

Bill Bollinger

(Brooklyn, New York, USA, 1939 – Pine Plains, New York, USA, 1988)

The works exhibited in Bill Bollinger's 1966 debut show in New York consisted of long, thin, anodized aluminum bars, worked by the artist with a few diagonal cuts, then recomposed in dynamic juxtapositions that show off the metal's material qualities. Installed longitudinally on the wall, these small silvery channels established a dialogue with the exhibition space, imprinting it with an unusually light and strongly aerial dimension. In the years immediately following, with his ceaseless experimentations and explorations along a decidedly individual path, Bollinger stood out for his development of an original idea of sculpture as a process that brings out the properties of the industrial or construction materials used, according to principles that can be tied back to his education as an aeronautical engineer. The forces and tensions to which his materials are subjected also become part of the artistic process, as in the case of the wire fencing the artist exhibited, resting it against the wall, allowing gravity to give the material a natural curvature tending downward, or presenting it as an object, simply arranged on the floor. In the early 1970s Bollinger decided to use film to record his sculptural investigations, capturing his attempt to place a tall, narrow, wooden pole in vertical equilibrium, resting on one of its two ends. Other investigations, instead, involve water, from the perception of the ocean as a sculptural plane to the use of conductors to channel its fluid presence.

Pipe, 1968, is a floor piece composed of two aluminum pipes of equal shape and size, connected centrally by a third pipe made of transparent plastic. Using the tension provided by the weight of the metal elements, the artist arranged the central pipe to form a curve. The work is strongly representative of Bollinger's poetics and his interest in what could be called a signifying formal reduction, obtained through drastic choices that tend to eliminate metaphorical reference, in favor of an emphasis, including in the titles, on a propensity for tautological investigation. The radical nature of Bollinger's positions was immediately noted by Harald Szeemann, who invited him to participate in the exhibition "Live in Your Head. When Attitudes Become Form," one of the very first presentations of process art, a fundamental stage in the international recognition of Arte Povera. The show, which opened at the Kunsthalle in Berne in March 1969, included some of Bollinger's *Pipe Pieces*. With acute perception, the Swiss critic, in his notes, referred to Bollinger in the following terms: "His dry art is more difficult to understand. Wire mesh, rope, pipes. But the act of selection on the part of the sculptor is felt everywhere, even with his black forms sprayed directly on the wall." (MB)