

BERTHA AND KARL LEUBSDORF GALLERY

132 East 68th Street New York, NY 10065

William Anastasi

By Xin Wang

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A recorder plays itself recording an otherwise silent environment (Microphone, 1963) while the murmur of industrial objects—a radiator, a deflated tire, a pneumatic drill—buzz conspicuously from attached speakers (Sound Objects, 1963–65). Foregrounding sound as readymade, these mechanomorphic-looking pieces conjure up Duchamp but their conceptual reckoning was very much at the contemporary edge—Joseph Kosuth's One and Three Chairs wasn't due out until 1965. Commencing this important retrospective of William Anastasi's engagement with sound, these early works showcase the artist's experimentation in utilizing sound to reinforce or problematize the reality of a thing as itself.

Anastasi works at the intersection of the visual, auditory, and gestural, where paradoxical randomness is the governing principal. For Constellation Drawing, 1963, Bach dictates the duration and form of the blindfolded artist's action on paper, resulting in clusters of faint dots trailing in varying formations and densities. The process was subsequently repeated while riding subway or attending live performances that range from classical repertoires to John Cage and Merce Cunningham, producing tangled lines, often in bilateral composition, drawn in and out of sync with the surrounding sound. Alternatively, The World's Greatest Music, 1977, spins recordings of Brahms, Wagner, and Mozart via a 78 rpm stuck on its last groove in colorful children's turntables, soundful with imagination in the absence of music.

Intriguingly, the default limitation of this succinct exhibition testifies to another kind of remarkable expansiveness. The first decade of Anastasi's sound works also saw the proto-Conceptualist making Minimalist pee marks on squares of sand, stacking brick cubes, and



carving out part of a wall—testing all sorts of boundaries. A unique piece on view, Window on the Airshaft, 1964, recreates the window area in the Anastasi's Lower East Side studio, complete with wallpaper, shades, and stucco. Enlivened by a recurrent loop of urban hubbub, recorded right then and there, it anchors the mood and energy for wide-ranging experimentation.