

Robert Marks



Cirrus 1971

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Virgin Space Gallery January 1971

Andrea Joki

The Virgin Space Gallery (now known as Cirrus Gallery) came into existence with the first solo show by Los Angeles artist Robert Marks in January 1971. The artworks included in this untitled exhibition reflect ideas and preoccupations of artists living and working in Los Angeles at the time, and echoes concerns seen in a distinctive West Coast minimalism.

The cultural scene in Los Angeles in the late 1960s and early 1970s was ripe with inventive talent. Marks came of age following a time when Ferus Gallery and the Cool School artists had helped lay the groundwork for the development of particular Los Angeles artistic styles including assemblage with artists Walter Berman and Ed Kienholz; a West Coast minimalism in the works of Robert Irwin, Larry Bell and Craig Kaufman; and the unique conceptual languages of Ed Ruscha and John Baldesarri.

Angeleno artists of this period often came together to live and work creating pockets of artistic activity and social networks in places such as Venice, Long Beach and downtown Los Angeles. The creative pockets where artists interacted in daily life influenced the exchange of artistic ideas and fostered opportunities for artists, curators and writers.

Marks and his fellow artist friends were part of a tight-knit group living and working downtown along Beaudry Avenue – each member branded on the hand with a rose tattoo known to the group as the “Beaudry Rose.” Marks’ dynamic social network led to his personal introduction to Milant, and ultimately to his opportunity of exhibiting new works in the gallery’s inaugural show.

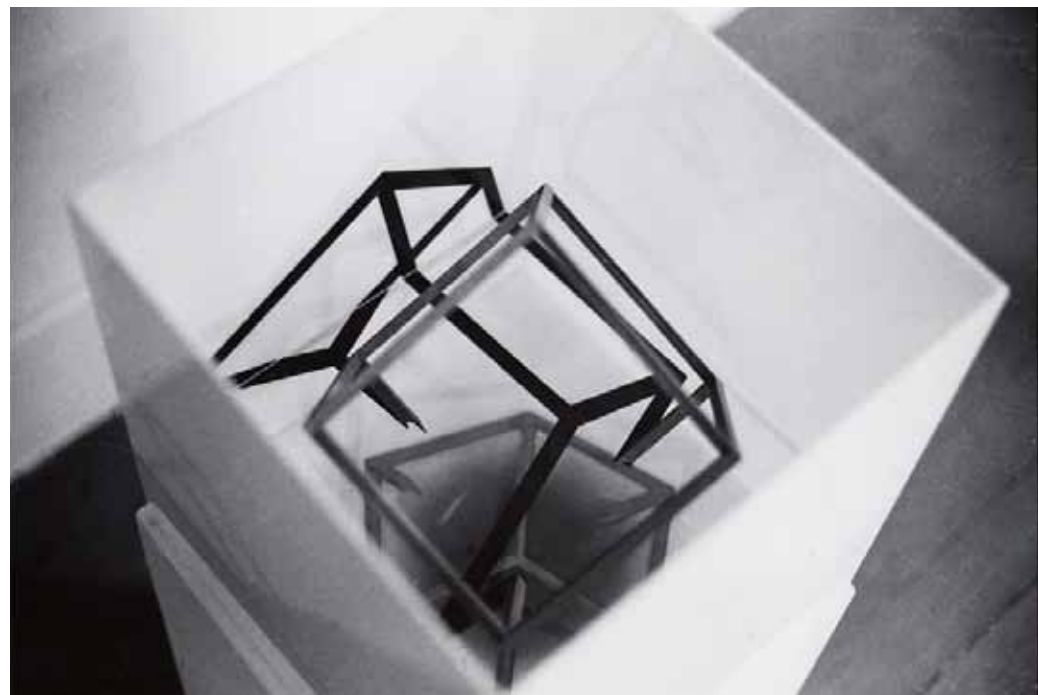
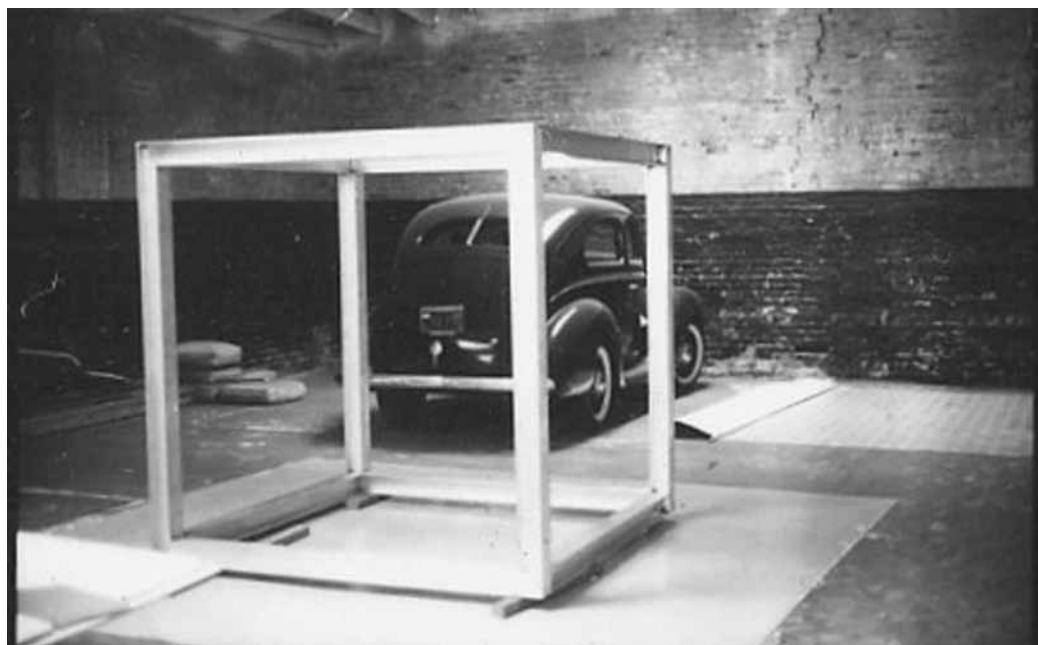
Identifying with his Los Angeles predecessors who, as Marks states, “took art off the canvas,” Marks’ concept-based artistic practice involves multiple processes including aluminum and acrylic glass fabrication, photography, screenprinting and painting. His unique language is a nod to 1960s Minimalist artists, such as Sol LeWitt and Donald Judd and to Joseph Albers with his critical theories relating to perception. However, Marks infuses his process and methodology with distinctive West Coast attributes as he incorporates into his work new non-traditional materials, addresses the ephemeral and evokes the metaphysical.

Installation

1971

Untitled

1971

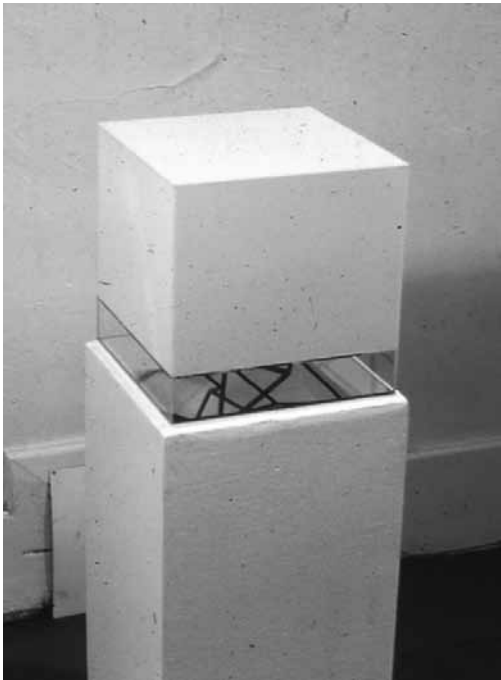


Installation
1971





The focal point of the exhibition is a six-foot cube framework constructed with aluminum H-beams that are bolted together at the corners. Commissioned as an outdoor sculpture by a private collector, this piece made its first appearance at the Virgin Space Gallery before its subsequent installation on the patron's grass lawn. The cube framework is positioned at a forty-five degree angle with a corner penetrating the floor plane, nestled in a triangular hole where the concrete floor



Untitled
1971

and several inches of underlying earth has been removed. Marks directs a controlled light source to cast a stark shadow of the cube on the surface of the concrete floor.

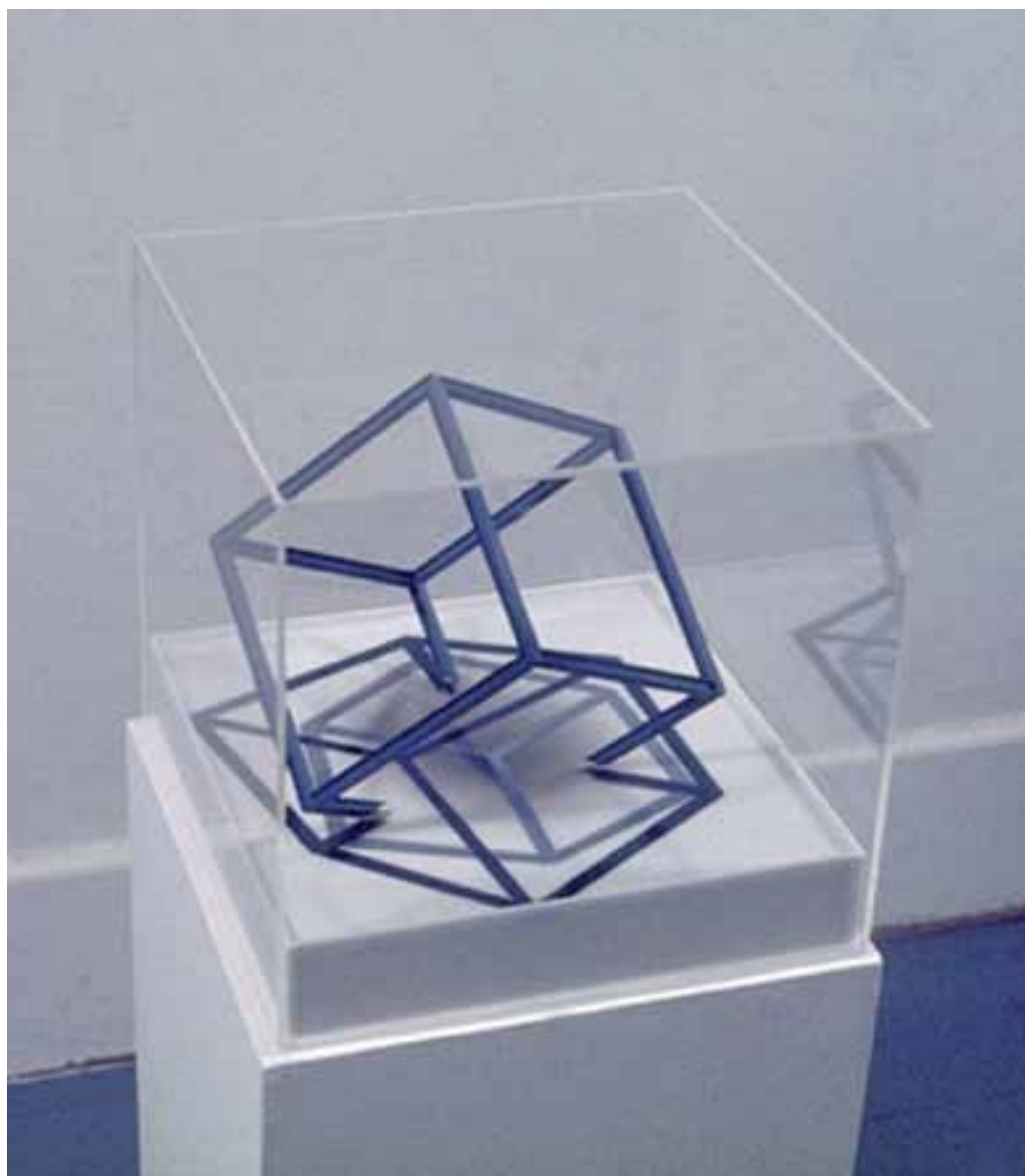
The shadow has been traced and then painted, transforming an ephemeral phenomenon into a static graphic element. Marks describes his intent in fixing shadows as a method of creating, as he calls them, "implied planes."

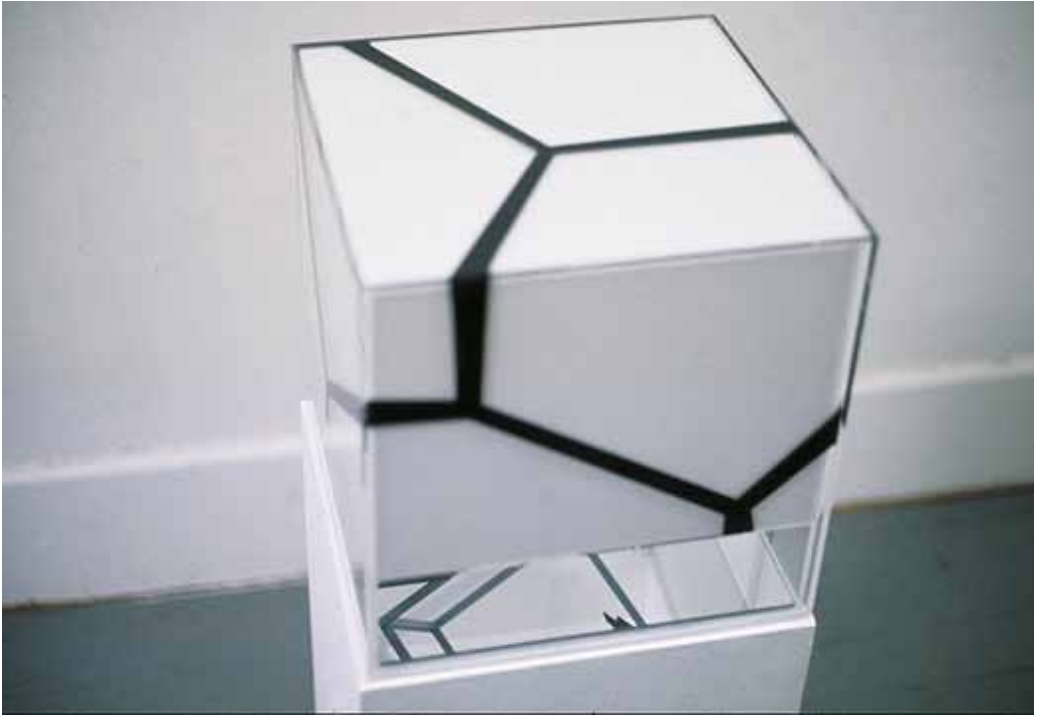
In an interview with Art International's contributing art critic Joseph E. Young on January 27, 1971, Marks elaborates on his conceptual inquiry:

In analyzing my environment I felt that I was penetrating planes all the time. I considered walking through a doorway like breaking through a plane. Later I determined that the cube structure was a "pure" form to work with. I guess that was a kind of romantic idea giving that kind of definition, but the cube was a very good vehicle for me so that I could work with the configurations that the cube produces as light was projected through it.

Smaller-scale sculptures in the exhibition include four freestanding white pedestals. Marks' strategy is further revealed with these more intimate sculptures. Each is conceived as a *gesamtwerk* where the pedestal itself is considered a sculptural element along with the language of the cube and shadows. The conceptual language Marks explores through various processes and materials is a terrain of dualities, such as transparent vs. opaque, reality vs. illusion, interior vs. exterior, nature vs. artifice.

Untitled
1971





Untitled

1971

In one pedestal piece, Marks constructs a scaled down version of the show's centerpiece. A cobalt blue cube framework is positioned at a forty-five degree angle with the illusion that one corner is penetrating the surface on which it rests. Instead of being nestled in a cutout triangular hole like the large-scale piece, the cube meets the surface at three points. Marks' process continues as he directs controlled lighting onto the cube framework, casting shadows of the piece from several angles. These overlapping shadows have been traced and painted in shades of blue. The web of painted shadows gives the illusion of depth and perspective and also speaks to qualities of light – intense light and stark shadows, diffuse light and soft shadows.

Marks further complicates this geometric construction with an acrylic glass vitreine that encapsulates the cube framework. Reflections of cube are cast on the surface of the acrylic glass, and shadows of the vitreine's seams are cast atop the web

of recorded shadows on the pedestal's surface.

In an early 2011 interview with gallerist Jean Milant of Cirrus Gallery, Robert Marks recalled his multiple-step process:

I took photosensitive paper and set the cube structure on top of it. I exposed this to a flash of light, and everything remained black except where the cube blocked the exposure to light, leaving white lines. I had silkscreens made from the photographic images of each plane of the cube, then screenprinted these images on Plexiglas sheets cut to size. Finally, I put the Plexiglas cube together. It was a complex process at the time. I had to record my process with mock-ups so that I wouldn't forget.

When viewed from a distance, another pedestal piece stands as a square column-like object with three stratifications. A narrow band of clear acrylic glass separates the pedestal base from a white

cube. Marks' geometric language is visible through this see-through band, drawing the eye in and making one curious about what else may be inside. A close-up view of the work reveals that it is possible to look down into the top of the sculpture, finding a cube framework. This cube-within-a-cube and the overlapping shadows of the cube implies an analytical thought process concerned with mathematical concepts such as exponents and multipliers.

With each piece, the repeated off-kilter positioning of a stable form gives the feeling that each iteration is a moment frozen in time, capturing the cubes in an instant as they cascade and tumble in a spot lighted environment. For me, Marks series of sculptures recall film stills and photographs of NASA's historical moon landing in July 1969 – as earthbound humans witnessed, via television, a man-made structure float down and make contact with the moon's stark surface.

Through his explorations of object and shadow, Marks reveals his heightened sensitivity to objects in space. With his multiple illustrations of the effects of light on cube frameworks, he reveals the object and shadow as one unit and makes visual and metaphorical play of the object shifting in presence as time passes. When asked by Jean Milant about the significance of the shadows in relationship to the physicality of the cube framework, Marks expressed that, for him, the shadow of an object means the object truly exists.

As with other Los Angeles artists of the late 1960s and early 1970s including Robert Irwin and John Baldesarri, both having taught classes at Chouinard Institute of Art, Marks creates a visual language that reveals a spiritual or metaphysical component. His analytical inquiry into objects in space brings to mind philosophical ideas of Plato and his Allegory of the Cave.

Although Marks insists that his ideas are straightforward and uncomplicated, a viewer that brings a knowledge of philosophy to the experience of viewing Marks works will be gratified by the elegance and lucidity of a visual language that may stand as a metaphor for the virtue of human intelligence and reasoning. Marks thoughtful and methodical artistic process makes visible those philosophical ideas and concepts that most often remain ethereal.

Bibliography

- Catalog L.A. Birth of an Art Capital 1955-1985, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2006.
- Jean Milant, "Interview with Robert Marks and Doug Edge," Cirrus Gallery, Los Angeles, 2011.
- Morgan Neville, "The Cool School: The Story of the Ferus Art Gallery," Arthouse Films, New York, 2007.
- Peter Schjeldahl, The Art World, "Way Out West," The New Yorker, January 25, 2010, p. 76.
- Samuel Enoch Stumpf, Socrates to Sartre: A History of Philosophy, 2nd Edition, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1975.
- Joseph E. Young, "Los Angeles: Robert Marks," Art International, Vol. XV/5, May 20, 1971.



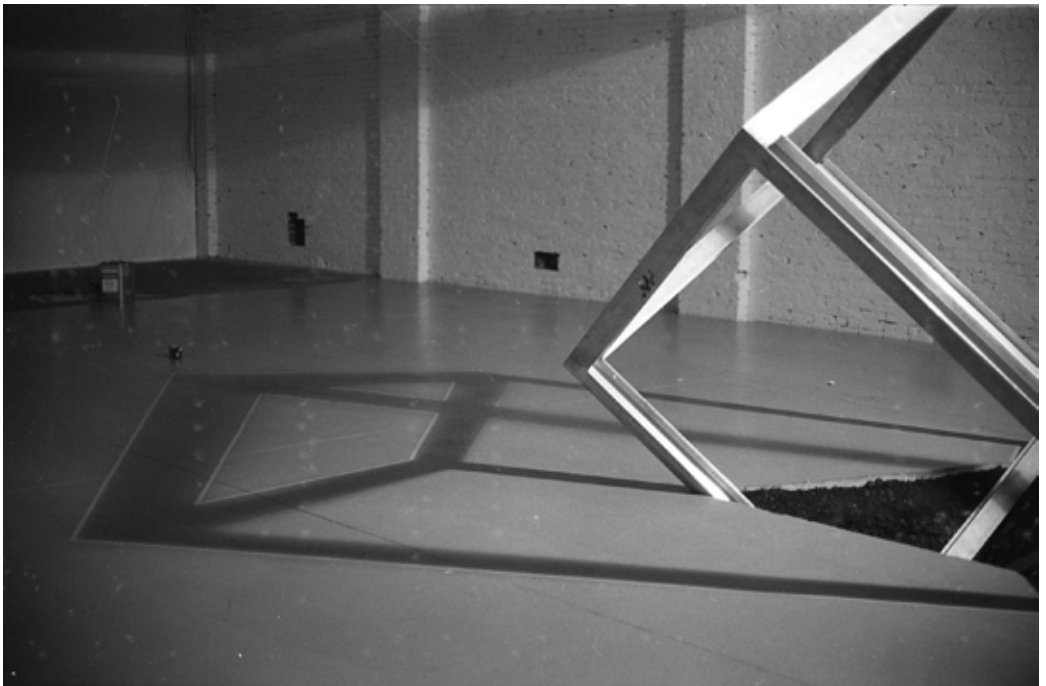
Untitled
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Untitled
1971



Installation
1971





Robert F. Marks

EDUCATION

Chouinard Art Institute
Bachelor of Fine Arts, 1971

SOCIETIES

- E.A.T./L.A. (Experiments in Art and Technology/L.A.)
- Southwest Museum
- L.A. Zoo Association
- Early Ford V8 Club

EXHIBITIONS

- 1989 "Selections" from the permanent collection of photography.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art
- 1984 "Santa Barbara Festival '84", Santa Barbara Arts Council.
- 1984 "Some Photos by Artists", Risser Gallery, Pasadena, California.
- 1981 Abstract Painting (Gribin Collection), California State College, Northridge, Los Angeles.
- 1980 "Marks-Milliken-Risser", Santa Barbara Photography Gallery.
- 1979 "Santa Barbara Invitational", 1120 Artists Space.
- 1979 "Attitudes/Photography in the 1970's", Santa Barbara Museum of Art.
- 1979 "R.F. Marks Photographs", Cummings Art Center, Connecticut College.
- 1978 "Warner/Marks", 120 Artists Space.
- 1978 "Eejima/Marks", College of Creative Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara
- 1977 "Photographs by Southern California Painters and Sculptors", College of Creative Studies.
- 1975 "Seven Santa Barbara Artists", Santa Barbara Museum of Art.
- 1974 "Santa Barbara Selection", Santa Barbara Museum of Art.
- 1974 Group Show, University of New Mexico.
- 1973 Group Show, Ruth Schaffner Gallery, Santa Barbara.
- 1973 Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska.
- 1972 "Focus '72", Palos Verdes Arts Association.
- 1972 One Man Show, Cirrus Art Gallery, Los Angeles.
- 1971 Group Show, Laguna Beach Art Gallery.
- 1971 One Man Show, Cirrus Art Gallery, Los Angeles.
- 1970 "Temple Street Artists", Long Beach Museum of Art.
- 1970 Group Show, Los Angeles Museum of Art.
- 1969 "Art in Space Age Materials", San Pedro Municipal Art Gallery.
- 1969 "New Directions Two", Westside Community Center, Los Angeles.
- 1969 Group Show, Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

EXHIBITIONS (Continued)

- 1968 "Plastic Painting and Sculpture", California State University, Los Angeles.
1967 "Small Image Show", California State University, Los Angeles.
1967 Group Show, Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

COLLECTIONS

- Permanent Collection of Santa Barbara Museum of Art
- Richard Dorso, Beverly Hills
- Cynthia Lasker, Beverly Hills
- Murray and Ruth Gribin Collection
- Jerry Kanter, Beverly Hills
- Dr. Alvin Leeb, Sherman Oaks
- Jacqueline Shlaes, Beverly Hills
- Los Angeles County Museum of Art Print Collection (Curator: Joseph Young)
- Jerrold Soloman (Art Services), Los Angeles
- Manny Silverman (Art Services), Los Angeles
- Ken Tyler (Gemini G.E.L.), Los Angeles
- Sid Felson (Gemini G.E.L.), Los Angeles
- Charles Coles (Art Forum), New York
- AVCO Industries, Los Angeles

SELECTED REVIEWS

"Mr. Marks serenely presents a serious dichotomy of calmness and force, inquisitiveness and controlled burn, and distinct in his treatment of motion and delay. He is a true force to be reckoned with: original and convincing."

Alfred Bogorass
FotoArt, Budapest, Hungary
April 1983

"'Similitude': Bob Marks (. . .) selected by the judges of the Herbert Bayer Photography Competition for inclusion in the Santa Barbara Museum of Art's permanent collection (. . .) chosen from more than 900 entries."

The Independent
Santa Barbara, California
June 1987

SELECTED REVIEWS (Continued)

"At a time when novelty for its own sake has significantly fallen into disfavor, Robert Mark's (work) seems to regally scorn the momentary attraction of fashion for the timeless love of art."

Joseph E. Young
Art International (Lugano, Switzerland)
May 20, 1971

"Shadows, mostly, are subliminal comments on the unknown - by the unknowing. Not so with one named Robert Marks. Mr. Marks deftly displays his mastery of "photo-technique" as simply a tool for his strong, 'unshadowy' and crisp statements which, most refreshingly, bring a visual art into blossom by exercising our intellect: a real accomplishment in this age of banality. I would like to meet him one day. Till then I advise all to keep a keen eye out for his works."

Johanan Boehm
Jerusalem Port
February 1988

PUBLICATIONS

Journal, (Contemporary Arts Magazine), California Institute of Contemporary Art
University of California, Irvin and California State University Northridge
September / October 1981

Spectrum, (Anthology), University of California, Santa Barbara, 1980
Spectrum (volume XXI), 1979

Popular Photography, June 1980

Attitudes, (Photography in the 1970's), May-August 1979, Santa Barbara Museum
of Art

Photography by Southern California Painters and Sculptors (University of
California Santa Barbara), June 1977

Arrow (College of Creative Studies, UCSB), 1975

Art International (The Lugano Review), May 1971
Art International (New York and Switzerland), May 1970

Art Forum (New York), May 1968



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