



Martin Beck, “Presentation”

Until Sun Nov 18

[47 Canal](#)

47 Canal St, New York

Exhibitions

Installation

Time Out says

Mon Nov 12 2012

Martin Beck’s Conceptual installations, which integrate archival material with display fixtures and sculptural objects, delve into how aesthetic and ideological developments in graphic design and architecture reflect changes in society at large. Some of his recent work, for example, has examined the 1970 International Design Conference in Aspen, Colorado, an annual gathering sponsored by such corporations as IBM and Alcoa. That year, the event’s suave, liberal organizers clashed with fractious, left-leaning attendees—including the activist art collective Ant Farm and philosopher Jean Baudrillard—who called for a less industry-focused and more socially and environmentally aware approach to the applied arts.

The artist’s current show looks at the same historical period, though in a more allusive and open-ended way. In the gallery’s front room are three works: a photograph of the moon, taken by the artist; a wall graphic, featuring driving directions from Haight-Ashbury to the site of the legendary ’60s commune Drop City; and a fabric wall treatment made up of pieces of white canvas sewn together in a pattern of interlocking polygonal shapes that conflates art and interior design. In the back room is a suite of prints depicting, among other things, a sign outside Drop City forbidding photographs, as well as an image from the first moon landing.

By the end of the 1970s, the counterculture’s language of emancipation and self-actualization had been co-opted by advertisers, to transform a restive country into a nation of consumers. Here, Beck reprises a moment just prior, to meditate on the issues of freedom and control, and resistance and collaboration, and the interconnections among art, design, society and capital.

—Anne Doran

Art in America

Long Way Home: Martin Beck at 47 Canal

by [aimee walleston](#) 11/14/12

With "Presentation," New York-based Austrian artist Martin Beck's first show at 47 Canal [through Nov. 18], the artist re-imagines the mid-century commune. "All these archival commune images are of barely clothed younger people in nature —I mean, what's not to like?" laughed Beck. "But for this project, I wanted to leave the images out of it, and construct an image that doesn't use that archival material." The artist uses the Drop City commune, which formed in Colorado in 1965 and dissolved in the early '70s, to consider the structural arrangements of planned communities.

The largest work in this tightly composed show, *Directions* (2010), consists of vinyl wall text listing the driving directions from the intersection of Haight Ashbury, in San Francisco, to the now-defunct headquarters of Drop City in Colorado. "The directions are what you would get if you compounded the results from a number of different sites—Google, Mapquest, and so on," Beck told *A.i.A.* "These directions are waypoints, the places where you have to change direction. I'm giving readers a scaffold to create their own stories. It's a much more structural way to think about the journey."

Drop City is perhaps best known for images of its geodesic tent structures constructed with brightly-colored panels, which were both artworks ("droppings," in the parlance of the commune) and residences. Today these structures are now removed, and the grounds have been partially taken over by a truck repair shop. Beck reinterprets the structures with a wall piece, *rumors and murmurs (polygon)*, 2012, comprising white fabric stitched together in geometric patterns that mimic the tents. "It's a polygon structure based on a geometry with no rules —the most anarchic form of geometry," explained Beck. "Dome building is a very rigid form. The structures [at Drop City] were essentially buildings that do not have the patience for geometry." The work is almost invisible on the wall.

Inside the gallery's office, drawings, screen prints and woodcuts invoke the artist's extensive research for this project. "When you assemble a collection of materials, it becomes an archive," said Beck. "But I didn't want to treat it as an archive—no vitrines." Instead, the artist chose pictures from various books on commune living—including books on cooking, astrology and agriculture—and reconfigured and reinterpreted their imagery. "I started to literally tear out pages. As I clipped them together, they became almost like other books." The untitled resulting work (2012) comprises eight book pages stacked together and pinned to a wall, with each page depicting an iconic element of commune living, including a diagram of love relationships, a page stamped "Altamont Library," and an image of chickens.

Another piece of the artist's puzzle is found in a large image of the moon, *We dismantle abandoned bridges...* (2012). The artist shot the beatific image in California, and its bright, intensely detailed focus on the moon's surface is a suitable counterpoint to the idealism woven throughout the show. "I kept coming across this notion of fantasy," said Beck. "The moon functions as a projection surface, and holds this utopic idea of colonizing a blank slate. And the communes [were constructed at the same time] the Apollo missions." Using our planet's satellite as a metaphor for transcendental union, Beck illuminates the eternal human imperative toward connection, in this world or beyond.