THE MERCHANT HOUSE

PRESS



Exhibition

MIDPOINT AMSTERDAM BY SANDRA JONGENELEN

Artists like Sol LeWitt and Lawrence Weiner were eager to work with Amsterdam's gallery Art & Project, which existed till 2001. Their entire legendary collection of *Bulletins* is now on view in the Netherlands.

Forget New York, London, or Paris. Those who wanted to know what art was all about in the 1970s travelled to Amsterdam. It was here that the Stedelijk Museum, together with the galleries and international artists, set the tone. The gallery Art & Project, which opened in 1968, played a major role in this regard. Early on it showed the work of international artists who in the later decades grew to stardom: Sol LeWitt, Lawrence Weiner, Daniel Buren, but also the Dutch Jan Dibbets and Ger van Elk, among

The Art & Project founders Geert van Beijeren en Adriaan van Ravesteijn are no longer alive but their art collection is quite well preserved. The works were donated to the Kröller-Müller Museum, the Municipal Museum of the Hague and the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen. The Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York received the *Bulletins*, which were originally published between 1968 and 1989. Six years ago the museum organized a related exhibition. Now the whole collection of 156 pieces can be seen in Amsterdam for the first time.

The word "bulletin" sounds a touch dated, but these are in fact artworks on paper. It's most remarkable that the gallery owners solicited one artist for each. Within a limitation of a single sheet of A3-size paper he—a woman was asked only twice— was given carte blanche. In his 1975 edition, Bas Jan Ader showed a photograph of himself in a sailboat with the subscript "In search of the miraculous." A short time later, he started the project with the exact same name, which entailed an attempt to cross the Atlantic Ocean in a sail-boat. This cost him his life.

A modern take on the Amsterdam tradition of a merchant A playful mix of life and commerce A radical shift in showcasing contemporary art Art space founded by Marsha Plotnitsky in 2012 Art & Project Bulletins Through December 18 The Merchant House, Amsterdam merchanthouse.nl

In the pre-internet age, Carl Andre used a bulletin as a means of solicitation. The American artist appealed to the collectors of his work to come forward because he wanted to compile a catalog.

Still more radical

In some cases, the audience was part of the artwork. Jan Dibbets's *Bulletin* included a request to send back half of the sheet (stamped) by the return mail. The gallery in Amsterdam displayed the black-lined maps, which made it possible to see the journeys of the returned items.

lan Wilson sent an empty bulletin with only the date. And there was no exhibition.

This type of conceptual art can be also attributed to the New Yorker Robert Barry, who made a thought experiment with his *Bulletin*. The front page contained practical details such as his show's opening hours. Inside, he typed one sentence: "During the exhibition the gallery will be closed." Still more radical was lan Wilson, who sent the reader a blank *Bulletin* containing only the date. And there was no exhibition either. Daniel Buren deserves the crown: at his request *Bulletin 24* was not to be published.

The first ten years saw 108 *Bulletins* leave the press. These were the years when conceptual art flourished, with Amsterdam at its center. To quote the New Yorker cartoon: "Everything was better back when everything was worse."

The Merchant House Herengracht 254 1016 BV Amsterdam The Netherlands

Open: Every Friday from 12–6 pm and by appointment