

For immediate release

AL TAYLOR

31 January – 29 March 2014

Private view: Thursday 30 January, 6 – 8 PM



Layson a Stick (Blue Balls), 1992
Wooden broomsticks with enamel paint, wire, and plastic leis
35 ½ x 28 x 39 ¼ inches
90.2 x 71.1 x 99.7 cm
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David Zwirner is pleased to present an exhibition of drawings and assemblages by **Al Taylor**, the artist's fourth solo show at David Zwirner and the first presentation of his work at our London gallery. The exhibition will focus on works Taylor created during the mid- to late- 1980s and will include a selection of the artist's earliest three-dimensional objects constructed out of humble and sometimes humorous materials that he had scavenged from rubbish on the streets of New York City.

Having begun his studio practice as a painter and draughtsman, in 1985 Taylor devised a uniquely innovative approach to process and materials that encompassed two-dimensional drawings and three-dimensional constructions, thereby creating compositions which were grounded in the formal concerns of painting. Taylor ultimately sought to expand the possibilities of vision by creating new ways of experiencing and imagining space, and his work provides the viewer with an insight into the artist's thinking and his investigations of perception across several dimensions.

Taylor saw no distinction between his drawings and three-dimensional works, even going so far as to dismiss the term "sculpture" altogether for his constructions, referring to them instead as "drawings in space" or as "drawing instruments." In his notes from 1990, the artist 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."¹

In the creative process of Taylor's oeuvre, some drawings preceded the objects, while others would follow. His three-dimensional works were usually fashioned out of unconventional materials, often incorporating everyday detritus and makeshift, droll elements shaped into delicate, quirky assemblages that offered him a multitude of distinct vantage points. As described by Robert Storr, "Taylor's innately poetic bricolage invariably resulted in images and objects whose apparently casual or ephemeral qualities were camouflage for unforgettable abstract imagery, such that attention to Taylor's work often triggers the equivalent of a comic double-take."²

This exhibition presents two concurrent bodies of work that emerged through Taylor's visual investigations. The group of works encompassed in the "Latin Studies" series (1984-85) are now viewed as the benchmark of the artist's transition from painting on canvas to creating his first three-dimensional objects. While working in tandem on paintings and drawings from this series during 1984, Taylor began to make related configurations out of carpentry scraps which literally extended the picture plane out from the wall. Completed in 1985, these early Latin Study constructions were described by Klaus Kertess as a "kind of disconnecting visual ping pong... They circle outward and forward in what appear to be three-dimensional diagrams of a cone, a wheel, or a clock; but their seeming makeshiftness defies resolution in the description of volume.... Each part becomes a separate unit of decision [and their] independence is punctuated by the visible screws that hold them together as well as by the separate color of each unit... [Their] smoothly painted surface dematerializes what little mass the linear components have as does the web of shadows cast upon the wall. The eye is lured into a tremulous trap of space."³

The second, ensuing group of Taylor's constructions incorporates segments of colorful wooden broomsticks the artist recycled from the garbage that engage the phenomenological as well as the perceptual experience of the viewer. Spanning from 1986 to 1992, these idiosyncratic broomstick assemblages vacillate between three and two dimensions with their exploration of line, shadow, and

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perspective while also revealing the artist's precise use of found and applied color. Moreover, his introduction of individual, often humorous, titles reflects Taylor's fascination with language, phonetics, and wordplay, which was to become another characteristic component of much of his later work. With few exceptions, the artist generally assigned titles during the creation of or after the completion of the works, often using subtitles—such as *Eating with Children* (1986), *Mine-A-Key* (1987), and *Bra* (1987)—that suggest underlying narratives or visual reference points to be extrapolated by the viewer. Later iterations such as *Laysan a Stick (Blue Balls)* from 1992, which incorporates plastic Hawaiian leis while subliminally suggesting sexual undertones, playfully reveal Taylor's uncanny ability to seamlessly mediate between the traditionally high and low realms. Contradictions are piled up in the artist's work, both visually and conceptually, which make the viewer question the materiality that formerly seemed so certain.

Also featured in the exhibition are numerous drawings whose creation coincided with the development of Taylor's three-dimensional objects. Whether the artist was working on paper or on his constructions, his creative process was fluid and non-hierarchical as he moved back and forth between mediums. In an interview in 1992, when he was asked by Ulrich Loock about the relationship between drawing and three-dimensionality in his work, Taylor 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."⁴ In an accompanying essay, Loock further elucidates: "Displacement, the production of incongruities, gaps and differences, and the dissolution of identities not only define the connections between graphic configuration and name, but also attain an effectiveness within the graphic work, differentiating drawing from itself. In many cases a figuration reappears as its own shadow. And then there are three-dimensional works which unfold possible levels of a drawing into space, translating them into real stratifications... [and] introduce a multiplicity of possible points of view that drawing does not allow... [they] are drawn in space, models for the idea of drawing, its impossible spatiality, the possibility of creating gaps."⁵

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), the Kunstmuseum Luzern (1999), the Staatliche Graphische Sammlung München at the Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich (2006 and 2010), the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark (2011), the Santa Monica Museum of Art (2011), and the High Museum of Art, Atlanta (2013).

The Estate of Al Taylor has been represented by David Zwirner since 2007. His work can be 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; The British Museum, London; the Museum Folkwang, Essen; and the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

Upcoming Event: Gallery talk with Ulrich Loock
Saturday 1 February, 11:30 AM

Ulrich Loock is a Berlin-based art critic and curator. He is also a lecturer at the University of the Arts, Bern. From 1985 to 2010, he served as the director of both the Kunsthalle Bern and the Kunstmuseum Lucerne and was deputy director of the Museu de Serralves, Porto, Portugal. Loock is the author of numerous texts on contemporary artists and has written extensively on the work of Al Taylor.

In 1992, Loock curated Taylor's seminal midcareer retrospective at the Kunsthalle Bern. His comprehensive essay on the artist's work "Return to Africa" appears in *Al Taylor: Rim Jobs and Sideeffects* (David Zwirner, 2011).

Space is limited. To RSVP, contact Electra Soutzoglou at +44 (0)20 3538 3165 electra@davidzwirner.com

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1 Al Taylor, unpublished artist's statement, July 1990.

2 Robert Storr, "First and Final Glimpses of a Gyroscopic Archive," in *Selections from the Private Collection of Robert Rauschenberg*. Exh. cat. (New York: Gagolian Gallery, 2012), pp. 26-27.

3 Klaus Kertess, "Lines of Sight," in *Al Taylor: Recent Work*. Exh. cat. (New York: Alfred Kren Gallery, 1986), n.p.

4 Al Taylor, in Ulrich Loock and Al Taylor, "A Conversation," in *Al Taylor*. Exh. cat. (Bern, Switzerland: Kunsthalle Bern, 1992), p. 34.

5 Ulrich Loock, "Gaps," in *Al Taylor*. Exh. cat. (Bern, Switzerland: Kunsthalle Bern, 1992), p. 10.