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Allan McCollum: from Artificial Surrogates to Natural Copies

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Allan McCollum. *Surrogate Paintings.* 1978-80. Acrylics and enamels on wood and museum board. Installation: 112 Workshop, New York, 1979.

Allan McCollum, born in Los Angeles in 1944 and resident in New York since 1975, is not concerned in his work with expanding the realm of art yet again and breaking down the boundary between art and reality ("everything is art"). Instead his approach presents him with the potential for investigating the aesthetic, emotional and psychological, social and economic conditions under which art exists within the commercial world of art. The artificial surrogates, universal signifiers which—while lacking any inherent meaning of their own—designate genres like paintings, photographs, sculpture and drawing, assume in a paradigmatic fashion all the functions that this system ascribes to them. On the other hand, McCollum the artist remains a constant fixture within this exchange

Allan McCollum. *Surrogate Painting* [No. 783]. 1978. 6 1/16 x 5 9/16 x 1 1/8 inches. Acrylic on wood and museum board.

with its complex rules, thereby preventing him from stepping aside and operating as a neutral and impartial observer. For precisely that reason his aesthetic products, which are simultaneously both art and its surrogate, are able to create responses and be implemented on a range of different levels. Although Allan McCollum accepts the laws of the art exchange and art market for his work, he still adopts a critical position towards them. Through his picture surrogates he treats their inherent mechanisms in his work and thus—rather than simply accepting them unquestioningly—exposes their standards and values. He maintains this stance even though he cannot necessarily change the values.

With his three most recent series, begun in the nineties and presented together for the first time in Hanover, Allan McCollum has started to exploit additional motifs and dimensions of meaning for his art. McCollum's casting material and production process may have remained the same, with his work still hovering on the boundary between industrial mass production, individual craftsman ship and unique artistic creativity. However, he has expanded his spectrum of subjects by selecting his models from the realms of natural history and archaeology. This new orientation has been accompanied by the artist's abandonment of surrogates of esthetic objects, replacing these with a world of figurative motifs in the broadest definition of the term. The figure, which is retained in the casting of *The Dog from Pompei* in the greatest detail, has already been reduced in the series *Lost Objects* to the fossilized dinosaur bones, while in the most recent series—*Natural Copies from the Coal Mines of Central Utah*—no more remains than the petrification of an ephemeral dinosaur footprint.

Allan McCollum. *Lost Objects*, 1991. Enamel on glass-fiber-reinforced concrete. Cast dinosaur bones produced in collaboration with the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Installation: Carnegie Museum of Art, 1991.

The museum as an institution also remains a further focal point for criticism in McCollum's artistic strategy. All three figures were taken from archaeological or natural science museum collections. Consequently they are subjected to collection and presentation, and exposed to scientific and social discourse, public interests, private passions and economic restraints in a similar fashion to works of art. Allan McCollum is sustaining a line of argument here that he began in the late seventies with the first *Surrogate Paintings*, albeit now under different conditions. However, these new works also thematize existential experiences of separation, loss and death with a power absent in his earlier works.

The series of *Lost Objects* originated in 1991, when Allan McCollum had just received an invitation to participate in an exhibition at the Carnegie International in Pittsburgh. With the support of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History—which was attached to the institute—he finally had the opportunity to realize a project he had been planning for years. He made fifty castings each of fifteen dinosaur bones from the museum collection and painted them in fifty shades of brown. In this way 750 objects in varying forms and/or colors came into exis-

Allan McCollum. *The Dog From Pompei*, 1991. Cast glass-fiber-reinforced Hydrocal. Replicas made from a mold taken from the famous original "chained dog" plaster cast of a dog smothered in ash from the explosion of Mount Vesuvius, in ancient Pompeii, in 79 A.D. Produced in collaboration with the Museo Vesuviano and the Pompei Tourist Board, Pompei, Italy, and Studio Trisorio, Naples, Italy.

tence. He presented them the same year on a gigantic flat pedestal spread out at the Carnegie International. In subsequent exhibitions, however, he divided the *Lost Objects* into smaller collections.

In the same year Allan McCollum showed the series *The Dog from Pompei* for the first time, a series he had begun in 1990. The figure stemmed from the famous hollow casting of a watchdog that had died in 79 AD during the eruption of Vesuvius in Pompei. What differs here from *Lost Objects* and all of the artist's other series is that each cast was identical and the individual objects are not distinguished from each other by modifications in color. McCollum presents the plaster casts of the dog in rows on narrow pedestals, whereby he has marginally varied the directions they face, so that the viewer sees a slightly different aspect of each one.

Allan McCollum had already found the models for his *Natural Copies* in 1990 in the collection of the regional College of Eastern Utah Prehistoric Museum in Price, Utah. The petrified footprints of dinosaurs had been discovered by local coal miners and later handed over to the museum. At the end of 1994, after Allan McCollum had been granted permission to make casts of the variously

Allan McCollum. *Natural Copies from the Coal Mines of Central Utah*, 1994-95. Enamel paint on cast polymer-enhanced Hydrocal. Natural dinosaur track cast replicas produced in collaboration with the College of Eastern Utah Prehistoric Museum, Price, Carbon County, Utah.

sized exhibits, he began—with the help of his studio assistants—to cast eight sets of 44 plaster objects each and paint them in differing shades.

In an interview by David A. Robbins in 1985, Allan McCollum speaks about his general experiences of working with art and his reasons for producing the first *Surrogate Paintings* in 1978: "I'm interested to encourage an analysis of art, but through the pleasure of looking, that's all. I would like to see us be a little more anthropological in the way that we assess our own cultural production. I feel that art now functions to keep people apart, to reinforce and maintain class boundaries, and to encourage exclusion and inequality through the cult of 'taste.'[1] Here too McCollum experienced works of art primarily as instruments in the class struggle within the arena of art. For him they therefore represent the aesthetic ideals of a ruling class which, through gifts and loans to public museums, is able to establish its own personal taste as the social standard and thus try and bolster its power. In 1987 Allan McCollum formulated his critical approach towards the social ramifications of art in even more pointed terms: "I usually end

[1] David A. Robbins: An interview with Allan McCollum, in: *Arts Magazine*, October 1985, p. 44.

up feeling angry and powerless when I visit a museum. I find myself thinking, 'Who are these people? Who paid for this building? Where did they get their money? Who chose these artworks? How much did they cost? What does all of this have to do with my experience?' And on and on ... I am aiming to work through this alienation by basing the value of my work on a new model, a model based on abundance and availability, not uniqueness and exclusivity."[2]

When the first *Surrogate Painting* was created in 1978, it was still Allan McCollum's idea to reduce his entire oeuvre to this one picture. "So I took it upon myself to create a model, a standard sign for a painting which might represent nothing more than the identity of painting in the world of other objects,",were the words McCollum chose to describe both his original approach to work and also its limits: "But this solution eliminated the possibility of exchange transactions—and how could a thing represent an art object if it couldn't be bought and sold?"[3] And so he began to replace the sign for a painting as a unique work with a multiplicity of *Surrogate Paintings* of similar form and equally significant functions. These objects are made of wood with molded fiber board inlays and are painted in a monochrome design. They also possess a relief-like character in which the picture surface, mount and frame are differentiated from each other. McCollum reduces the essential features of the painting to such an extent that the character of the painting remains recognizable, but at the same time all individu-ality is extinguished.

Allan McCollum's *Surrogate Paintings* arouse the desire to recognize something in a picture while simultaneously frustrating his audience in this desire: In this manner his audience is referred back to its own position and act of perception. The artist himself identifies an affinity between this process and the alienation effect forming part of Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theater theories. Instead of immersing his audience in a theatrical illusion and eliciting emotion responses, Brecht exposed the production methods and mechanisms to his audience's view, thereby encouraging a detached and critical stance. In McCollum's surrogates, this function is assumed by the uniform paint covering and subsequently by the plaster of Paris, ensuring that the works cannot be confused with paintings and are immediately recognizable as their "templates."

The *Surrogate Painting* possesses neither pattern nor content. For this reason Allan McCollum is not interested in the work as a form of presenting reality either in figurative or abstract depictions. Instead he asks questions of the picture in its fluctuating role as an exhibition piece, object of desire, cultural item, status sym-bol and wall decoration: questions like 1) what social mechanisms affect his

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[2] Allan McCollum, in: *New York Art Now: The Saatchi Collection* (cat.), The Saatchi Museum, London, 1987, p. 15.

[3] David A. Robbins: "An interview with Allan McCollum," in: *Arts Magazine*, October 1985, p. 41.

Allan McCollum. *Plaster Surrogates*, 1982/84. Enamel on cast Hydrostone.

art; 2) what functions does the work acquire as a result, and 3) what is its role within both the aesthetic debate and the economic system. As a model, replacement, representative, substitute or even surrogate of artwork, the *Surrogate Paintings* are introduced into all these different positions in the commercial art world where they not only adopt these functions in a paradigmatic way but above all illuminate the context and once again thematize its demands on art.

Since 1982 the *Plaster Surrogates* have been supplementing the earlier *Surrogate Paintings*. Aside from the monochrome paintings, there have also been numerous pieces since the beginning of the eighties in which Allan McCollum divides frames, mounts and picture surfaces from each other through the use of color. While the inner surface remains completely black and thereby defies interpretation and associations, the artist has chosen various shades of chamois for the mats and brown, beige, gray, gold or red for the frames for a total of over one hundred color gradations. In combination with the twenty different formats ranging between 12 x 10 cm and 50 x 40 cm, the potential for variety is almost inexhaustible so that none of the *Surrogates* appear identical. Initially McCollum presented the works individually and at a distance from each other. However, since the *Plaster Surrogates* he has increased the number of pieces considerably so that every inch of the exhibition walls is sometimes covered with hundreds of adjacent *Surrogates*. Apart from this type of presentation, which is modeled on the

Allan McCollum. *Surrogate Paintings*, 1980/81. Installation: waiting area, Chase Manhattan Bank, New York, 1981.

classical art galleries of the 17th century, there are other possible forms of installation where the artist prescribes a strict arrangement of his *Surrogates* in one or more lines.

Offered in collections of between five and 480 objects, Allan McCollum has now sluiced his *Surrogate Paintings* into the art exchange by the thousands. The photograph in the lobby of the Paine Webber investment company in New York, which he has repeatedly chosen to reproduce for catalogues and articles, shows persuasively how a collection of five *Surrogate Paintings* has assumed the traditional role of an artwork here, now functioning as little more than a status symbol and decorative ornament over the couch. Unlike traditional paintings, the closed-off picture surfaces in McCollum's objects shift the focus of meaning to the outside. In this way they emphasize to their audience their predominantly functional role within a specific spatial and institutional context. Similar to these installations of his own pieces, Allan McCollum presents arrangements in the *Surrogates on Location* photographs as pseudo-documentary collections of source material. He has exclusively photographed scenes on television and in newspaper articles which have paintings bearing an amazing resemblance his own *Surrogates* in the background. These photos appear to lend support to his working concept in more than one respect and in an astonishing manner. In the selected scenes the

Allan McCollum. *Surrogates On Location*. Snapshot from television screen, 1982-84.

paintings depicted adopt precisely the same positions that Allan McCollum had also intended for his Surrogates. And just like the latter, these photographed paintings also defy any kind of interpretation due to their dark, closed-off picture surfaces. On the other hand this allows them to assume the function of a universal sign for paintings.

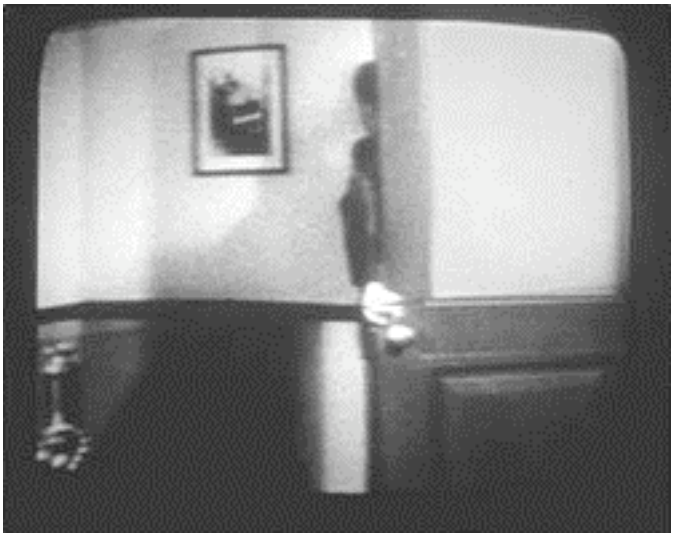
In this respect, the *Surrogates on Location* can be viewed as the artist's guide on how to perceive his own *Surrogate Paintings*—in that they depict paintings in the context of at least some of their social roles. In 1985 Allan McCollum explained his interest in these photographs at length: "There are almost always people in the photographs, because I'm interested in the painting presented as an art object in the background. Paintings are in the background of our lives anyway—perhaps less for us because we're involved in the arts—but their real place in the world is to be in the background functioning as a prop, or a token, and to remain secondary to the social behavior which gives them meaning. I'm interested in foregrounding the social behavior of making, buying and selling art, and of having art and looking at art. So there are lots of different strategies I have for reducing the art object. One of them is to place it in the background of the action."[4] Allan McCollum has never viewed the *Surrogates on Location* as an independent series of works and has therefore always exhibited them in conjunction with the *Plaster Surrogates*. As didactic material they illustrate his working concept by using apparent documentary photographic sources in varying forms of presentation at alternative display sites.

Allan McCollum. *Perpetual Photo* (No. 4), 1982/84. Silver gelatin print, unique.

The *Perpetual Photos*, developed directly from the *Surrogates on Location*, were first produced in 1982 but were not exhibited until two years later. They exist both as smaller prints in traditional photograph sizes, with or without mounts, as well as in larger formats, oriented to the size of paintings. Here too each work is unique. These black and white photographs have media pictures as their source, similar to the ones McCollum used for the *Surrogates on Location*. With the decisive difference however that the paintings reproduced in the

[4] Allan McCollum, interviewed by Gray Watson, in: *Artscribe,* Dec/Jan. 1985/86, p. 66.

so-called Source Photos still show sketchy traces of a pattern. Allan McCollum removes the models from their location at a scene of action and subsequently inserts them as framed pictures in a new exhibition context. These photographs deny the viewer information on their subject: it is only possible to guess whether the abstract constructs present landscapes or human figures. As with the *Surrogates,* this denial of content results in an inability to discover meaning in the pattern. Instead viewers of the *Perpetual Photo* are confronted with an object that needs to exist within its context of artistic, psychological, social or economic dependencies.



Allan McCollum. Source for *Perpetual Photo* (No. 4), 1982. Snapshot from TV.

Allan McCollum's photographs can also be defined as a complex game involving several dimensions of image and differing levels of perception. The original painting that was "alienated" into a media picture is at first photographed from the television screen or newspaper and subsequently enlarged out of the resultant Source Photo, framed like a picture and presented anew. A further photograph was taken of the exhibited work *Perpetual Photo* (No. 216 A) from 1982/89 to serve as a printer's copy for its reproduction in this catalogue. On each of these real and reproductive levels the *Perpetual Photo* is subjected to demands that define its function differently.

1985 saw the first works from the *Perfect Vehicles* series: broad bellied and tight-necked vases whose shape imitates traditional Chinese designs. Presented on pedestals in collections of five, nine, twenty-five or fifty figures, each set is distinguished from the others by its combination of colors. In addition to the small vases, measuring 48 cm in height, since 1988 Allan McCollum has also been making large-scale vases—cast in concrete and two meters in height. These are also presented individually, each in its own shade or color. In the same year he also began developing the ideas for his *Drawings*. Each of these framed drawings depicts a symmetrical black shape against a white background. They are drawn with soft-leaded pencil, in numerous layers and dense hatching so that

Allan McCollum. *Five Perfect Vehicles*, 1985. Acrylic on cast Hydrocal. 19" x 9" x 8 1/2" each.

they have acquired a somewhat relief-like surface. For these abstract creations the artist cut a total of several hundred stencils, using combinations of them for each drawing. Here too every *Drawing* is a unique creation, constituting just one of the innumerable possible variations.

With both these series of works Allan McCollum has continued to pursue his contextual analysis of art and applied his approach to sculpture and drawing as well. In an interview back in 1986, he had already characterized this complicated web of relationships between reality, its representation in artwork and his surrogate: "I try to make substitutes for all art objects: substitute paintings, substitute photographs with substitute images, and so forth. The solid-cast vases that I call *Perfect Vehicles* are substitute sculptures. An art object is in a way already a substitute for something else, so to make a substitute for a substitute is to foil its original function."[5]

During a conversation with Lynne Cooke in 1991, Allan McCollum restated his intention to produce surrogates for every artistic genre, simultaneously pointing out however that the concomitant growing affinity to industrial production processes was a central experience within his working concept: "So I began to deliberately produce a kind of Painting, a kind of Sculpture, a kind of Photograph, a kind of Drawing, and so on. And while I've been doing this, as you know, I've been trying also to include within the logic of each series the logic of what we might say to be the artwork's opposite, the mass-produced object."[6] This antithesis is realized most impressively in the *Individual Works* series which no longer constitutes the surrogate of an artistic genre, being modeled instead on so-called bibelots, small collector's items from the fields of craft and art. McCollum himself has always cited the Faberge eggs by way of illustration. This also distinguishes these pieces from the *Drawings,* which appear to be silhouettes of the

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[5] Daniela Salvioni: "McCollum and Koons" (Interview), in: *Flash Art,* Dec./Jan. 1986/87, p. 68.

[6] Allan McCollum: (Statement) , in: *Carnegie International 1991* (cat.), The Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, 1991, Vol. 1, p. 100.

Allan McCollum. *Drawings*, 1989-91. Pencil on museum board, each unique. Installation: Centre d' Art Contemporain, Geneva, Switzerland, 1993.

Allan McCollum. *Over Ten Thousand Individual Works* [detail], 1987/88. Enamel on cast Hydrocal. 2" diameter, lengths variable, each unique.

Individual Works projected on a surface, but are simultaneously substitutes for drawings.

The idea for the *Individual Works* originated in 1987. The two first collections of more than ten thousand similar aquamarine or salmon pink objects were completed during the following two years. There were more than 150 shapes available for the individual elements, with between five and eight being combined. The artist had cast the models from an extremely wide range of objects and containers, lids, capsules, screw threads and electrical switches. The *Individual Works* are always presented as complete ensembles on a long table. Unlike in the other series, Allan McCollum decided not to compose any smaller collections here or, as with the large *Perfect Vehicles* and *The Dog from Pompei*, to display items on their own. The contrast

between the single *Individual Work* and its position and significance within the mass context of the ten thousand items between its exclusivity as a unique piece of art and its perception as an industrially manufactured product—only becomes strikingly clear in this form of presentation.

Allan McCollum. *Over Ten Thousand Individual Works* [detail], 1987/88. Enamel on cast Hydrocal. 2" diameter, lengths variable, each unique.

More than any other artist of his generation, Allan McCollum has thematized these antitheses in his work, only to resolve them immediately in the actual operation of his studio. During the eighties his studio developed increasingly into a perfectly organized manufacturing site for artistic products, with McCollum adopting the conditions, rules and roles of business management: "As I continued to develop my ideas about mass production as a serious form of expression, and began to use the actual techniques of mass production in my studio instead of merely referring to them, I had to learn what people do when they run small factories and workshops. Beyond theory, philosophy and aesthetics, I also had to address some legal and ethical issues, to learn about occupational safety and health, unemployment and disability insurance, social security taxes and so on—like any other small businessman."[7]

The statutory social contributions had to be paid for the staff working in his studio and everyone received efficiency bonuses on top of their hourly wages. The staff all have their own fixed spheres of responsibility with new employees being engaged by placing ads in New York's daily newspapers. "The responsibilities have become very diffused in my studio, and sometimes you wouldn't realize I was the artist in charge," explains Allan McCollum, describing the working situation in his studio and his own role within this hierarchy: "A lot of the actual labor—making molds, casting, painting, packing, installing—is often done by contractors and assistants. For better or for worse, my role is often confined to that of a kind of manager or production engineer."[8] Here McCollum accepts the production conditions as they apply to both the manufacture of industrial mass goods and artistic work in his studio. He therefore draws the inevitable conclusion from his experiences: that the individual work of art is a product that has to compete on the market under the same economic conditions as all the oth-

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[7] Allan McCollum: (Statement), in: Wade Saunders: "Making Art, Making Artists," in: *Art in America*, January 1993, p. 94.

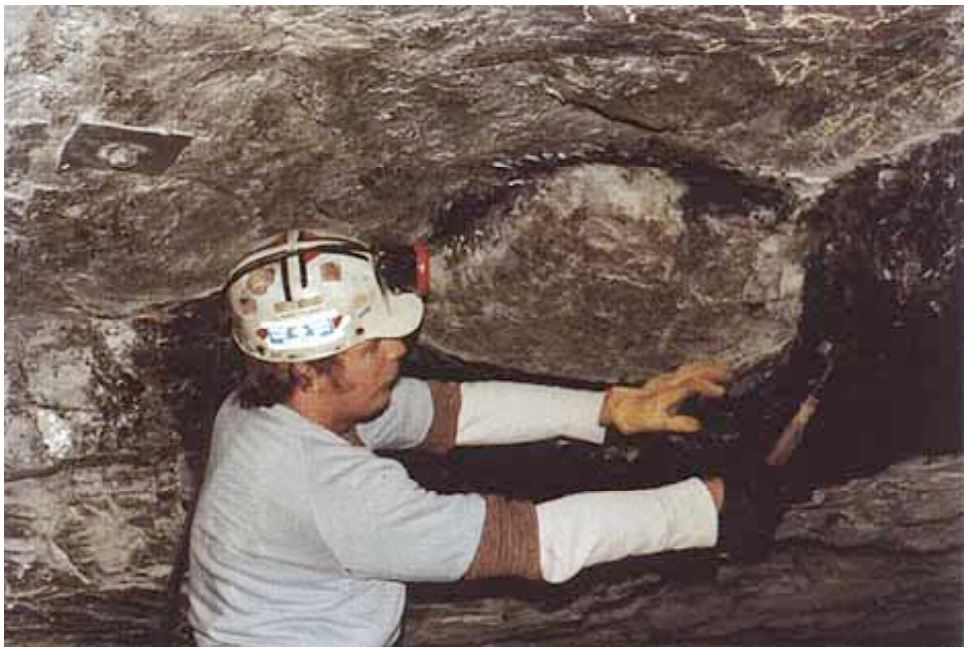
[8] Allan McCollum: (Statement), in: Wade Saunders: "Making Art, Making Artists," in: *Art in America*, January 1993, p. 94.

Allan McCollum. *Lost Objects*, 1991, during production in the artist's studio, in New York. Enamel on glass-fiber-reinforced concrete.

ers. Ultimately it is not only competing for customers with other artworks but also with all the other consumer goods.

With his three series *The Dog from Pompei*, *Lost Objects* and *Natural Copies from the Coal Mines of Central Utah*—all of which were begun during the 1990's—Allan McCollum's art has finally acquired a new quality. Whereas he began by designing surrogates of individual art genres—e.g. painting, sculpture or photography—and concentrated in each case on universally valid signs, the *Individual Works* and the subsequent *Drawings* of the late 1980's deal with manufacturing processes in artists' studios within a dialectical context spanning individual art and mass-produced articles. The three series displayed in this exhibition under the joint title of Natural Copies are surrogates, like all of the artist's other motifs. However, in this exhibition McCollum directs our attention at the aspect of art as an academic discipline, incorporating an additional experiential dimension in the process.

The casts of finds from the realms of archeology and natural history—*The Dog from Pompei*, the dinosaur bones and footprints—function here as surrogates for both the artistic works themselves and the debate on their evaluation. While their institutional function remains strikingly similar to that of works of art, the change of discipline generates the detachment needed for critical assessment. The most recent *Natural Copies from the Coal Mines of Central Utah* series provides the best illustration of how discrepant dimensions of representation



Excavating a naturally-formed Cretaceous duck-bill dinosaur track cast from the roof of a coal mine (photo from *Tracking Dinosaurs* by Martin Lockley, Cambridge University Press, 1991).

and perception can be integrated. These fossils satisfy needs in their owners—pleasure in collecting items, pride and prestige—in the same way as traditional works of art. They can be displayed, archived and catalogued. Exhibited in museums, galleries or private rooms, they are redefined each time by the changing institutional context. They become either aesthetic objects, items of cultural value, historical documents, commercial goods or private decorations—or all of these things at the same time.

The petrified dinosaur tracks were found by miners in the coal mines of Central Utah, most notably during the twenties and thirties. They kept the objects as souvenirs and curios, were shown proudly to friends and visitors and sometimes given away as gifts, while providing a sustained subject for discussion within the small community of Price. At the same time a parallel reception and veneration of the finds took place on another level at scientific conferences and in specialist magazines. In 1960, following the foundation of the College of Eastern Utah Prehistoric Museum, many of the owners donated or sold their possessions to the institute.

It was this unusual story about the dinosaur tracks from Utah that captured Allan McCollum's interest above all and led him to adopt them as the motif for his *Natural Copies* series. The events in the community of Price provide a perfect illustration of how people deal with specific objects for which they have no practical use. Collector's items like these become souvenirs and therefore metaphysi-

Allan McCollum, *Reprint*s. Information handouts available to the public during presentations of the *Natural Copies*.

cal value, while simultaneously performing a social function as instruments of communication. The foundation of the museum finally created the context and institutional framework through which the fossils can instill the community with a sense of cultural and historical identity. Allan McCollum has found another form of representation for the additional dimension of academic debate.

During the first presentation of *Natural Copies from the Coal Mines of Central Utah*—in the spring of 1995 in New York's John Weber Gallery—texts providing supplementary information on the origins of the tracks, their discovery and significance were laid out on a table and handed out by the artist to visitors. To this end he had collected a number of scientific and popular reports on the finds in Utah and copied stacks of them on colored paper: Allan McCollum underscored the exhibits' functions as surrogates by drawing out parallels with discussions on art. He did so by selecting those texts and headlines which contain concepts and categories comparable to those used in discussions on art. These include questions of authorship ("Identifying the Track-Maker") and issues like authenticity and imitation ("Dinosaur Tracks in the Field Laboratory: Artificial Casts, Molds and Replicas"), Chance ("Discovering Dinosaur Tracks by Sheer Luck") is a central element in both scientific and artistic work processes. And the description of a dinosaur track ("A Footprint as a History of Movement") could be equally well applied to Jackson Pollock's action painting. By also inserting a photograph—taken of his own Natural Copies in his studio—into one of the scientific broadsheets, Allan McCollum further refines a strategy that had already been implemented in the *Surrogates on Location*. Whereas the pseudo-documentary photographs showed the ostensible presence of his *Surrogates* in a wide spectrum of different places and behind well-known personalities, here he injects photos of his art as illuminating illustrations into the scientific debate. In the *Surrogates on Location* McCollum was fascinated by the original work which

Allan McCollum. *Natural Copies from the Coal Mines of Central Utah*, 1994-95. Enamel paint on cast polymer-enhanced Hydrocal. Natural dinosaur track cast replicas produced in collaboration with the College of Eastern Utah Prehistoric Museum, Price, Carbon County, Utah.

appeared like his own substitute. On this occasion it is the substitute to which he ascribes the position and function of his original.

Allan McCollum has always chosen motifs for his works that in some way represent values symbolizing man's cultural and social identity. With his works from the 1990's—*The Dog from Pompei*, *Lost Objects* and *Natural Copies from the Coal Mines of Central Utah*—his art has now acquired an extra, historical dimension. While *The Dog from Pompei* stands proxy for a highly civilized metropolitan culture from almost two thousand years ago—one that was extinguished by a natural catastrophe and yet simultaneously preserved as a moment in time—the dinosaur bones and footprints provide details of a long-perished world as it existed millions of years earlier.

Allan McCollum has also selected these motifs specifically because all three objects are themselves already substitutes of originals that no longer exist. The dinosaur bones, footprints and *The Dog from Pompei* are all the products of evolutionary or natural processes and castings. Nature therefore provides a kind of parallel for McCollum's reproduction techniques in his studio and consequently

legitimates his artistic activity. As no original exists, every casting of this copy simply produces an additional copy, without detracting from its authenticity or emotional expressiveness. The "original version" of the Pompeii dog is, like all the copies produced in his New York studio, simply a plaster cast.

For mass societies which manufacture the vast majority of products industrially and in large quantities—and which view this process as a stabilizing force symbolic of their democratic and egalitarian systems—anything original acquires special significance. It becomes a sign—and the exclusive property—of a controlling elite. The loss of originality had already been treated in the *Individual Works* series with its ten thousand objects. The Pompeii dog and dinosaur bones and tracks intensify these motifs of loss, absence and death, transforming them into an existential experience which is raised to central importance in the series shown in this exhibition: "Now, it is probably evident in my work that I suffer some preoccupation with absence and with death, and with how the objects we produce and the objects we collect work to defer our knowledge of death, displace our fears of it."[9]

All three series symbolize worlds that have perished. In the case of the dinosaur motifs, they relate to a world that can no longer be experienced, imagined or visualized. This chronological dimension finds its most radical formulation in the contrast inherent in the preserved footprints. By contrast, with *The Dog from Pompei*, it is possible to directly re-experience something of the civilization eradicated by the volcanic eruption of 79 AD. The contorted expression of death on the animal's agonized face and its cramped posture lend enduring expression to the catastrophe which unexpectedly ruptured the people's daily lives with devastating permanence. On the other hand, these three of McCollum's series intimate above all that the production of art and the desire to purchase art always constitute an attempt to deal with and overcome death in some way. With reference to the *Lost Objects*, Allan McCollum characterized his own artistic motivation as follows: "I think that making as many molds and casts as I've made has worked symbolically for me as a kind of attempt to master my own apprehensions about death and absence."[10]

Translated from the German by Mary Fran Gilbert & Keith Bartlett

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[9] Allan McCollum: (Statement), in: *Carnegie International 1991* (cat.), The Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, 1991, Vol. 1, p. 100.

[10] Allan McCollum: (Statement), in: *Carnegie International 1991* (cat.), The Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, 1991, Vol. 1, p. 100.