

## *There's a Sculpture on My Shoulder:* Bruce McLean and the Anxiety of Influence

Jo Applin

*Art is the only serious thing in the world and the only person who is not serious is the artist.*

Oscar Wilde

PEOPLE WHO MAKE ART IN GLASS HOUSES IS THE TITLE OF A photographic work made by Bruce McLean in 1969, in which the young artist stands in the proverbial glasshouse (fig. 1). The panes are broken not by stones, but by the protruding remnants of one of McLean's early abstract sculptures made in 1964 while he was a student at St. Martin's School of Art in London. There McLean was taught by a number of "New Generation" sculptors including Anthony Caro, William Tucker, and Phillip King. This photograph spells out the terms in which McLean's generation perceived their relationship to their modernist predecessors. The photograph was published in *Studio International* alongside a review McLean wrote in 1970 of the exhibition *British Sculpture Out of the Sixties*, in which he lambasted the contemporary scene for remaining subservient to a modernist vocabulary that had become tired and out of date.<sup>1</sup> In his polemical attack on the current state of sculpture McLean declared that the legacy offered by the New Generation sculptors would no longer do. What had seemed a "major breakthrough" in 1960, he wrote, now seemed anything but. "Why don't they take a few chances," McLean suggested, "smash up the little scenes they've carefully built up like a military operation for themselves over the last five years and have a go at setting towards making or doing something worthwhile?"<sup>2</sup> Retreading old ground, for McLean, was no longer an option. Anthony Caro, he grudgingly admitted, was the only person making anything that was remotely interesting—the rest, he claimed, should be "slung out."<sup>3</sup>

In a similarly provocative performance work *There's a Sculpture on My Shoulder*, which took place in 1971 at Situations in London, a series of well-known large-scale New Generation works were projected onto the wall behind McLean, as he knelt on his hands and knees. With each change of image, McLean crumpled and staggered, as if under the weight of the sculpture, wittily illustrating the extent to which his predecessors' works were an oppressive weight to bear. The antimonumental impulse of the current genera-

**Figure 1**

Bruce McLean (Scottish, b. 1944), *People Who Make Art in Glass Houses*, 1969. In *Studio International* 180, no. 926 (1970). © Bruce McLean. Photo: Dirk Buwalda. Photo courtesy of the artist



tion of young artists such as Barry Flanagan, Gilbert and George, and McLean was a million miles from the grandiose solidity of, for example, Anthony Caro's *Early One Morning* from 1962 (fig. 2). It was, in McLean's opinion, "time for a re-think. Or a think."<sup>4</sup>

These two works by McLean bracket neatly the issues I want to raise regarding a small number of photographs and films that he made between 1969 and 1971, in which McLean engaged with, and challenged, an Oedipal scenario of artistic inheritance and rejection that literary critic Harold Bloom has famously dubbed the "anxiety of influence."<sup>5</sup> I want to pursue the idea of an artist's complex and self-conscious engagement with the idea of influence, and to ask what the exchange, incorporation, and rejection of another artist's work might entail, specifically, in McLean's case, the work of the British sculptor Henry Moore. Interestingly, McLean was not the only artist then carving out his artistic identity by referring to the work of Moore. Between 1966 and 1967, the young American artist Bruce Nauman had also produced a number of works that paid homage to Moore's work, and that highlighted the difficulty of working after Moore, suggesting through a number of sketches, sculptures, drawings, and photographs that the figure of Henry Moore should be "bound up" and stored for the future when he might once again become useful to younger artists—the implicit suggestion being that he served no current purpose.<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 2**

Anthony Caro (British, b. 1924), *Early One Morning*, 1962. Painted steel and aluminum, 289.6 × 619.8 × 335.3 cm (114 × 244 × 132 in.). London, Tate, T00805. © Barford Sculptures/Anthony Caro. Photo © Tate, London, 2010



McLean's series of homages to Moore were, like Nauman's, marked by ambivalence and humour. In one series of photographic works from 1969, McLean presents his own take on Moore's *Fallen Warrior* motif, for which he hurled himself at a concrete "plinth" on the banks of the Thames, wearing a tin helmet and Doc Marten boots (fig. 3). In another photographically recorded performance, *Poses for Plinth*, in 1971 at Situations, McLean once again recon-

**Figure 3**

Bruce McLean (Scottish, b. 1944), *Fallen Warrior*, 1969. Black-and-white photograph, 93 × 62.5 cm (36<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 24<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.). Barnes Riverside. © Bruce McLean. Photo: Dick Buwalda. Photo courtesy of the artist



ceived Moore's humanist rendering of the body atop a plinth, this time destabilized and subject to inevitable failure, as McLean tumbled and wobbled on the plinth, yielding to gravity and falling to the floor, the preferred base for abstract sculpture in the hands of the postwar generation of sculptors, including of course Caro, a one-time assistant to Moore.<sup>7</sup> For McLean's generation, Caro functioned as mediator between the old and the new, for just as Caro had rejected the lessons learnt from Moore, so his students in turn attempted to break away from Caro's own large-scale welded metal sculpture.

Alongside the more obvious engagement with the work of Moore, what follows outlines another kind of generational dialogue that took place between McLean and the American artists Robert Morris and Walter De Maria in 1970. The year before, all three had been included in Harald Szeemann's international conceptual art show "When Attitudes Become Form." While McLean's early relationship to Moore and, to an extent, Caro could be broadly described in terms of patrilineal revolt, the nature of his relationship to Morris and de Maria operates along a different axis, coming closer to psychoanalyst Juliet Mitchell's description of the various "peer-group alliances" that are identifiable if, as Mitchell puts it, we "look sideways" to the more oblique, lateral relations and exchanges that occur between peers and siblings rather than fathers and sons.<sup>8</sup>

Between 1963 and 1966 McLean attended the advanced sculpture course at St. Martin's School of Art. Frank Martin, head of the sculpture department at St. Martin's, had established the course during the late fifties, as a way of bypassing the regulations for assessment imposed by the National Diploma in Design, which examined students only on figurative work. As the course was not officially recognized, it remained "vocational" and independent to a degree from the strictures governing the rest of the school's departments. Students signing up for the course were explicitly encouraged to "break new ground" and to work in an abstract idiom with unconventional materials.<sup>9</sup> McLean and his classmates were encouraged to work in an abstract visual language by tutors such as King, Tucker, and particularly Caro, whose own large-scale modernist sculpture was directly influenced by the American abstraction that was then being heralded by Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried, with Fried in particular championing the work of Caro in America.

During his second year at art school McLean had worked as a fabricator for Tucker, although his own early experiments with the strict formal vocabulary of sculpture being taught at St. Martin's were marked by disillusionment and a desire to break away from its rules. Although McLean was initially unsure what direction his work should take, that it would differ radically from the American model of abstract formalism quickly became evident to him: at the end of his first term King and Tucker kindly asked him whether art school was the best choice for him, suggesting that he should "go home and consider the situation."<sup>10</sup> McLean did not leave, but returned for his second term, and throughout the next year he produced a number of large coloured works that engaged in an explicit dialogue with the work of the New Generation.

McLean's earliest sculptures make clear the extent to which he was working through the formal precepts of Phillip King in particular, although he was soon to abandon such works, since for McLean and his fellow classmates (who included Richard Long, Barry Flanagan, Roelof Louw, Braco Dimitrijević, Jan Dibbets, and Gilbert and George), the radical reconception of sculpture that Caro's generation had engineered was already by the mid-sixties an outdated

orthodoxy—it had gone from what Joy Sleeman has called a “productive conversation” to a “frozen bit of dialogue.”<sup>11</sup> McLean later complained how the St. Martin’s sculpture forum would “avoid every broader issue, discussing for hours the position of one piece of metal in relation to another: twelve adult men with pipes would walk for hours around sculpture and mumble.”<sup>12</sup> He later admitted that his rejection of that model of formalism was hard-won, saying “at St. Martin’s I was stumbling, I was struggling hard: all you could do was to emulate things that you liked. I knew I hadn’t got a direction.”<sup>13</sup>

In his review of “British Sculpture out of the Sixties,” McLean railed against the tired, false posturing of the New Generation and, worse, the work of the generation of young artists who continued to thoughtlessly rehash the formal tenets of the New Generation. McLean mockingly refers to the familiar formats of the “Put-a-sculpture-on-the-floor-piece,” or the “Paint-a-sculpture-piece,” and also the “take-that-sculpture-off-that-base-and-don’t-ask-questions-piece.”<sup>14</sup> Although he rejected the modernist model offered by his tutor Caro, in his review McLean did not group Caro in with the others, but recognized the inventive aspect of his work, claiming that Caro’s work demonstrated elements of original thinking. Caro, McLean complained, was the only person in the show who had “a touch of the crimble crumbles,” his term for the “sort of ease, style that some people have, cultivate a bit because they know they’ve got it, work on it; it has something to do with ‘craft tricks,’ then perpetuating the tricks, never quite letting them become completely boring.”<sup>15</sup>

McLean’s “re-thinking” of precisely what a sculpture could be began in earnest between 1965 and 1967, during which time he made a series of ephemeral, cheap sculptural interventions that seemed to be the exact opposite of all that he had been taught at art school. While at first glance it seems that the “direction” he felt he was lacking during these formative years is very much in evidence, his diverse works at this time, which ranged from photography and film to sculpture, performance and land art, are in fact united in their attempt to explore and challenge the material status of the object. Stacking, piling, propping, and placing replaced the formal stringencies of the large-scale welded metal object. McLean’s street sculptures were made from pieces of linoleum, hardboard, wood, and concrete that he would precariously prop and balance against each other, the pavement, and the wall. Writing about McLean’s work from this period in 1969, Charles Harrison described McLean’s shift toward working with provisional and cheap materials in economic terms, pointing out that he lacked the funds to purchase the “permanent materials of his choice,” although he quickly points out that his works are “nonetheless valid for that.”<sup>16</sup> By now all evidence of the studio had been removed from McLean’s work: that it is an art work at all is only evident through knowing the work latterly, through photographs, for example, *Installation with Street and Fence*, in which a roll of lino and sections of steel pipe have been leant against the fence and pavement. By 1967 McLean was working in an even more expanded environment, making a series of interventions into nature with works that, like the street sculpture, cease to exist almost immediately after the fact of their reproduction as photographs.

Works such as *Vertical Ice Sculpture*, in which a frozen lake is cracked and a pane of ice flipped up into a vertical sheet, and the self-explanatory *Grass on Grass Sculpture* seem at first to belong to a different category of outdoor sculpture, to “nature,” the monumental and elegiac. However, McLean pulls back from the brink of the spectacular and grandiose, with works such as *Splash*

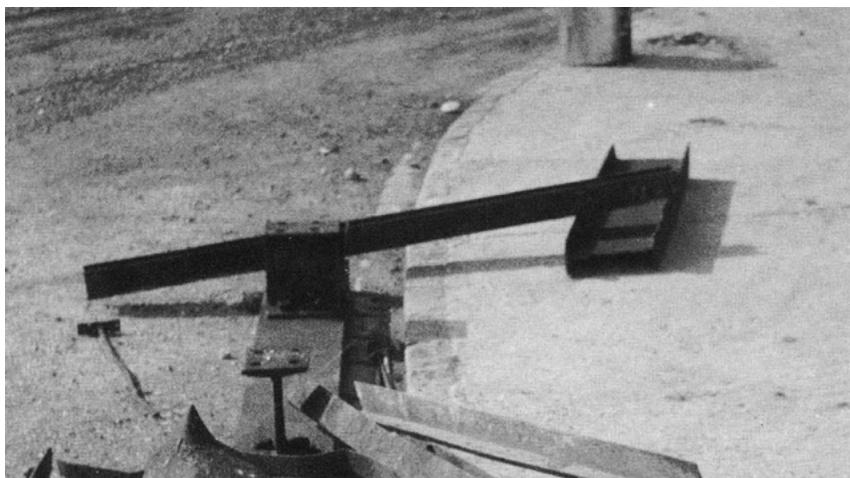
*Sculpture*, *Mud Sculpture*, and *Floataway Sculpture* resisting the lure of either. These works are casual, ephemeral, and witty in spirit. They comprise a small pile of mud, an object thrown into a brook, a piece of lino and wood placed on top of a sheet of hardboard floating away, all of which resist the monumentalizing scale we might expect from the emergent land art being produced at that time, mostly in America but also by a number of McLean's peers, including Richard Long. The use of found, crushed, squashed tangles of steel scrap found in the streets and photographed against a variety of urban outdoor backdrops in works such as *Found Steel Girder and Scrap Metal Sculpture* (fig. 4) replace the permanence and solidity promoted by the sculptural programme McLean had recently graduated from. It is hard not to read Caro's *Early One Morning* (1962) in miniaturized and ruinous form at the rear of the pile of girders and scraps, as if the sculpture had been chewed up and spat back out (fig. 5).

A few years later, McLean moved away from his earlier modernist interventions, and, although the idea of sculpture remained integral to his practice, he began to be associated more closely with conceptualism. He was included in most of the major conceptual art shows of the late sixties and seventies, including "Op Losse Schroeven" and "Information," and, in 1969, Harald Szeeman's international traveling group exhibition *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form: Works—Processes—Situations—Information*.<sup>17</sup> The show opened in Switzerland, and then traveled to Germany before ending up, in a reduced format, at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London (ICA), where Charles Harrison took over as organizer. When planning the show, Szeeman

Figure 4  
Bruce McLean (Scottish, b. 1944), *Found Steel Girder and Scrap Metal Sculpture*, 1968.  
Steel scrap. © Bruce McLean. Photo courtesy  
of the artist



Figure 5  
 Bruce McLean (Scottish, b. 1944), *Found Steel Girder and Scrap Metal Sculpture*, 1968 (detail).  
 Steel scrap. © Bruce McLean. Photo courtesy of the artist



approached McLean and asked him to send along some documentation of his work for inclusion in the catalogue that was to accompany the show. The catalogue was conceived as a separate project to the actual exhibition, with some artists included in the show who were not in the catalogue and vice versa. Although McLean was included in the catalogue from the outset, he only showed work in the London hang of the exhibition. The catalogue was organized like a telephone directory, with an alphabetical thumb index running down the right-hand edge. It opens with the minimalist Carl Andre, and closes with the arte povera artist Gilberto Zorio. In its final incarnation, only the letters “U,” “X,” and “Y” remained empty.

Let us focus on “M.” Although obviously an accident of the alphabet, McLean’s placement at the beginning of the “M” section was fortuitous, for it unwittingly placed his work into a relationship with that of Walter De Maria and Robert Morris, his more established American counterparts. While McLean was familiar with Morris’s minimalist work at that time, the “Attitudes” show was McLean’s first introduction to the work of de Maria, who by 1969 had established himself as a land artist who created colossal works in the desert such as *Two Parallel Lines* (1968), which consisted of two parallel mile-long lines drawn in chalk twelve feet apart on a dry desert lake bed. The photograph was reproduced in the catalogue with de Maria lying face down between the two lines (fig. 6). Adjacent in the loose-leaf catalogue are the last page of McLean’s entry and the first page of De Maria’s entry, with photographs of one of McLean’s own “earth works,” which comprised a series of iron poles placed around the base of a hill on Hampstead Heath, London. In the photograph of De Maria on the opposite page, the artist occupies the foreground of the frame, hand held up to run parallel with the mile-long line; serious, unsmiling, and demonstrating his mastery of the vast terrain (fig. 7). In each instance the photographs in De Maria’s entry are organized by the logic and scale of his body, pitched against the spectacular grandiosity of nature. The rest of De Maria’s entry included a reproduction of a letter he wrote to Szeeman that included the typed instructions for his *Art by Telephone*, which was included in the show in lieu of one of his outdoor earth works. The gallery was to install a “STANDARD BLACK MODEL TELEPHONE AT THE END OF A 25 TO 50 FT. BLACK INSTALLATION CORD,” which the artist could call at any point during the run of the exhibition.

Figure 6

Walter De Maria (American, b. 1935), *Mile Long Drawing*, 1968. In *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form: Works—Processes—Situations—Information*, exh. cat. (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern; London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1969). © Walter De Maria. Photo: Getty Research Institute

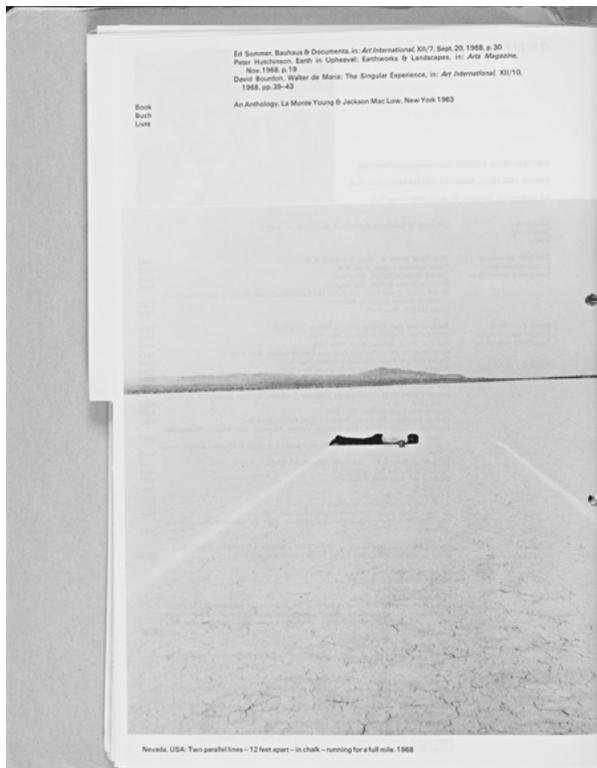
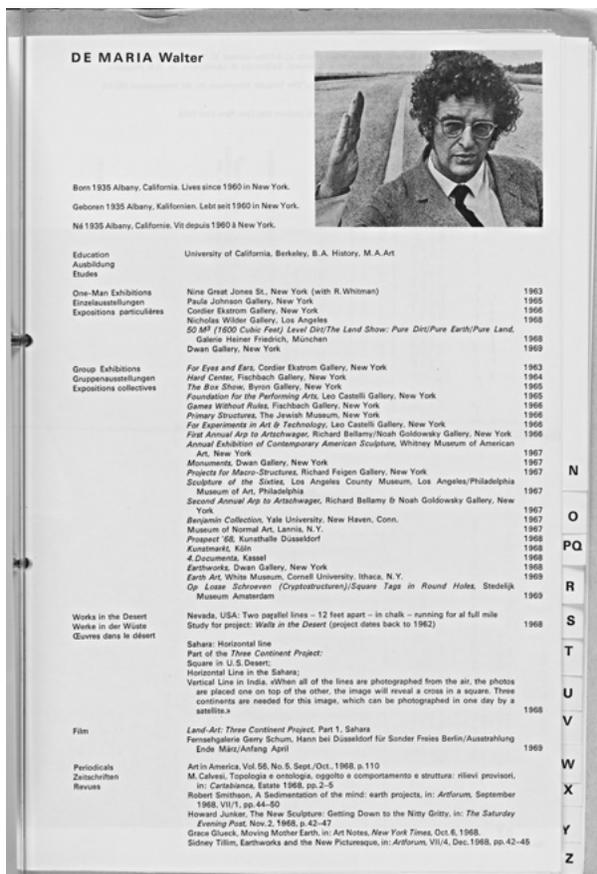


Figure 7

Walter De Maria (American, b. 1935). In *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form: Works—Processes—Situations—Information*, exh. cat. (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern; London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1969). © Walter De Maria. Photo: Getty Research Institute



McLean and his friends spent much of the opening night at the ICA hanging around De Maria's telephone, to see if he would call. He didn't.

Robert Morris's entry, like all other contributors to the catalogue, also included a black-and-white artist photograph, as well as photographs of his recent felt sculpture, a biography, and exhibition history (fig. 8). Interestingly, Nauman was the only artist included who used a colour photograph—McLean in fact phoned Nauman up to ask how come he had been allowed to use colour, to which Nauman responded that it was because he had asked. It seems that the other contributors were so entrenched within the monochrome aesthetic of conceptual photography that it simply had not occurred to them that they could use color. On the other hand, Morris's choice of black-and-white is clearly deliberate, as the harsh shadow and stark lighting of his photograph casts deep shadow across the unsmiling artist who poses in front of the heavy metal girders that provide his austere backdrop.

McLean's entry includes no biographical information or exhibition history, apart from simply listing year and place of birth: 1944, Glasgow (fig. 9). His entry also included reproductions of his *Landscape Paintings*, one of which was included in the ICA installation of the show, where it was laid out along the floor (it was destroyed afterwards), and a hanging work, entitled *Rope Piece*. He half smiles in his photograph—it is closer to a smirk, really—underneath which he reproduced a series of four banal postcards of Barnes, London, which he had sent to Szeemann in lieu of any actual documentation of his work, which he says he simply did not have.<sup>18</sup> Although McLean's entry conforms entirely with the other artists' entries in the catalogue, it also functions as a dialogic conversation with the work of his two American bedfellows, the most established artists in the "M" category, whom McLean usurps through his alphabetical placement at the beginning of the section.

The "Attitudes" show provided the starting point for the series of photographic and film works making reference to the work of Morris and De Maria that McLean embarked upon the following year. Of De Maria, McLean recalls being deeply impressed: he remembers thinking that De Maria's outdoor land art works, and his photograph in the "Attitudes" catalogue, were "cool."<sup>19</sup> McLean's interest in Morris, at first triggered by the black-and-white photograph, was supplemented by his discovery of a short text by Morris called "On drawing" that was published in John Russell and Suzi Gablik's anthology *Pop Art Redefined* in 1969, the year "Attitudes" opened. McLean found Morris's text both witty and engaging, and a far cry from the serious, monumental posturing of the photograph with which Morris chose to represent himself in Szeemann's show. In the short text, Morris, his tongue firmly in cheek, advocates that the artist combine the "skill and malice" of W. C. Fields with "a certain awkwardness and blunt, left-handed effort like that needed to open a stuck closet door."<sup>20</sup> Morris's unexpected use of humour in his writing struck McLean, as did his description of the artist as someone who employs humour and skill, which chimed with McLean's own description of the "craft tricks" that kept the best new work from becoming "completely boring,"<sup>21</sup> and he began to mull over the idea of making two films in homage to "Bob" and "Walter."<sup>22</sup>

McLean was intrigued by the seeming mismatch between Morris's self-presentation and the sense of humour his text revealed. The film he made about Morris was called *In the Shadow of Your Smile, Bob*. He was inspired by Andy Warhol's real-time and split-screen films such as *Empire State Building* and

Figure 8  
 Robert Morris (American, b. 1931). In *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form: Works—Processes—Situations—Information*, exh. cat. (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern; London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1969).  
 © Robert Morris. Photo: Getty Research Institute

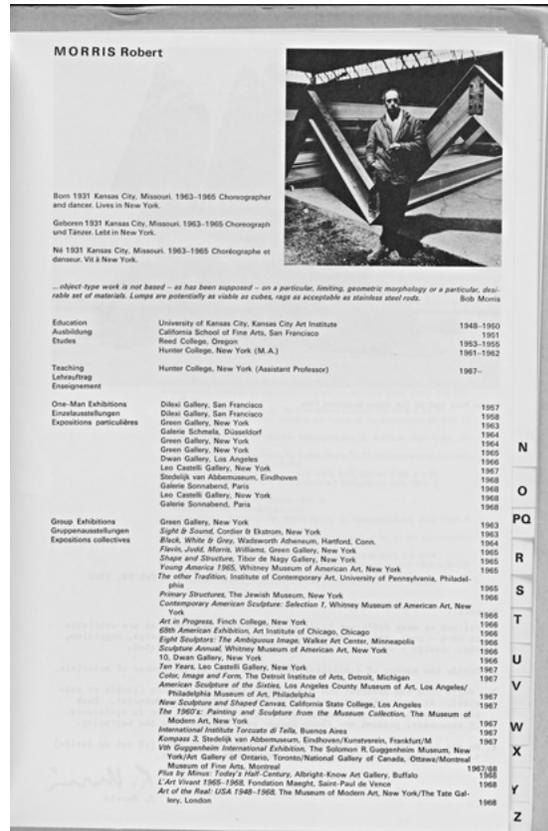
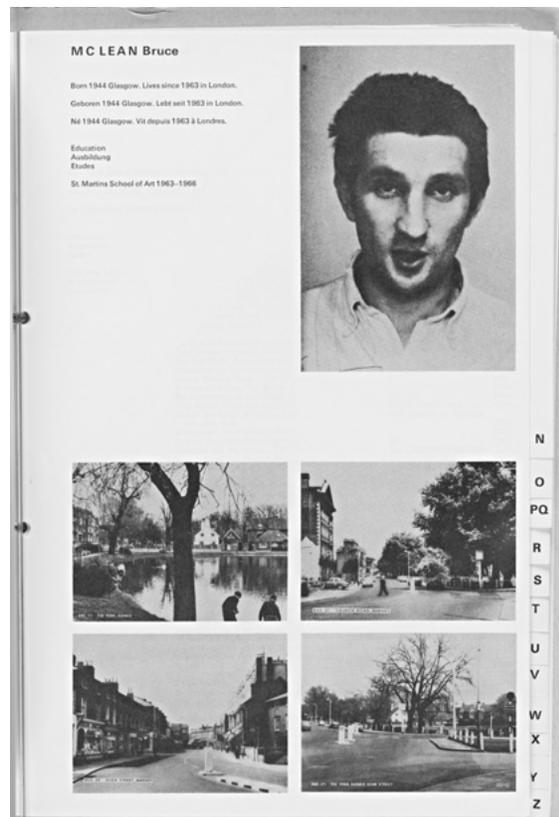


Figure 9  
 Bruce McLean (Scottish, b. 1944). In *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form: Works—Processes—Situations—Information*, exh. cat. (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern; London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1969). © Bruce McLean. Photo: Getty Research Institute



*Chelsea Girls*, and by Brancusi's claims that he could not work in the shadow of Rodin.<sup>23</sup> McLean made a thirty-minute split-screen film in which one side of the screen was occupied by a huge blown-up reproduction of Morris's "Attitudes" photograph. On the other side ran a film of McLean, cast in shadow to mimic Morris, while talking to camera the whole time, describing what he was doing, in a contemporary restaging of Brancusi's anxiety of being in the shadow of another artist's achievements.

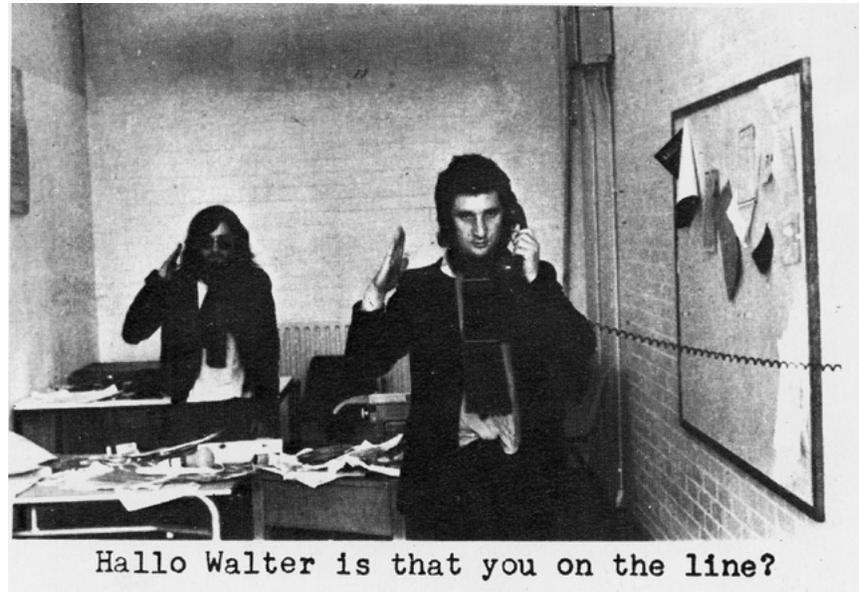
McLean's 1970 film about De Maria similarly stemmed from De Maria's "Attitudes" photograph and, as with the Morris film, he made a number of photographic works to accompany the film. Called *A Million Smiles for One of Your Miles, Walter*, it featured McLean outstretched not between two mile-long lines in the desert, but between the rather more prosaic white painted lines of a British football pitch in a local London park (fig. 10).<sup>24</sup> This film was also 30 minutes long, and shot in real time. A young woman in hotpants leans against a shed just out of McLean's sight, looking bored and fidgeting, while the artist lies prone on the ground. As with his Morris film, McLean recorded a soundtrack afterwards in which he provided a funny, unscripted dialogue describing what was going on around him as he lay stretched out on the ground, for example children playing nearby, or a man passing by walking his dog. In another photographic work made to accompany the film, McLean conflates De Maria's *Two Parallel Lines* and *Art by Telephone*, aping De Maria's serious hand-raised posture while ostensibly answering the phone that De Maria included in the "Attitudes" show, which De Maria may, or may not, deign to call (fig. 11). With each of these works McLean inserts himself into both Morris's and De Maria's projects, appropriating formal themes from their work and insinuating himself within them, a kind of pastiche or parody that functions also as an acknowledgment of homage to their work. The teasing humour of his earlier Oedipal wrangling with Moore and Caro takes on a rather different tenor in the case of De Maria and Morris. They function as a bridge between McLean's earlier and later work, offering something much closer to a critical engagement or conversation with his peers and two very different responses to the question of how one artist engages with the work of another.

The idea of posturing continued to figure in the work McLean produced in the immediate aftermath of his films to "Bob" and "Walter." In 1971, while teaching at Maidstone College of Art, McLean founded Nice Style, the World's First Pose Band, with his students Paul Richards and Ron Carr. The perfor-

**Figure 10**  
Bruce McLean (Scottish, b. 1944). Production still from *A Million Smiles for One of Your Miles, Walter*, 1971. © Bruce McLean. Photo courtesy of the artist



Figure 11  
 Bruce McLean (Scottish, b. 1944). Photographic  
 work after the film *A Million Smiles for One  
 of Your Miles, Walter*, 1971. © Bruce McLean.  
 Photo courtesy of the artist



mances by Nice Style were marked by a witty, ironic, and critical investigation into social hypocrisy, posing, and mimicry. Part absurdist performance, part social critique, Nice Style drew upon a wide range of oblique references, from minimalist dance to other more familiar and popular clichés: their first public appearance was as a support band for The Kinks in 1971. In another work from 1969, in what could also be read as a deflationary response to the magisterial pretensions of De Maria's mile-long lines in the desert, McLean reduced the line to a spare and barely registered length of string dragged along the street that he then had photographed. *Taking a Line for a Walk* he called it, calling to mind Paul Klee's desire to let the unconscious guide the artist's hand as well as Richard Long's outdoor works. McLean in fact made a ten-minute black-and-white film about Long at the same time that he made the Morris and De Maria works. In *The Elusive Sculptor, Richard Long*, McLean approached members of the public, asking if they had seen a man out walking.<sup>25</sup>

In 1970 McLean staged his most radical rejection of artistic posturing. In his conceptual one-day retrospective entitled *King for a Day*, he produced a typed list of proposals for a number of works realized and not realized, which provided the basis of his "one-day retrospective," initially held at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, and again in 1972 at the Tate Gallery. In his late twenties and only at the beginning of his professional life as an artist, McLean wryly acknowledges the notion that an artist's career is over the moment they are offered a retrospective, although unlike the usual format of the large retrospective exhibition in which all one's significant works are gathered together, McLean's twenty-four-hour retrospective was remarkable in that no physical works of art were included. The show took place in one room at the Tate Gallery, containing only McLean's exhibition catalogues, arranged on the floor to mimic the floor-bound structure of the minimalist grid. Like the catalogue for Szeemann's *Attitudes* show, the booklet McLean produced to accompany *King for a Day* was a conceptual exhibition itself. It consisted of one thousand typed proposals for works previously made, imagined, impossible, and not yet realized. As the catalogues were removed, the show—and McLean's

retrospective—ended, leaving behind only a textual residue of imagined projects. The proposals in the catalogue, which McLean typed in one sitting, gradually running out of ideas and steam as he neared the end, demonstrated among other things McLean’s ongoing dialogue with other artists:

- 104 Tony Caro reflected in his “early one morning” work
- 403 Earthworks piece, mixed media
- 455 homage to baby blue piece
- 872 a recent crimble, crimble crumble work, parody
- 978 Henry Moore revisited for the 10th time piece

McLean’s use of humour provides a powerful weapon against what we might think of as the perceived pomposity of De Maria’s and Morris’s posed photographic conceits, although it is a project notable primarily for the fondness McLean displays for their work, amounting to something closer to fandom or comradely acknowledgment than an antagonistic attack or joke made at their expense. McLean cites Oscar Wilde as a formative influence on his work, particularly Wilde’s insistence on the seriousness of humour, and recalls with pride the rumour that the first time Richard Serra was seen to smile at an opening was during the screening of *In the Shadow of Your Smile, Bob*.<sup>26</sup> McLean was, in fact, a founding member of “The Society for Putting Humour Back into Art.” “Humour,” he said, “is the nearest to truth that you can get.”<sup>27</sup> The subversive humour that McLean employs in these two films is complex—they do not simply set out to ridicule their subjects, but they stem in part from a deeply entrenched belief in questioning what sculpture could be. This process of interrogation was “ingrained” in McLean’s generation under Caro, Tucker, Annesley, King, and Bolus, who insisted that their students constantly question the status of the object, even though these students came up with a rather different set of responses to their teachers.<sup>28</sup> Rather, what McLean did with these works was enter into a performative and dialectical relationship with his American peers. McLean vehemently rejects claims that his work from this period was primarily about making fun of the work of others, pointing out on the contrary that “you can only have fun with things you actually admire,” a point made clear by reading through the list of proposals for *King for a Day*.<sup>29</sup>

McLean’s brief flirtation with, on the one hand, Henry Moore and Anthony Caro, and, on the other, Morris and De Maria, was tactical, in the sense described by Michel de Certeau’s writing on the difference between “strategy” and “tactics.” In a passage that could just as easily describe what McLean set out to do with his films, de Certeau describes how the tactic “insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance.”<sup>30</sup> Tactics work through random or surprising juxtapositions, in a way similar, de Certeau writes, to how Freud defines “wit” in *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*. In another context, psychoanalyst Adam Phillips has suggested that flirtation functions as a “transitional performance” that is an “early version of the experimental life, of irreverence as curiosity.”<sup>31</sup> Far from standing as the opposite to a correct and serious way of establishing relationships, Phillips writes, flirtation “might simply describe a different kind of relation, another way of going about things.”<sup>32</sup> Flirting describes McLean’s “way of going about things” here. These works are not oppositional or hostile—they don’t place attack at their centre, whether Oedipally charged or not. Instead McLean’s tactical engagement with the work

of Moore, Morris, and De Maria is playful. For Phillips, flirting works as a non-committal and playful way of imagining alternatives. It “makes room” for “other stories” by “unsettling preferences and priorities.”<sup>33</sup>

In an essay on flirtation of 1909, Georg Simmel wrote “every decisive conclusion brings flirtation to an end.”<sup>34</sup> Phillips, too, insists upon the productivity of keeping closure at bay, for “flirtation keeps the consequences going.”<sup>35</sup> The open-ended, tactical aspect of flirtation and its two-way process of play and exchange provides the most useful model for reconsidering the “anxiety of influence” as it was transformed in McLean’s hands, satisfying McLean’s own call in 1969 for a “re-think. Or even a think.”<sup>36</sup>

A version of this article was presented at the conference “Anglo-American Exchange in Postwar Sculpture 1945–1975” at the Getty Institute, Los Angeles, April 2008. I would like to thank the convenors and my fellow participants at this event for their thoughtful comments and discussion. Thank you to Joy Sleeman, Richard Taws, and Jon Wood for their conversations about McLean’s work, and to Bruce McLean for taking the time to talk to me, and for allowing me to reproduce images of his works.

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#### Notes

- 1 Interview with the artist, April 15, 2008, London. See also Jon Wood’s interview with McLean, “Fallen Warriors and a Sculpture in My Soup: Bruce McLean on Henry Moore,” *Sculpture Journal* 17, no. 2 (2008), pp. 116–24.
- 2 B. McLean, “Not Even Crimble Crumble,” reprinted in N. Dimitrijevic, *Bruce McLean*, exh. cat., Kunsthalle Basel; Whitechapel Art Gallery, London; and Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (London, 1981), pp. 22–23.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 H. Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, 2nd edn. (New York and Oxford, 1997).
- 6 I have written about Nauman’s series of works that he made referencing the work of Henry Moore and the American sculptor H. C. Westermann in my forthcoming *Eccentric Objects: Rethinking Sculpture in 1960s America* (New Haven and London, 2013). See also A. M. Wagner, “Henry Moore’s Mother,” *Representations* 65 (1999), pp. 93–120; A. M. Wagner, *Mother Stone: The Vitality of Modern British Sculpture* (New Haven and London, 2005). There is a discussion of Nauman’s Henry Moore related works in D. Kosinski, *Henry Moore: Sculpting the Twentieth Century* (New Haven and London, 2001). Joan Simon mentions Nauman’s references to Westermann and Moore in “Nauman Variations: Back to the Future,” in *Bruce Nauman*, exh. cat., Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (London, 1986), pp. 11–18, as does Coosje van Bruggen in *Bruce Nauman* (New York, 1988).
- 7 *Poses for Plinth* was one of several performances McLean staged at Situations in 1971, along with *There’s a Sculpture on My Shoulder*. McLean and Nauman in fact met several years later when they were introduced by Nicholas Serota, who recognized the similarities between their works. Interview with the author, April 15, 2008, London.
- 8 J. Mitchell, *Siblings: Sex and Violence* (Oxford, 2003), p. 110.
- 9 Course description 1962–65, as quoted in R. Tant, “Sculpture at St. Martin’s,” in *Art and the 60s: This Was Tomorrow*, eds. C. Stephens and K. Stout, exh. cat., Tate Britain, London (London, 2004), p. 88.
- 10 M. Gooding, *Bruce McLean* (London, 1990), p. 16.
- 11 J. Sleeman, *The Sculpture of William Tucker* (Aldershot, 2007), p. 26.
- 12 McLean, quoted in Dimitrijevic, *Bruce McLean*, p. 7.
- 13 McLean, quoted in Gooding, *Bruce McLean*, p. 14.
- 14 McLean, “Not Even Crimble Crumble,” quoted in Dimitrijevic, *Bruce McLean*, p. 22.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 C. Harrison, “Some Recent Sculpture in Britain,” *Studio International* 177, no. 907 (1969), p. 32.
- 17 For an excellent account of this exhibition see Alison Green, “When Attitudes Become Form and the Contest over Conceptual Art’s History,” in *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth, and Practice*, ed. M. Corris (Cambridge, 2004).
- 18 Interview with the artist, April 15, 2008, London.

- 19 Ibid.
- 20 R. Morris, "On Drawing," in *Pop Art Redefined*, eds. J. Russell and S. Gablik (London and New York, 1969), p. 94.
- 21 McLean, "Not Even Crimble Crumble," quoted in Dimitrijevic, *Bruce McLean*, p. 22.
- 22 Interview with the artist, April 15, 2008, London.
- 23 "Nothing grows well in the shadow of a tree," Brancusi famously remarked on declining an offer from Rodin to work in his studio.
- 24 *A Million Smiles for One of Your Miles*, Walter no longer exists. In *the Shadow of Your Smile*, Bob is currently missing.
- 25 *The Elusive Sculptor, Richard Long (1970)* exists as a reel-to-reel film that is now disintegrating. Interview with the artist, April 15, 2008, London.
- 26 Interview with the artist, April 15, 2008, London.
- 27 McLean, quoted in Dimitrijevic, *Bruce McLean*, p. 24.
- 28 Interview with the artist, April 5, 2008, London.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. S. F. Rendall (Berkeley, 1984), p. xix.
- 31 A. Phillips, *On Flirtation* (London, 1994), p. xxv.
- 32 Ibid., p. xxii.
- 33 Ibid., p. xxv.
- 34 G. Simmel, "Flirtation," in *On Women, Sexuality, and Love*, trans. and intro. Guy Oakes (New Haven and London, 1984), p. 136.
- 35 Phillips, *On Flirtation*, p. xxiii.
- 36 McLean, "Not Even Crimble Crumble," quoted in Dimitrijevic, *Bruce McLean*, p. 22.