

# Imi Knoebel

*Raum 19 (Room 19, 1968)*, a key work in Imi Knoebel's oeuvre, was created while he was still a *Meisterschüler* (master student) under Joseph Beuys. The work, which takes its title from the room number of his studio at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, explores the fundamentals of painting and sculpture. Common constituents and components of artistic practice—stretchers, picture frames, variously scaled planar surfaces, and simple sculptural volumes—are reduced to the rudiments of form, material, space, support, and surface. Each of the work's seventy-seven elements is fabricated from wood and fiberboard in a "raw," untreated state. Knoebel's use of these ordinary, practical, and humble building materials manifests his belief that the artist's practice is as pragmatic as that of a farm laborer, an urban worker, or an architect.

*Room 19* can be variously arranged, depending on the context—the gallery space and the artist's impulses. Since no fixed set of relationships binds the components, the work can expand to an environmental scale; alternatively, it may be densely compacted as it would be in storage. Because the ensemble is permutable and its particular configuration, dimensions, and internal relations are dependent on the artist's decisions in situ, form becomes an event: chaotic or ordered, impenetrable or lucid, austere or abundant, confined or boundless. And, since any single installation is only ever one among countless possible compositions in this open system, emphasis shifts to presentation per se, to staging.

Knoebel's preoccupation with questions of presentation and installation betrays a considerable debt to Beuys. Not only were the older artist's performances—his "actions"—undertaken in relation to the specifics of a situation, but his larger sculptural works, such as *Arena—dove sarei arrivato se fossi stato intelligente!* (*Arena—where would I have got if I had been intelligent!*, 1970–72), in Dia's collection, were also adapted to the context in which they were shown. However, Knoebel in large part eschewed Beuys's ideology. Works such as *Room 19* carry no metaphysical meaning beyond their pure physicality. Purging his materials of all

metaphor and allusion, Knoebel focuses instead on a strictly pragmatic investigation and revision of the formal properties, syntax, and protocols of the exhibition space.

# Imi Knoebel

Imi Knoebel was born in Dessau, Germany, in 1940. He was a student of Joseph Beuys at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf from 1964 to 1971. His first exhibition, *IMI + IMI*, with fellow student Imi Giese was held in Copenhagen in 1968. Knoebel has since exhibited his works at Sonsbeek (1971) in Arnhem, the Netherlands, and at Documenta (1972, 1977, 1982, and 1987) in Kassel, Germany. In 1987 Knoebel oversaw an installation of his own work, as well as those of Beuys and Blinky Palermo, for the inaugural exhibitions at Dia's galleries on West 22nd Street in New York City. A 1996–97 retrospective of his work traveled throughout Europe, including such venues as Haus der Kunst in Munich, Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, and Institut Valencià d'Art Modern in Spain. Two related exhibitions of Knoebel's work were held in 2009 at the Neue Nationalgalerie and the Deutsche Guggenheim, both in Berlin, and in 2011 the artist's monumental windows for the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Reims, France, were consecrated. He lives and works in Düsseldorf.

*Raum 19 (Room 19)*, 1968  
Fiberboard and wood  
Dia Art Foundation

