

ARTFORUM

Robert Morris

HUNTER COLLEGE/TIMES SQUARE GALLERY

October 9–November 21, 2009



Robert Morris, *Site*, 1964/1993, still from a color film in 16 mm, 18 minutes 45 seconds.

Robert Morris's *Site*, 1964, originated as a dance piece performed with Carolee Schneemann. Dressed in white workman's clothes and a papier-mâché mask, Morris moved two eight-by-four-foot plywood sheets to reveal a tableau of Schneemann powdered white and posed as Manet's *Olympia*, 1863. Morris then performed a sort of minuet with the plywood, flipping a sheet over his back and lofting it into the air, before again blocking Schneemann from view. Stan VanDerBeek later filmed *Site* and included it in *Aspen's* 1967 double issue, on the same 8-mm reel as Hans Richter's Constructivist animation *Rhythm 21*, 1921. The two are curiously alike. On film, the sheets seem to lack texture or depth; while Morris deftly tilts and shifts them, they resemble nothing so much as Richter's floating rectangles.

I describe *Site* in such detail because it's conspicuously missing from this engrossing and worthwhile survey of Robert Morris's film and video. Its replacement, a recording by Babette Mangolte from a 1993 reenactment of *Site*, lacks the nuances that make the earlier film so compelling *as a film*. Any exhibition attempting to cover the arc of Morris's career must reckon with his protean restlessness, either by sorting the diverse strains of his work—variously associated with Minimalism, Fluxus, and Conceptual art—or by identifying a common thread. For the latter attempt, *Site* may prove the absent cipher. On film, the plywood sheets appear as sheer optical presence, except when contact with Morris's body reasserts their blunt materiality. In *Mirror*, *Slow Motion*, and *Wisconsin*, all 1969, Morris uses the camera to tease out this same play from other thin rectangular objects, like mirrors and glass doors. As different bodies manipulate and move them, these sheets read alternately as frames and as screens. That some of Morris's subjects sport tan lines and Tom Selleck mustaches could be chalked up to the machismo with which he is sometimes charged, but it also underscores a fundamental tension: However austere it first seems, Morris's work is intended for an emphatically fleshy here and now.

— Colby Chamberlain