



Smithsonian American Art Museum

## **Art and Homage in 1960s New York**

Kathleen Merrill Campagnolo  
Postdoctoral Fellow  
Courtauld Institute of Art

A group of little-known early works by American artist Walter De Maria that encapsulate, in radically simplified form, critical ideas and strategies that shaped many of the developments in contemporary American art of the 1960s and '70s has been the focus of my doctoral research. Each of these works is a form of homage, making reference to influential cultural figures John Cage, Joseph Cornell, Marcel Duchamp, Andy Warhol, and La Monte Young, and documents a web of associations and friendships that map the transmission and development of radical strategies for art making from varied media including film, literature, music, painting, performance, and sculpture. At the Smithsonian I hope to expand the scope of my investigation of unconventional forms of portraiture and homage in 1960s American art, situating De Maria's pieces within a broader field of practice. I also wish to pursue several previously unpublished discoveries concerning specific works by Cornell and Duchamp, Duchamp and Rauschenberg, and Cornell and Warhol that are obliquely referenced in De Maria's sculptures.

Although De Maria is recognized as an important figure in American art, particularly in relation to minimal, conceptual, and land art, there is relatively little published about his oeuvre and there are no books or articles that address these early homage pieces. De Maria's early sculptures both offer insight into the development of his later practice and reflect changing artistic approaches within the broader cultural community. Among the strategies explored in these works are activating the viewer's role in the production of meaning, privileging conceptual content over image, minimizing evidence of the artist's subjectivity, and incorporating space and time as central elements in the work of art. As a group, De Maria's homage works also reflect an undercurrent of interest in portraiture and shifting models of artistic identity among avant-garde artists of the 1960s.