

✱ FUNDACIÓN JUMEX ARTE CONTEMPORÁNEO

MUSEO JUMEX

FUNDACIÓN JUMEX AND MOMA PS1 COLLABORATE ON COMPREHENSIVE
RETROSPECTIVE OF JAMES LEE BYARS

JAMES LEE BYARS: ½ AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

NOVEMBER 19, 2013–APRIL 20, 2014
MUSEO JUMEX, MEXICO CITY

JUNE 15, 2014–SEPTEMBER 7, 2014
MOMA PS1, NEW YORK

Fundación Jumex Arte Contemporáneo and MoMA PS1 present the most comprehensive survey of James Lee Byars organized in North America since the artist's death in 1997, and the first solo exhibition in Mexico of this American artist. *James Lee Byars: ½ an Autobiography* is one of the two inaugural exhibitions organized by Fundación Jumex Arte Contemporáneo for its new Museo Jumex, opening this weekend in Mexico City. After being shown in Mexico, the exhibition will travel to the United States to be presented at MoMA PS1, in Summer 2014.

When he was thirty-seven years old—then half an average lifespan—James Lee Byars (Detroit, 1932—Cairo, 1997) wrote his “½ autobiography.” Sitting in a gallery, he jotted down thoughts and questions every time a visitor approached him, and published them afterwards in a book he also titled “the big sample of Byars.” Throughout his life, Byars constructed a myth around his persona, styling himself into a continuous performance that helped make him one of the most provocative and mythical figures in the art of the latter half of the twentieth century.

The exhibition features a selection of sculptures, fabric costumes, performable paper pieces, film, ink paintings, correspondence, ephemera, live performance, and documentation that focuses on the *event* of Byars's work. With works drawn from the artist's estate, as well as private and public collections internationally—including numerous pieces from The Museum of Modern Art, the Getty Research Institute, the Berkeley Art and Pacific Film Archive, Kunstmuseum Bern and De Appel arts center, amongst others—the exhibition engages with the absence of Byars himself, and more generally highlights the inherently incomplete summary that a retrospective offers of an artist's life.

Obsessed by the idea of perfection, Byars produced a remarkable body of work that strove to give form to his search for beauty and truth. Pursuing what he called “the first totally interrogative philosophy,” he made and proposed art at scales ranging from the vastness of outer space to the microscopic level of subatomic particles, attempting to delineate the limits of our knowledge while enacting a desire for something more.

After studying art and philosophy, Byars moved to Kyoto in 1958, where he spent much of the following decade. Influenced by aspects of Japanese Noh theater and Shinto rituals, Byars created and performed folded paper works at sites including Japanese temples and New York galleries, and made fabric pieces that served as costumes to join together two or more people in public performances. Throughout his career, he also produced a large quantity of printed books, ephemera and correspondence that he distributed widely among friends and acquaintances. Dispersed across a wide geography, they attest to Byars's desire to be present—however fleetingly—in different places and times.

Byars lived and worked itinerantly, moving between New York, Venice, San Francisco, Kyoto, Bern, the Swiss Alps, Los Angeles and the American southwest, eventually choosing to die in Cairo. Posing his art confoundingly between apparent contradictions—the monumental and the miniscule, the universal and the personal, the luxurious and the minimal, the relic and the event, the spectacular and the invisible—Byars heightens the viewing experience. In the aesthetic interrogations he provokes, he suggests that perfection may occur not simply at the most evanescent edges of form, but also in the attenuated moments of attention spent trying to discern it. A question, Byars remarked, is “the best statement of reality that I know.”

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James Lee Byars: *½ an Autobiography* is co-organized by *Fundación Jumex Arte Contemporáneo* and *MoMA PS1*.

The exhibition is curated by *Magalí Arriola*, Curator, *Fundación Jumex Arte Contemporáneo*; and *Peter Eleey*, Curator and Associate Director of Exhibitions and Programs, *MoMA PS1*.

PUBLICATION

The show will be accompanied by a bilingual publication that will be published in two volumes. The first volume, a source book of images and previously unpublished interviews with the artist, will be issued during the exhibition's run at Museo Jumex. The second volume will be released in Summer 2014, and will include essays by the exhibition curators, as well as new scholarship on Byars's performance works, his fabric pieces and his early years in Japan.

ABOUT THE CURATORS

Magalí Arriola is Curator at Fundación Jumex. Previously, she was Chief Curator at the Museo Tamayo de Arte Contemporáneo (2009–2011) and the Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil (1997–2000).

Peter Eleey is Curator and Associate Director of Exhibitions and Programs, MoMA PS1. Before joining MoMA PS1, he served as Visual Arts Curator at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2007–2010) and Curator and Producer at Creative Time, New York (2002–2007).

PRESS CONTACT

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HOURS

Museo Jumex
Tuesday–Friday: 11:00 am to 8:00 pm
Saturday: 10:00 am to 8:00 pm
Sunday: 10:00am to 7:00 pm

ADMISSION

Adults: \$30 MXN
Students & teachers (with current ID) \$15 MXN
Seniors and children (15 and under) Free

LOCATION

Museo Jumex
Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra 303
Col. Ampliación Granada
11529, México City

MUSEO JUMEX

Museo Jumex is the main platform and exhibition space of the Fundación and Colección Jumex. The building, designed by British architect David Chipperfield, was conceived as a unique space to promote discovery and critical thought about contemporary art. The museum's innovative programming seeks to engage with and explore the questions and paradigms of our time.

MOMA PS1

MoMA PS1 is one of the largest and oldest organizations in the United States devoted to contemporary art. Established in 1976 by Alanna Heiss, MoMA PS1 originated from The Institute for Art and Urban Resources, a not-for-profit organization founded five years prior with the mission of turning abandoned, underutilized buildings in New York City into artist studios and exhibition spaces. P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, as it then was known, became an affiliate of The Museum of Modern Art in 2000.