



56. Barry X Ball

BARRY X BALL

PASADENA, CALIFORNIA, U.S.A., 1955-

When I got to know Barry X Ball he was creating small but precious objects covered in gold, placed on an equally rare material and all finished with great care. He uses the best material in order to be certain that they will last. This work takes a lot of time. To find the longest-lasting materials also requires a

#### THE THIRD COLLECTION

long search, but the result of this effort can be seen. They are small jewels, precious and extremely beautiful. The emblematic work from this period is *Twelve Identical Units*, 1987–1988. These are a series of twelve small objects, about twenty centimeters long each side, which are gilded and hung from two thin steel wires between the ceiling and the floor. In the 'nineties he developed a different kind of work, making larger objects though always finished with the same obsessive care, using a special extremely hard plastic that is only made by DuPont. In these works a part of the composition consists of a special crystal container, quite transparent, like those astronomers use for telescopes, and this container is full of pure pigment. In this way the color has greater importance than when used in painting a canvas. It has an unimaginable chromatic strength. The colors we usually see are always mixed with a binder, because otherwise they would float away since they are a very fine powder. But the binder greatly reduces the intensity of the color. Even the packaging of these works is made by the artist. Each thing has its exact place from which it cannot move, and there are white gloves for handling the work, as well as detailed instructions.

The packaging resists the strongest knocks. For the larger pieces the packaging is inside another very light plastic crate so it can float in the eventuality of shipwreck or of a plane falling into the ocean. These are works that must last for centuries without alterations. Often he talks to me about the gold backgrounds used by Medieval Italian artists. They are eight hundred years old, and his own works must last that long too.

His studio is full of sophisticated machinery for working with precision, and it is so clean you could eat off the floor. To spend time making a small object that is not easy to see is in total contradiction to what happens in our so-called modern times where the opposite is expected: to do a lot in the shortest possible time. We live in a wealthy society where everything is done for a comfortable life. Time is money. It is certainly a basic thing, and there is nothing more important. But it also has another basic characteristic: it doesn't last. This is a certainty for all of us without exception. We are lucky if time lasts an average span.

We quickly pass from childhood to adolescence, to youth, maturity, old age, and then the end. When you are eighty you see just how true this is. All philosophers are searching for truth, a definitive truth, but there can be no mistake in the face of these facts. They must start from here in order to build a true interpretation of the world, but instead they begin from things that do not count or that are less important.

An explanation of this phenomenon would explain everything, but they do not try: in fact, to explain the unknowable is impossible, and at this point philosophy stops.

## THE ART OF SMALL OBJECTS

But to get back to Barry X Ball, the time necessary for making things, and the fact that for modern society to do better it must produce more and quicker sucks us into a vortex together with our freedom. If we do not have more time for thinking and judging then we are finished. We are no longer people. Time, a lot of time, is necessary for thinking. It is also a lot of effort: we must have doubts and run the risk of having to start all over again. We must question ideas we love, those that reflect our desires but that often are dangerous. We would like to change the world but without knowing where to start from, because it is the others who must change and not us.

It is important and unusual that Barry X Ball has the courage to say no to this way of life, with all the risks this involves. Whoever goes against economic laws, Time is Money, cannot expect to make money. Luckily not everyone applies these laws and understands that time spent on thinking and doing things well is time well spent and the best way of spending it.

A contradiction of this system is the rapidity of change: when you produce a lot it then has to be used up, otherwise you must slow down and change things and, as a result, create a widespread wish for this change. In a rich society this desire is very strong, and production must make the most of it. A person who courageously contradicts this perverse trend is my wife who will throw nothing away, and consumes whatever there is to be consumed until nothing is left. At times she exaggerates, but I too feel myself involved in this virtuous principle. I never throw crumbs of bread away but eat them.

Barry X Ball is not nostalgic for some lost past; he doesn't exclude the use of up-to-date methods, in fact his drawings for his works are created with a computer, and have all the cold precision of mechanical things, but they serve their purpose. This is a work of collaboration with industries that produce materials, and with other people who undertake special tasks; for example, the artist's mother-in-law carries out the long and painstaking job of applying gold leaf to the works. The beauty of this art is to be innovative and antique at the same time.

RONI HORN

NEW YORK, U.S.A., 1955-

Horn is another female artist whose work is in the collection. In the 'fifties there were no women; in the 'sixties and 'seventies only two, Hanne Darboven and Maria Nordman, but in the 'nineties, even though men are still in the majority, there are many women, all excellent. It would be interesting to discover the causes of this evolution that has given women the same artistic dignity as men. Women are more intuitive and are quicker to understand emotive