

# Walter De Maria

Truck Trilogy consists of three classic Chevrolet Advanced Design pickup trucks that have been stripped of extraneous features and details. Placed vertically in the trucks' flatbeds are circular, square, and triangular stainless-steel rods. Begun in 2011, Truck Trilogy was completed posthumously in 2017 by Walter De Maria's estate according to detailed instructions. The trucks selected for the work are a black model from 1950 and red and green models from 1955. The Advanced Design, unveiled in 1947, was the best-selling vehicle in its class until 1955, when the design was discontinued. Chevrolet's vehicles featured an innovative passenger cab that was smoothly welded together rather than bolted shut, which reflected a streamlined aesthetic geared toward "style-conscious consumers while simultaneously increasing safety" and efficiency. Like De Maria's *Bel Air Trilogy* (2000–11), Truck Trilogy juxtaposes the elegant lines of mid-century American industrial design with the geometric vocabulary that underscores more than fifty years of his practice.

De Maria began incorporating highly polished, geometrically shaped metal rods into his practice in 1965. These works were finished to Brancusi-like perfection and functioned as self-contained sculptures, which, De Maria argued, eliminated "a lot of needless relationships" without reducing an object's aesthetic or conceptual complexity. The artist's *High Energy Bar* (1966), for example, explores the auratic potential of the sculptural object through both its formal articulation and suggestive title. Later rod-based works expanded to encompass room-scaled installations, such as *The Broken Kilometer* (1979) and *360° / Ching/64 Sculptures* (1981), both commissioned by Dia Art Foundation.

De Maria's preoccupation with materiality filtered through his practice, and Truck Trilogy finds a corollary in his use of precious metals for *Silver Meters* (1976) and *Gold Meters* (1976–77). The two closely related, multipartite works include eight polished-stainless-steel, square-meter plates measuring one inch in height. Each plate contains one troy ounce\* of silver or gold in the form of

solid cylindrical plugs that have been inserted flush to the plate's surface. The plugs vary in depth according to their number and weight; the number of plugs that constitutes the troy ounce progressively increases from plate to plate by squaring the integers two through nine, so that the first plate in each series contains a total of four plugs (weighing  $\frac{1}{4}$  troy ounce each) and the last plate contains eighty-one plugs (at  $\frac{1}{81}$  troy ounce each).

The fact that each plate contains the same amount of gold or silver is not discernible from empirical observation. By prompting speculation about such underlying or binding systems, De Maria's sculptures engage structures of meaning beyond the immediately apparent. Abstract methodologies based on ordering, sequencing, and mensuration provide fundamental and essential ways of regulating human experience. Yet, like the values attributed today to rare metals, they are ultimately arbitrary—that is, they are the product of human rather than cosmic ways of engaging and apprehending the world.

\* Slightly heavier than an avoirdupois (or standard) ounce, the troy ounce has been employed for measuring certain precious metals, notably gold and silver, since medieval times. Even today gold and silver are often weighed and sold according to this alternative system.

# Walter De Maria

Walter De Maria was born in 1935 in Albany, California, and studied history and art at the University of California, Berkeley. In 1960 he moved to New York City, where he lived and worked until the end of his life. With Robert Whitman in 1963, De Maria founded a gallery at 9 Great Jones Street in New York and exhibited his sculptures there later that year. He also performed as a jazz percussionist with Don Cherry and other figures, and joined the band the Primitives, which later evolved into the Velvet Underground. After his first solo exhibition at a commercial gallery in 1965, De Maria's work was included in the *Primary Structures* exhibition at the Jewish Museum, New York, in 1966. He subsequently had numerous international shows at venues including the Kunsthaus Zürich (1999), the Museum für Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt (1991), the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart (1987), and the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam (1984). Dia maintains De Maria's *The Lightning Field* (1977) in western New Mexico, and *The New York Earth Room* (1977) and *The Broken Kilometer* (1979) in New York City. De Maria died in July 2013.

1. *Silver Meters*, 1976  
Stainless steel and silver; 8 units  
Dia Art Foundation

2. *Gold Meters*, 1976–77  
Stainless steel and gold; 8 units  
Dia Art Foundation

3. *Green Truck: Circle, Square, Triangle*,  
2011–17  
1955 Chevrolet truck with polished,  
stainless-steel rods  
Courtesy Gagosian Gallery

4. *Red Truck: Square, Triangle, Circle*,  
2011–17  
1955 Chevrolet truck with polished,  
stainless-steel rods  
Courtesy Gagosian Gallery

5. *Black Truck: Triangle, Circle, Square*,  
2011–17  
1950 Chevrolet truck with polished,  
stainless-steel rods  
Courtesy Gagosian Gallery

