

# Overview

## TOM MARIONI at 80



*Beer with Musical Friends*. Color spit bite aquatint with aquatint and soft ground etching on gampi paper chine collé. 22-x-25-inch image on 28½-x-31-inch sheet, edition 30. All images printed by Sam Carr-Prindle. Visit [crownpoint.com](http://crownpoint.com) for prices and information.

“I first did *The Act of Drinking Beer with Friends is the Highest Form of Art* in the Oakland Museum of California in 1970, and I have been doing it ever since, in America and Europe,” Tom Marioni said when I asked him to tell me something about his new prints.

On this page, the largest of the prints is illustrated. What we see is nine bottles in a row; it could be a bare-bones classic still

life. Or it could be, as the artist describes it, “nine bottles that are meant to be blown into to create musical sounds.”

“How can we know the bottles are meant to be blown into?” I asked.

“You can’t know,” he replied. “But from the title, *Beer with Musical Friends*, you might get a suggestion. The word ‘musical’



*Three of a Kind*. Color spit bite aquatint with aquatint and soft ground etching. 11-x-11-inch image on 17½-x-17-inch sheet, edition 25.



*Beer with Lemon*. Color spit bite aquatint with aquatint and soft ground etching. 12-x-9-inch image on 18½-x-15-inch sheet, edition 25.

would be a clue; the only way to make music would be to blow into the bottles. But the bottles might also suggest different types of people, different sizes, shapes, and colors. That would be good, too. You can see anything you want in it, but the more you know, the more you can see. That's a nice thing about art."

When I asked Marioni about his other new prints, this is what he replied:

"*Three of a Kind* was made by drawing around three bottles of Pacifico beer. I use Pacifico because of the yellow label and the long neck that makes a good sound when you blow into it. *Beer Bottle Bouquet* comes from an Anchor Steam Beer bottle. Anchor Steam is a San Francisco beer. *Beer with Lemon*—I always thought that if you put lemon in a domestic beer it brings out the flavor, makes it taste imported. *Particle Accelerator* and *Collision Debris* suggest to me the bombardment of atoms at close to the speed of light from an accelerator. They look like flower arrangements."

In 1970, forty-seven years ago, Tom Marioni presented in the Oakland Museum of California a work of performance art titled *The Act of Drinking Beer with Friends is the Highest Form of Art*. "I left the debris on exhibit, but I didn't think of the debris as art," he told me. "I considered the debris as residue, like keeping a photograph as evidence of an act. In that piece, the social interaction is the art."

When I asked about subsequent exhibition venues for *The Act of Drinking Beer with Friends*, I received a list of about fifty. I've selected some to give you an idea of the range and influence of this work.

Oakland Museum of California (1970); Demarco Gallery, Edinburgh ('72); Secession Gallery, Vienna ('79); Artist's Space, New York ('94); MOCA, Los Angeles ('95); Baltimore Museum (2000); Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco ('04); Lyon Biennale, France ('05); in a Tom Marioni retrospective exhibition at the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati ('06); in "The Art of Participation" at SFMOMA ('08); Hammer Museum, Los Angeles ('10); Smart Museum, Chicago ('12); Site Santa Fe ('14); in a solo show at Kunstsaale, Berlin ('14); Wigman Projects, Sydney, Australia ('14); University of Minnesota, Minneapolis ('15); City Gallery, Bremen, Germany ('15); SFMOMA ('16); Marlborough Contemporary, New York ('17).

In 2016, Marioni's presentation of *The Act of Drinking Beer with Friends is the Highest Form of Art* at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art was part of its gala reopening (after remodeling). On a terrace outside, lit with yellow light, celebrities from the art community took turns serving beer in bottles from Marioni's installation, which, as he says, is always "strictly" designed.

The basic elements are "a table and chairs and a bar that they've built, a refrigerator, a yellow light, a shelf for the empty beer bottles, a video of beer filling up a glass." Those elements are visible. Less obvious elements, Marioni explains, are "a male, a female, and a spirit. The beer bottle is the male; the refrigerator



*Beer Bottle Bouquet*. Color spit bite aquatint with aquatint and soft ground etching on gampi paper chine collé. 14-x-9-inch image on 20½-x-15-inch sheet, edition 25.



*Particle Accelerator* (left); *Collision Debris* (right). Color spit bite aquatints with dry-point. Each image measures 8¼-x-5½-inches on a 13½-x-10½-inch sheet, edition 20.

Conceptual Art and *Beer with Friends* as my public or social art.”

The Museum of Conceptual Art (called MOCA) was an art space Marioni founded in 1970 in a large studio loft space; it was a performance art venue very early in that movement’s history, but also a place for weekly meetings where artists got together to drink beer.

Tom Marioni closed MOCA in 1984, but continues to hold weekly gatherings of artist friends in his studio. Members of this group will perform the 1996 work *Beer Drinking Sonata (for 13 Players)* at the opening of Marioni’s 2017 “Tom Marioni at 80” exhibition at Crown Point Press.

—Kathan Brown

is the female (it holds nourishment); the yellow light is spirit. It represents California light. Yellow is the color of the intellect and the color of enlightenment.”

Marioni has written, “Even art with wit and beauty should have political content, have a subject, make a point, and not be an ornament.” He quotes Picasso who said in 1937, ‘Painting is not done to decorate apartments.’”

Painting is a medium that Tom Marioni has not used extensively, although he has always done a good deal of drawing. He calls himself a sculptor and conceptual artist. In an interview with Nick Kaye for an Exeter University (UK) project, he said, “I think a conceptual artist is free to work in any medium and is not defined by the medium in the way a painter is.”

Kaye went on to ask about Marioni’s drawing performances: *Drum Brush Drawings* in which he brushed rhythmically on sandpaper, and (later) large figure drawings made by tracing his shadow; the sound of the moving pencil was amplified and accompanied by recorded music. Marioni replied, “I always thought of my graphic art as my private or personal art and my Museum of

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### Tom Marioni *Beer Drinking Sonata (for 13 players) 1996*

**Allegro.** Thirteen bottles are lined up on a table in front of the performers. The performers stand in a semicircle around the back of the table. Each performer opens a bottle of beer; the bottle opener is passed around the table. All the bottles are the same size, long neck, (Mexican “Pacífico” if possible). On cue, all together, the performers blow into full bottles with a short burst as if tuning up.

**Adagio.** The players blow once into their bottles after each drink (swig) until the last performer finishes. The performers drink at their own rate so the sounds are random. After each drink, the sound is different from the one before and from the sounds of the other players. As each player finishes the beer, the player puts the bottle on the table.

**Rondo.** When the last person finishes drinking, all the players pick up their empty bottles and on cue all blow together three times into the bottles. The piece takes about 8 minutes.

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Tom Marioni with Master Printer Sam Carr-Prindle in the Crown Point studio, 2017.

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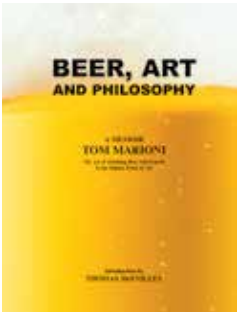
Join us at a reception with  
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Wednesday, September 13  
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**FROM THE CROWN POINT BOOKSTORE**

These books by Tom Marioni can be purchased from our gallery bookstore or from our online shop at [crownpoint.com](http://crownpoint.com).



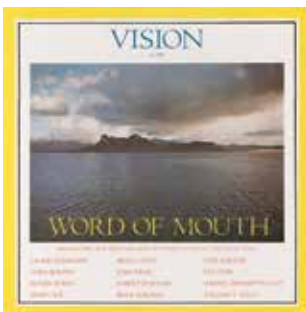
*Beer, Art and Philosophy*  
A Memoir by Tom Marioni

Sol LeWitt said of this book: "I would encourage everyone to get to know the work of Tom Marioni. There are many discoveries and delights there. It won't make you a better person but will make you happy to be the one you are." Published by Crown Point Press, 2003. \$20



*Writings on Conceptual Art*

Tom Marioni writes that Conceptual Art is "idea oriented situations not directed at the production of static objects." This little book of Marioni's writings collected over thirty years will catch you up on some of the philosophy behind a defining art of our time. Marioni writes with humor and clarity. Published by Crown Point Press, 2000. \$10



*VISION #4: Word of Mouth*

VISION is a journal of contemporary art edited by Tom Marioni and published by Crown Point Press irregularly between 1975 and 1982. In 1980, twelve artists participated in a conference sponsored by VISION on the South Pacific island of Ponape. Each artist gave a twelve-minute talk/reading/performance that was recorded and produced on vinyl LPs. Artists included are Marina Abramovic, Laurie Anderson, Chris Burden, Daniel Buren, John Cage, Joan Jonas, Brice Marden, Tom Marioni, Pat Steir, and William T. Wiley. The set of three records comes with an illustrated booklet documenting the trip. \$75

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