

Walter De Maria

Walter De Maria's final body of work, *Truck Trilogy* (completed posthumously according to the artist's plans), consists of three 1950s Chevrolet pickup trucks in red, black, and green that have been stripped of their extraneous elements. An oak platform on the bed of each truck supports a group of three vertical, stainless-steel, 8-foot-long rods, whose cross sections embody the shapes of a circle, square, and triangle respectively; the sequence of the rods is different in each truck. The series unites sculptural and conceptual considerations such as geometric shapes, vertical steel rods, and large-scale installations that the artist explored throughout his career.

The wood platforms in each of the trucks recall De Maria's early plywood constructions like *4' x 8' Box* (1961). Some of these plywood works later served as maquettes for the artist's early stainless-steel fabrications, several of which are on view with *4' x 8' Box* at Dia:Beacon. He began using steel in the form of highly polished, geometrically shaped rods in 1966, first for his 4-6-8 Series, which combines permutations of square, hexagonal, and octagonal upright rods. De Maria subsequently employed them in several of his most recognizable installations like *The Lightning Field* (1977) and *The Broken Kilometer* (1979), both commissioned and maintained by Dia Art Foundation. In *Bel Air Trilogy* (2000–11), the antecedent to *Truck Trilogy*, De Maria paired three 1955 Chevrolet Bel Air models with a single 12-foot-long circular, square, or triangular stainless-steel rod inserted through the front and back windshield of each of the vehicles.

The differing combinations of the circular, square, and triangular steel rods in *Truck Trilogy* reflects the artist's engagement with permutational mathematics, which is similarly explored in his *Silver Meters* (1976) and *Gold Meters* (1976–77). De Maria's related multipart works both include eight polished-stainless-steel, square-meter plates measuring one inch in height. Each plate contains one troy ounce of silver or gold in the form of solid cylindrical plugs that have been inserted flush to the plate's surface. Troy ounces are slightly heavier than standard ounces

and have been used for measuring precious metals, notably gold and silver, since medieval times. The plugs vary in depth according to their number and weight. The number of plugs that constitutes the troy ounce progressively increases from plate to plate by squaring the integers two through nine, so that the first plate in each series contains a total of four plugs (weighing 1/4 troy ounce each) and the last plate contains eighty-one plugs (at 1/81 troy ounce each).

The fact that each plate contains the same amount of gold or silver is not visually discernible, as the surface of the plugs all have the same circumference. Abstract methodologies based on order, sequence, and mensuration—the act of measuring geometric areas, lengths, magnitudes, and volumes—provide fundamental ways of regulating human experience. Yet, like the values attributed today to rare metals, they too are ultimately arbitrary.

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Walter De Maria was born in 1935 in Albany, California; he moved in 1960 to New York City, where he lived and worked until his death in 2013. De Maria founded a gallery with Robert Whitman in 1963 at 9 Great Jones Street, where he exhibited small-scale, interactive sculptures later that year. After his first solo exhibition at a commercial gallery in 1965, De Maria's work was included in early surveys of Minimal art, including the 1966 *Primary Structures* exhibition at the Jewish Museum, New York. De Maria began making large-scale, site-specific Land art in the American West in 1968. His works *Mile Long Drawing* (1968) and *The Lightning Field* (1977) exemplify a career-long exploration of the relationship between art and the natural environment as well as an interest in geometry, mathematics, and principles of measurement. De Maria's work has been featured in numerous international shows at venues including the Kunsthhaus Zürich (1999), Museum für Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt (1991), Staatsgalerie Stuttgart (1987), and Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam (1984). Dia maintains De Maria's *The Lightning Field* in western New Mexico, *The New York Earth Room* (1977) and *The Broken Kilometer* (1979) in New York, and *The Vertical Earth Kilometer* (1977) in Kassel, Germany.

1. *Silver Meters*, 1976
Stainless steel and silver; 8 units
Dia Art Foundation

2. *Gold Meters*, 1976–77
Stainless steel and gold; 8 units
Dia Art Foundation

3. *Green Truck: Circle, Square, Triangle*,
2011–17
1955 Chevrolet truck with polished,
stainless-steel rods
Courtesy Gagosian Gallery

4. *Red Truck: Square, Triangle, Circle*,
2011–17
1955 Chevrolet truck with polished,
stainless-steel rods
Courtesy Gagosian Gallery

5. *Black Truck: Triangle, Circle, Square*,
2011–17
1950 Chevrolet truck with polished,
stainless-steel rods
Courtesy Gagosian Gallery

