

Tom Marioni



Tom Marioni in the San Francisco studio, 1994.

One wall of Tom Marioni's studio is covered with shelves. Books on Leonardo da Vinci, Miles Davis, Yves Klein and Picasso sit side by side with a little wooden statue of a saint, a pop bottle from Yugoslavia with female-like curves, a tea whisk from Japan, an oversized jar of maraschino cherries—things saved because the ways they look affect what they mean. Marioni, who was born in 1937 and matured as an artist in the 1970s, carries on a continuing investigation into the nature of art and its relationship to life.

Eventually, many of the objects on Marioni's studio shelves will find their way into his sculpture installations. Some installations are small, contained in what he calls shadow boxes, and others fill a room or part of a room. Marioni uses found objects as triggers for people's minds. The objects mean something to him and also have shared, but usually not clearly delineated, meanings to groups of people. He transforms the objects into art by framing, mounting or placing them in defined spaces. Often one of several combined objects is a print or drawing.

The central object in an installation called *Beijing*, 1989, for example, is a drawing of a ghostly figure, made by tracing the artist's own shadow. The shadow seems to sit on a real bicycle in the installation. Between the bicycle handlebars Marioni placed a large calligraphy brush, shaped to suggest the Liberty torch of the statue Chinese students created as part of their 1989 demonstrations in Tiananmen Square. Mounted on the carrier behind the bicycle is a board with a stick poking out of it, balancing a dinner plate of the type Chinese acrobats juggle.

Marioni developed his shadow drawings, like the figure in the *Beijing* installation, at the end of the 1970s after a lengthy exploration of drawing as a measurement of body activity. The first drawing Marioni made which explored a repeated gesture

was called *Drawing a Line as Far as I Can Reach* and was done in 1972. He sat on the floor and reached upward with a pencil, marking over and over the length of his reach. He continues to use this approach, and has made several prints which explore the reach of an arm or a finger. Also in the early 1970s, Marioni did many drum brush drawings, mostly in performance or action situations in which the sound of the activity was transmitted to the audience. In making a drum brush drawing, Marioni drums with wire drum brushes on paper. He works with both hands, moving them repeatedly in an overlapping pattern, a natural movement for a jazz drummer, and the finished drawings look something like birds flying.

Landing, illustrated here, is one of a series of prints related to drum brush drawings. Although Marioni began this body of work as a way to explore sound in performance-actions, after he stopped doing performances in the mid-eighties he kept on doing drum brush drawings from time to time. He had realized, he says, that this type of drawing is more than a way to use sound as a material. It also allows him to make drawings generated directly from his body without intervention from his mind during the working process.

"All of this work is body measurement," he says, "but each drawing has associations: tree, bird, man or—in the calligraphic works—picture writing." Marioni became interested in calligraphy when he learned that in the Chinese and Japanese tradition, writing is connected to the body's breath. He has written Chinese words he likes, like "Art" and "Heart," and has made woodcuts of the symbols "Pi," and (illustrated here) "Yen", the Japanese money sign. Marioni, with a delicate sense of humor evident in much of his work, titled that 1990 print *Flying Yen*.

Marioni's newest prints, introduced in this newsletter, synthesize his body-measurement drawing with the symbolism of his sculpture. He has used the soft end of a feather to draw

(continued)



Landing, 1977. From a set of six mezzotints. Paper size: 19 x 20"; image size: 14½ x 11". Edition 25.

Tom Marioni

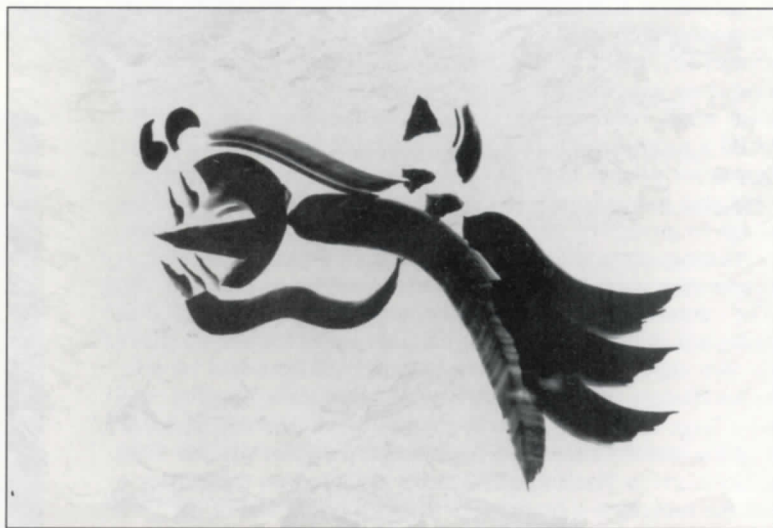
Zen Stories



7 *Stroke Skunk*, 1994. Photogravure. Paper size: 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ " ; image size: 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ ".
Edition 65.



13 *Stroke Rooster*, 1994. Color photogravure. Paper size: 16 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 14 $\frac{1}{4}$ " ;
image size: 10 x 10". Edition 65.



War Horse, 1994. Photogravure with soap ground aquatint printed in grey and black.
Paper size: 17 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 21 $\frac{1}{2}$ " ; image size: 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Edition 65.



American Eagle, 1994. Photogravure printed in blue. Paper size: 17½ x 21½"; image size: 11¼ x 17¾".
Edition 65.



Windblown Rooster, 1994. Color photogravure with aquatint and hard ground etching. Paper size: 22¼ x 33";
image size: 15¼ x 19¾". Edition 65.

(Marioni continued)

images calligraphically. He drew with a light touch on mylar, which we used to make photogravure plates which show the track of the feather exactly. Each of the images is fresh and charming by itself, but, if the individuals are grouped, a viewer can construct parables. There is a graceful skunk, drawn as if to hold at bay the others: two roosters, one crowing and the other braced against a strong wind; a "war horse" taken from Picasso's *Guernica*; an American eagle. Marioni has titled the set of prints *Zen Stories*, and he suggests the meaning is open-ended. He quotes Picasso who said that if it were up to the artist to interpret the symbols he uses, he might just as well simply write them out in words instead of painting them. Pictorial symbols are there for people "to interpret as they understand them."

Marioni, since 1959, has lived and worked in San Francisco, a good place to live, he says, and an interesting place to make art. He is more influenced by European and Asian art attitudes than those current in New York. Because he was not in an art center like New York, and believes that creativity rarely occurs when artists are isolated from other artists, Marioni developed what he calls a social side to his art. His "social work" centers on the Museum of Conceptual Art, called MOCA, which he founded in 1970 and closed in 1984. MOCA showed the work of two generations of Bay Area artists and brought Conceptual artists from around the world to San Francisco.

Marioni defines Conceptual art as not limited to any medium or material; materials are chosen to reflect the ideas being explored. He sees art as a way of approaching life, so, in a way, all his art is socially responsive. MOCA, for example, was a large-scale social comment and the new prints are a small scale one. But if "social comment" makes the work sound preachy, it's not the right word. Marioni's work gently and elegantly raises thoughts about what it means to live in the world today.



Flying Yen, 1990. Color woodcut printed in red on silk mounted on rag paper. Paper size: 22½ x 20¼"; image size: 13 x 12¼". Edition 25.

TOM MARIONI

Born 1937, Cincinnati, Ohio. Lives in San Francisco, CA.

Selected One-Person Exhibitions

- 1963 Bradley Memorial Museum of Art, Columbus, GA
- 1968 Richmond Art Center, Richmond, CA
- 1970 The Oakland Museum, CA
- 1972 Richard DeMarco Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland
- 1975 *Thinking Out Loud*, Galleria Foksal, Warsaw, Poland
- 1977 *The Sound of Flight*, M. H. de Young Museum of Art, San Francisco, CA
- 1979 *The Museum of Conceptual Art at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art*, San Francisco, CA
- The Power of Suggestion*, Modern Art Gallery, Vienna, Austria
- 1980 Feliz Handschin Gallery, Basel, Switzerland
- 1984 *Cutting the Mustard*, A La Limit, Dijon, France
- 1987 Margarete Roeder Fine Arts, NY
- 1990 *Tom Marioni*, Fuller Gross, San Francisco, CA
- Starting Over: the Artist's Studio*, Capp Street Project, San Francisco, CA
- 1993 *Seascapes*, Gallery Paule Anglim, San Francisco, CA
- Landscapes*, Crown Point Press, San Francisco, CA
- Photograms*, Robert Koch Gallery, San Francisco, CA

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 1970 *Sound Sculpture As*, Museum of Conceptual Art, San Francisco, CA
- 1972 *The San Francisco Performance*, Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Beach, CA
- 1975 *Kontra punkt*, Fiuro Wystaw Artyslyczynch, Warsaw, Poland
- 1980 *For Eyes and Ears*, Academy der Kunst, Berlin, Germany.
- Traveled to:
 - ACR Museum of Modern Art, Paris, France
 - Music/Sound/Language/Theater*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Holland
 - Word of Mouth*, Island of Ponape, Micronesia.
- Artists conference organized by Crown Point Press, Oakland, CA
- 1982 *Twenty Americans*, Biennial II, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA
- 100 Years of California Sculpture*, Oakland Museum, CA
- Live to Air*, Tate Gallery, London, England
- Elegant Miniatures from San Francisco*, Belca House, Kyoto, Japan
- 1985 *Alles und Noch Viel Mebr (All and Even More)*, Kunsthalle, Bern, Switzerland
- From Sound to Image*, Stuttgart Stratsgalerie, Germany
- 1989 *Forty Years of California Assemblage*, University of California, Los Angeles, Wight Art Gallery
- 1990 *In Site: Five Conceptual Artists from the Bay Area*, University Gallery, Univ. Massachusetts, Amherst, MA
- 1991 *Prints by Sculptors*, Crown Point Press, NY
- 1994 *Lasting Concepts*, Artists Space, NY
- Solid Concept*, Gallery Paule Anglim, San Francisco, CA

Awards, Grants, and Fellowships

- 1976 National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship
- 1980 National Endowment for the Arts Award in Visual Arts
- 1981 John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Award in Conceptual Art
- 1984 National Endowment for the Arts Award in Sculpture
- 1986 Asian Cultural Council Travel Grant to Japan