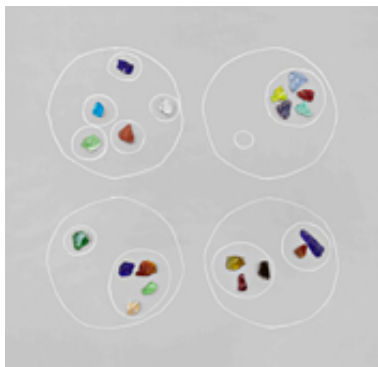


## Print Article



Mel Bochner, *Five by Four*, 1972/1991, at Marc Selwyn Fine Art, Los Angeles



Mel Bochner, *5 Stones, 4 Space (Hinge)*, 1972/2012, at Marc Selwyn Fine Art, Los Angeles

## Mel Bochner

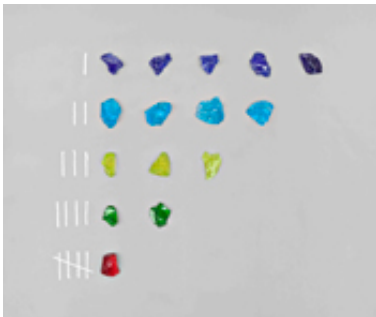
# CONSTELLATION OF IDEAS

by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp

Walking into the [Mel Bochner](#) show at [Marc Selwyn Fine Art](#) in Los Angeles is a little like entering an observatory, but you are looking down instead of up at the sky. On the concrete floor are simple chalk marks, drawings of circles and lines and lists of numbers. Strategically placed among them, punctuating the shapes and charts, are large chunks of richly colored glass that might be emeralds, rubies and sapphires glistening in the reflected light like stars. Minimal? You bet, yet memorably and unpredictably uplifting nonetheless. The title of the show and the story behind it add to the intrigue. Called "Theory of Sculpture: Fontana's Light," the pieces extend the visual language of the influential Italian artist [Lucio Fontana](#), who worked with this same broken glass in the 1950s and '60s.

Beginning in the mid-1960s, Bochner made Conceptual Art about systems, about ideas. In his "Theory of Sculpture" pieces from the 1970s, shown on the floor of the [Sonnabend Gallery](#) at 420 West Broadway in SoHo, he used pebbles, nuts or matchsticks to refer to the gap that exists between the act of counting and the physical manifestation of counted objects, for instance. His writing is astringent and lucid. Yet, as critic Eleanor Heartley has observed, "In Bochner's work, perception constantly trumps idea, reaffirming the artist's belief that the sensuous is an essential element in even the most conceptual art."

In 1991, when Bochner was living in Rome, he was



Mel Bochner, *Cardinal vs. Ordinal*, 1972/2012, at Marc Selwyn Fine Art, Los Angeles



Mel Bochner, *3 / 5 / 4*, 1973/1991, at Marc Selwyn Fine Art, Los Angeles



Mel Bochner, *Four Points*, 1972/2012, at Marc Selwyn Fine Art, Los Angeles

approached by art dealer Sergio Casoli to show at his gallery in Milan, which had once been the studio of Fontana. In a dusty back room, Bochner found all of Fontana's old art materials, including the Murano glass that he had smashed to bits to attach to his paintings. Bochner said that opening the box was like opening Ali Baba's cave, filled as it was with chunks of raw glass in the "most beautiful and luminous shades imaginable." Bochner had been making his sculptures using pebbles and drawn lines. He then proceeded to make similar pieces with the chalk markings and pieces of glass on the floor.

Decades passed, and he assumed that those delicate pieces had been lost. Last year, thanks to Google, his L.A. art dealer Marc Selwyn was able to locate Casoli as co-author of a book on Fontana. Selwyn contacted Casoli and learned that he had saved the glass. Last September, 20 years after Bochner had visited Fontana's studio, a crate was sent to him. Inside was an old gym bag with each piece of glass carefully wrapped in a sheet of 1992 Italian newspaper.

Using the original materials and ideas, Bochner's sculptures have been recreated at Selwyn Fine Arts. Bochner authorized the execution of the pieces by assistants. In reconnecting to this older work with chunks of bright color, Bochner realized that it was a precedent to his more recent paintings of words, where color is a key component of their execution and legibility.

He told Selwyn, "It's always surprising to see how thoughts and perceptions subliminally circulate through one's mind, only to reappear two decades later in wholly different and unexpected ways. It's surprising. . . and deeply gratifying."

Mel Bochner, "Theory of Sculpture: Fontana's Light," Mar. 17-Apr. 27, 2012, at Marc Selwyn Fine Art, 6222 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 101, Los Angeles, Ca. 90048.

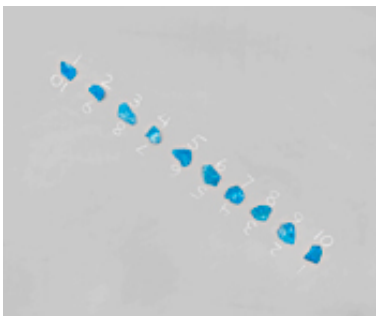
**HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP** is the author of *Rebels in Paradise: The Los Angeles Art Scene and the 1960s* (Henry Holt, 2011).



Mel Bochner, *Measurements 180°*, 1968/2012, at Marc Selwyn Fine Art, Los Angeles



Mel Bochner, *Meditation on the Theorem of Pythagoras*, 1972/1991, at Marc Selwyn Fine Art, Los Angeles



Mel Bochner, *Reversibility*, 1972/1991, at Marc Selwyn Fine Art, Los Angeles



Mel Bochner, *Ten*, 1972/1991, at Marc Selwyn Fine Art, Los Angeles