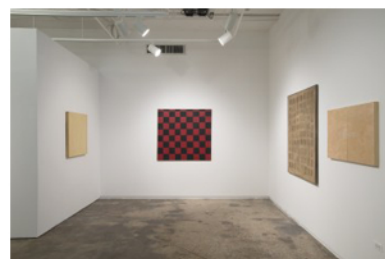


# To the Ivory Towers! Robert Barry at Hunter



Installation view of 'Robert Barry: All the things I know...1962 to the present' with *Marcuse Piece* (1970) and *Untitled Performance Piece* (1972-present) at the 205 Hudson Street. PHOTO BY BILL ORCUTT/HUNTER



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Robert Barry, *Invitation Piece*, 1972-73, for which galleries sent out invitations for shows by the artist at other galleries.

By Andrew Russeth

For a few years around 1970, Robert Barry was the most far-out artist in the game. he was popping off one canny idea after another, finding new ways to make art without objects, redrawing the accepted boundaries. In 1968 he used electromagnetic waves to create a sculpture that was invisible (save for the electromagnetic waves to create a sculpture since those waves were flying out into outer space. The next year he released containers of noble gases into the atmosphere, transmitted an artwork via telepathy (so he said), and shuttered galleries for the duration of his shows. And in 1970 he produced *Marcuse Piece*, one of the most beautiful artworks I know, which is simply a wall text that reads, "A place to which we can come and for a while 'be free to think about what we are going to do.'" It demarcates a space, rendering it almost sacred.

A tightly organized survey of the artist, "Robert Barry: All the things I know...1962 to the present," on view at Hunter College's 205 Hudson Street Gallery in Tribeca through April 4, 2015, does a superb job of telling his strange, thrilling story. Entering from Canal Street, you could be forgiven for thinking that you've happened into the wrong place. The gallery looks almost empty. Stroll around, though, and you will begin encountering artworks, like this text, written in faint graphite on the walls of one gallery in capital letters: "All the things I know but of which I am not at the moment thinking--1:36 p.m. June 15, 1969." That is one hell of an artwork: just about everything and, well, nothing really. As in a lot of great conceptual art, there is a stoner quality in Barry's work that can be read both as profound and very funny. Here's another great one from 1969, typed in the show on a sheet of paper: "Something I was once conscious of, but have now forgotten."

All of the classis are here--the transmitter, those wall pieces, a live performance (single words spoken into a microphone every 30 seconds reverberate in the gallery), and exhibition mailings and other ephemera, which fill vitrines and promise to delight aficionados of the period. There are also some more recent pieces--installations Barry has made by affixing vinyl words to walls and glass ("MEANING," "BEYOND," and "REASON" appear among others in one on view at the Montclair Art Museum through December 27), and others painted on canvas. They feel ponderous, or maybe just navel-gazing. After reaching a remarkable zero point, it feels like Barry stalled.

Thankfully, there are also intriguing early works--spare abstract paintings that Barry made in the early to mid '60s, one a checkerboard of red and black squares, the other four separate beige squares arrayed so as to form the four corners of a square on a wall. In a new interview in the catalogue, the artist, thinking back to this period, explains to Max Weintraub (who curated the show with Sarah Watson and Annie Wischmeyer), "It just dawned on me that the space around the painting was interesting." Following that line of thought to extreme conclusions, he made some of the postwar period's most audacious art.

BARBARA

KRAKOW GALLERY