

The Museum of Modern Art

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PROJECTS: MICHAEL CRAIG-MARTIN

March 9 - April 23, 1991

Three mural-size drawings executed in architectural drafting tape by British artist Michael Craig-Martin are on view in The Museum of Modern Art's PROJECTS series from March 9 through April 23, 1991. Although Craig-Martin has for nearly two decades been influential in England, where he has had a distinguished career as a teacher, his work is largely unknown in this country. Organized by Robert Evrén, curatorial assistant, Department of Drawings, **PROJECTS: MICHAEL CRAIG-MARTIN** is the artist's first museum exhibition in the United States.

For this installation, Craig-Martin has developed a single composition into a three-part wall drawing consisting of one long, frieze-like rendering and two smaller ones on flanking walls. On the right wall, a flat, "transparent" drawing superimposes a book, drawer, globe, light bulb, and table. On the left wall, certain lines have been suppressed from the drawing so that the objects take on volume and appear to intersect. On the center wall, the composition is repeated with subtle variations, so that different objects appear to emerge or recede, exchanging places with one another as in a musical "round."

At first glance, this austere rendering of mundane, man-made objects appears to blend Minimalism and Pop art, recalling work by such artists as Jasper Johns, Sol LeWitt, and James Rosenquist. Unlike the mass-media

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transformations of Pop art, however, Craig-Martin draws all of his objects from life, "picturing" them in the classic tradition of still life. The installation itself is conceived in "classical" terms, much like the configuration of a fresco in a Renaissance refectory. By depicting the objects as pure scheme, he reduces them to a pristine, Platonic ideal. His choice of objects, too--a book, a light bulb, a globe--conjures up erudite associations of reading or scholarly pursuits.

Trained in America in the Conceptual spirit of the late sixties, Craig-Martin switched in 1975 to imagery and made the first of what now number more than 200 wall drawings of such objects as shoes, ladders, books, hammers, and tables, no more than two dozen of which have been executed on a large scale. His Conceptual orientation is revealed by the process of installing his work. He makes an original drawing on plastic film, projects it onto the walls of the gallery, and then traces it in drafting tape, transposing a strictly preordained scheme to the wall. Yet, his way of arriving at a composition is intuitive. For example, there is a sustained contrast between open and closed forms and circular and rectilinear ones, an effect that is achieved by bringing out a feeling of balance suggested by the objects.

Mr. Evrén writes in the brochure accompanying the exhibition that, in Craig-Martin's installation, the gallery walls function "like a magic cinematic screen, one that allows him to externalize a quiet passion for the look of things blown up to a grand scale and stripped of incidental detail. In the end, when completed by the viewer, Craig-Martin's work must also undergo a change, from image into music, ephemeral decor into philosophy, room into theater on whose stage he enacts for our pleasure a lucid dance of art and the mind."

Born in 1944 in Dublin, Ireland, Michael Craig-Martin received his B.A. (1963) and M.F.A. (1966) degrees from Yale University, where his classmates included Brice Marden, Jennifer Bartlett, and Chuck Close. He left the United States soon afterward to accept a position at the Bath Academy of Art, Corsham, later teaching at Cambridge University, the Canterbury College of Art, and Goldsmiths College School of Art, London. In 1972 his work was included in the Hayward Gallery's seminal exhibition, THE NEW BRITISH ART. More recently, Craig-Martin has had individual exhibitions in London at the Whitechapel Art Gallery (1989) and the Waddington Galleries (1985). An exhibition of his recent wall drawings and paintings is on view at the David Nolan Gallery in New York from March 12 through April 6.

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