exh. cat. (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006), p. 41.
- 3 Al Taylor, unpublished artist's statement, July 1990.