

RICHARD BELLAMY MARK DI SUVERO



STORM KING ART CENTER

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STORM KING ART CENTER
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RICHARD BELLAMY AND MARK DI SUVERO

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Richard Bellamy and Mark di Suvero at the Storm King Art Center, 1985. Courtesy of *The Times Herald Record*; pages 2-3

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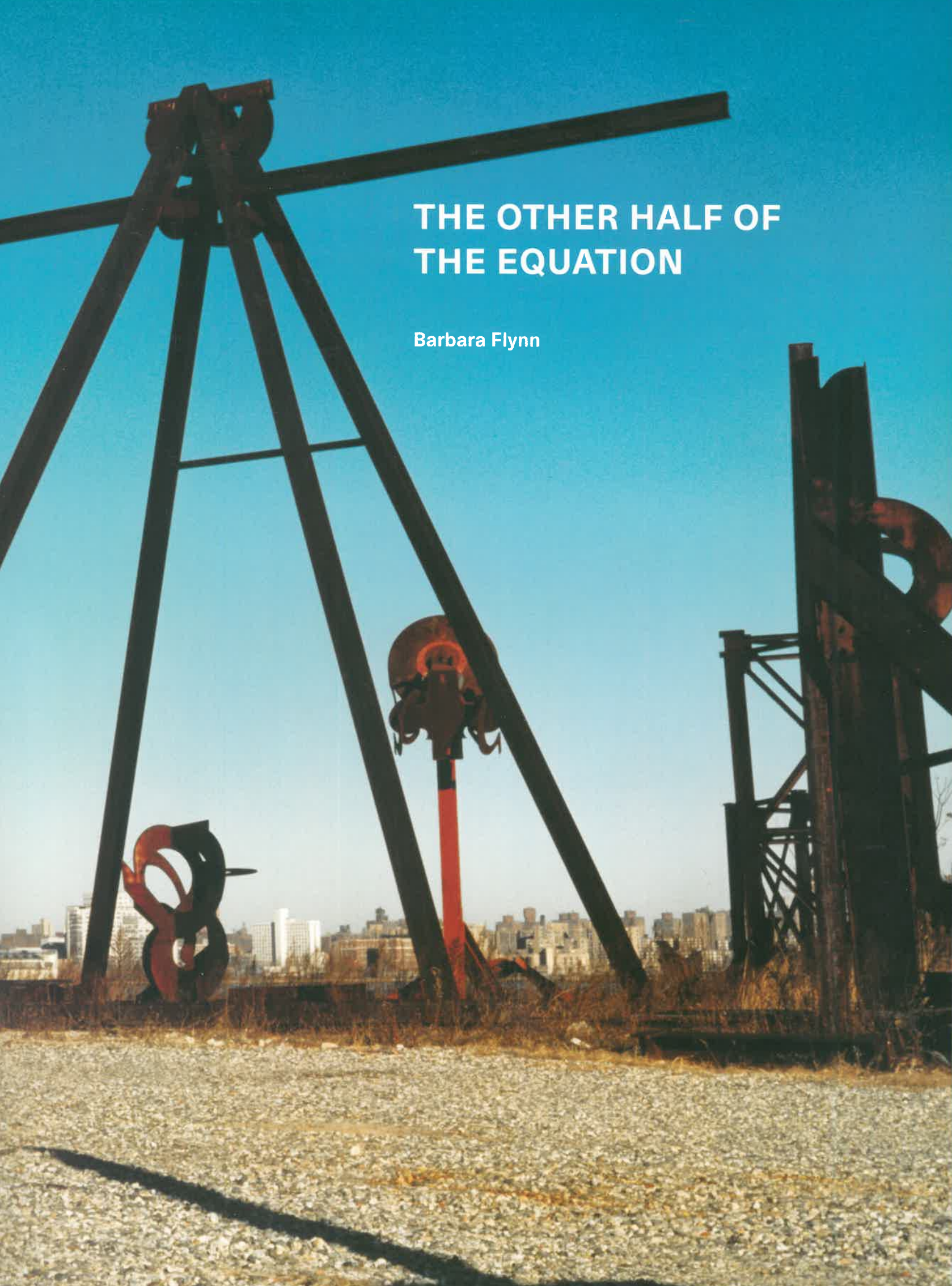
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THE OTHER HALF OF THE EQUATION

Barbara Flynn

Richard Bellamy would have been the first to maintain that the focus of this exhibition should be unwaveringly on the artist, on Mark di Suvero, and though one hesitates to speak for Dick, I'm pretty sure he would have been embarrassed to have any attention at all called to himself. Dick, as gallerist, seemed to cultivate the attribute of invisibility. Certainly, he had his vanities like all the rest of us, and felt the slights and lack of recognition endemic to the art world, but it remained his manifesto never to upstage the art and the artist.

Not so much "old school" as his own school, Dick dropped out after a semester at Columbia and continued on his own path, developing a highly original credo and persona. He had a knack for melding deeply held views — like the goodness of America manifest in the Cincinnati of his youth — while living in the day to day in the most unconventional and anarchic, quixotic fashion imaginable. Dick was one of those individuals who would craft every moment spent with another person, enlivening it with some antic, or skewing it with an inscrutable glance. He was often perplexing and exasperating but never routine or dull.

Invisibility seemed to go hand in hand with silence and, during his life, Dick said little. Working or living with him one learned to interpret and communicate non-verbally. Glances, expressions, even the tenor of silences conveyed his meaning, once you had learned to read them. This included using props, like his false teeth, which he'd pop out and place on your skin to disconcert you or throw to the ground to make a point. It's difficult to express the qualities of a great work of art and, ironically perhaps, Dick's lack of verbiage was the ideal accompaniment to such a work because one could feel how moved he was, and appreciate his honesty in allowing those feelings to remain exposed, without any effort to conceal them with words. For instance, rather than talk about Mark's art, he thought it would be purer to use photography to capture the works exactly as he had experienced them in those moments of rapture. Thus, he was meticulous about documenting a particular work from the right angle and under the ideal conditions of light, which varied from work to work; often he would labor at it for days.

Dick is in none of the photographs and, officially, he didn't take any of them either. His stand-in alter ego, George Bellamy, was the photographer. This urge to transpose wove through Dick's life, manifesting itself in cross-dressing, as when he wore a lime green number to host a PS1 event in 1983, the evening he met my mother, Carolyn Flynn. And he was capable of similar such capers in his social life, sending the artist Kunié Sugiura to art world dinners in the 1980s not just in his stead, but as him.

Dick was shy, yet he didn't so much hide behind the tripod as use it for stability, as his axis in the force field that he found Mark to be. There were days when Dick would be depressed, literally supine on his gallery floor, believing he had lost the deal or in some fashion otherwise not come through for Mark. I believe Dick's whole existence turned on his devotion to the artist. The integrity of their dealer-artist relationship and their loyalty to each other is one small lingering suggestion of what was once possible in an art world that started to change long before Dick's death in 1998.

Dick was a modest man who wrote beautiful letters in the service of his trade, or the “art bidnis,” as he liked to call it—and strangely, rightly or wrongly, he didn’t think himself good at much else. But the photographs were something he could do for Mark, and he intended them to remain uncredited and anonymous. Indeed, the photography process structured his days on many week- or even month-long sculpture set-ups. Looking through the viewfinder at Mark’s art, he would be arriving at a place where he felt most comfortable, where he could experience the pleasure of seeing the art in his own time, privately. Viewing the works in this way, he learned all about them, memorized them. Yet ultimately, it was not with the photographer’s eye that he judged a sculpture. His judgment came much earlier in the life of a work, and was a visceral response. His opinion about a work was reached quickly, in the first moment of proximity to it—a combination of intuition and the physical experience of it, by circling, nudging, and climbing it. There were a few pieces he didn’t like, and when they appeared in international shows, he would once again circle them, barking like a dog to indicate his disfavor. Then after barking, he’d lovingly photograph them.

Dick wasn’t good at holding on to things. He was forever leaving behind eyeglasses, suitcases, though fortunately never cameras. In his professional life he would be the first to identify artists and exhibit them, then lose them to other galleries; he seldom had the capital to invest in their work along the way. Unlike an artist, he produced little in his wake that was tangible. In this context, then, it is even more amazing that, slowly and systematically, he developed his archive of photographs. The archive is his most tangible legacy.

Dick saw every work that Mark made from the beginning of his practice, developing a conviction about it that was unassailable. The photographs he took throughout convey his relationship. Although different from love or childrearing, psychologically and emotionally, it was every bit as powerful.

This devotion is made manifest in the photos, but there are still the accompanying letters that need to be published—and also a book written that would convey the full measure of this man, who moved many people to understand that palpable sense of being one can experience in relation to a work of art.

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