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*INVISIBLE QUESTIONS THAT FILL THE AIR:
JAMES LEE BYARS AND SEUNG-TAEK LEE*

CURATED BY ALLEGRA PESENTI

Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti
Palazzo Loredan, Campo Santo Stefano, Venice

17 APRIL - 25 AUGUST 2024

OPENING RECEPTION: 16 APRIL, 5-8pm

Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, Venice, with the support of Michael Werner Gallery is pleased to present *Invisible Questions That Fill the Air*, an exhibition of works by American artist James Lee Byars (b. 1932, d. 1997) and Korean artist Seung-taek Lee (b. 1932), curated by esteemed curator and art historian Allegra Pesenti. "The otherworldly fabric of Venice and more specifically the historical backdrop of the Palazzo Loredan become a unique stage for both artists," Pesenti notes of the exhibition. "The combination of gold, stone, wood, and rope in their respective works reflects the traditional materials of Venice's built environment. And poetry and philosophy, which are so central to the art of both Byars and Lee, find common ground in the ornate libraries of Palazzo Loredan in Campo Santo Stefano."

Both artists were born in 1932 on opposite sides of the world. Byars in Detroit, an industrial city struggling during the Great Depression, and Lee in a small town in a Northern province of a then unified Korea under Japanese rule. They never met, but their works present surprising and unexpected parallels. Foremost, both artists elude easy categorization. While they are tangentially associated with Surrealism, Dada, Minimalism, Mono-ha, and Arte Povera, their work streams through different forms and concepts, and they resist being bound to a specific movement. Both artists share a deep curiosity for history and the arts of the past, alongside a reflective and critical approach to the present.

Despite the tactility of their works, there is a common interest in the immaterial. Lee describes the origins of his "non-sculpture" as "departing from a sculptural form, these works signaled a state of existence, visualizing the invisible air." Likewise for Byars, the critic Dave Hickey notes that "the implication of his work is that seeing is never quite enough, that we should listen for instance to the invisible questions that presumably fill the air."

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Invisible Questions That Fill the Air includes over six decades of work and bolsters both Byars' and Lee's reputations as major contributors to the 20th and 21st century avant-garde. According to Pesenti, "There is an indomitable energy that has kept the work of these two artists alive against the vagaries of contemporary art trends and expectations. Despite the vast differences that place them apart, there is a closeness of thought: a correspondent affinity for the spiritual, for ritual, and for a purity of form. Through their own alchemical transformations, they make the invisible visible."

James Lee Byars has been the subject of numerous museum exhibitions worldwide, including *The Palace of Good Luck*, Castello di Rivoli / Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Turin (1989); *The Perfect Moment*, IVAM Centre del Carme, Valencia (1994); *The Palace of Perfect*, Fundação de Serralves, Porto (1997); *Life Love and Death*, Schirn Kunsthalle and Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain de Strasbourg (2004); *The Perfect Silence*, Whitney Museum of American Art (2005); *1/2 An Autobiography*, MoMA PS1, New York and Museo Jumex, Mexico City (2013-2014); *The Golden Tower*, Campo San Vio, Venice (2017); *The Perfect Kiss*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp (2018); and *The Perfect Moment*, Red Brick Art Museum, Beijing (2021). Most recently, a major survey of Byars' work was on view at Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan from October 2023 to February 2024 and opens at Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid in May 2024.

A pioneer of the Korean Avant-Garde with a career spanning over a half century, Seung-taek Lee's work is held in the collections of museums worldwide, including the Tate Modern, London; the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA), Seoul; the M+ Museum, Hong Kong; the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi; the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney; and the Seoul Museum of Art, among others. Lee's work has been included in major recent group exhibitions at the Gwangju Biennale (2023); the MMCA, Seoul (2023); the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2022); the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo (2019); and the National Gallery, Singapore (2019). In 2020, a major retrospective survey of Lee's work was held at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Seoul. Lee is included in *Only the Young: Experimental Art in Korea, 1960s-1970s*, on view at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles until May 12, 2024 after having been on view at the Guggenheim Museum, New York.

About the curator. Allegra Pesenti obtained her PhD from the Courtauld Institute of Art. She has held prominent positions as Associate Director and Senior Curator of the UCLA Grunwald Center for Graphic Arts at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles and as Chief Curator and Curator-at-Large for the Menil Collection in Houston, Texas, where she was instrumental in the development of the Menil

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Drawing Institute. A specialist in drawings, she worked on the catalogue raisonné of drawings by Jasper Johns and has pursued research on the drawings of Pablo Picasso, Robert Ryman, Alina Szapocnikow, and Rachel Whiteread, among others. She currently works as an Independent Curator in Rome.

Invisible Questions That Fill the Air is put together with the cooperation of Gallery Hyundai, Seoul. It opens at Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti in the Palazzo Loredan with a reception from 5-8PM on 16 April. A catalogue will accompany the exhibition. The show will be open Monday to Sunday, 9:30am to 5:30pm, from 17 April through 25 August.

For more information, please visit www.michaelwerner.com, contact the gallery at press@michaelwerner.com or Carrie Rees, Rees & Co. at carrie@reesandco.com. Follow the gallery on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and Wechat.

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