

MARTIN BECK

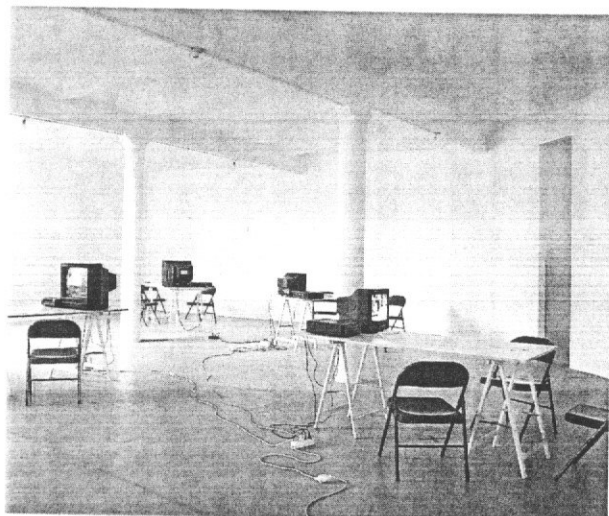
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Last year Martin Beck covered the walls of a Viennese pub with a questionnaire entitled "Gefällt Ihnen dieses Kunstwerk?" (Do you like this work of art?, 1993). If you said Yes, you were asked to respond to 14 more questions by choosing either "yes," "no," or "I don't know" in an attempt to understand why you liked the work. By asking questions like, "Do you believe that your decision was influenced by other people's opinion about this work of art?" Beck hoped to get at the various factors that influence a viewer's response to a particular work.

In this exhibition, Beck posed similar questions about the way in which we evaluate visual art. He filled the gallery with four tables with three chairs each, one television, and a video recorder. Four videos presenting artists and their works—two documentaries (on Franz West, Bruno Gironcoli), a retrospective evaluation of the life and work (of Angelica Kauffmann), and a feature film (on Egon Schiele)—were shown. All of the films were produced and broadcast by Austrian television, and all were played in their entirety. The films showed how similar means have been used for centuries to bring art closer to the public. From Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* to contemporary artist monographs and documentary films little has changed: social context is often viewed as being of nothing more than anecdotal interest.

On the tables in front of the monitors, Beck placed texts that discussed the representation of art and artists in film and television, which were also published in a bilingual catalogue accompanying the show. Beck presents the viewer with a few possible questions, for example, "How are women artists represented in biographical films?" or "How is what makes an artwork artistic communicated in an artwork—just as being an artist is communicated by a person?" or "What do artists make when they are not making art?" As in the questionnaire piece, Beck asks the viewer to consider his means of evaluating and understanding what he sees. Though it was certainly easier to complete the pub questionnaire on a casual visit, even if the viewer does not stay for the three and a half hours required to see the films in their entirety, the excerpts Beck provided sufficed to open a debate about the conditions and codes that inform art's entry into the social.

—SV

Translated from the German by Charles V. Miller.Martin Beck, *untitled*, 1994, mixed media. Installation view.