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ALLAN McCOLLUM
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Allan McCollum. *Natural Copies from the Coal Mines of Central Utah, 1991.*

ing a white plaster cast of the famous "chained dog" found in Pompeii and made directly from a cast in the Vesuvius Museum, of which 50 are presented in this exhibition. This show, which includes series comprising cultural and biological objects, gives an idea of the different ways in which the artist approaches these two categories. In the former, we have 340 *Plaster Surrogates*, which cover the monochrome, picture mounts and frames, and question the status of painting; six large elements from the *Perfect Vehicles* (begun in 1985), creating a perfect archetypal form of an urn or a vase, as a paradigm of a certain idea of beauty; *Over Ten Thousand Individual Works* (1987-1989), comprising more than ten thousand small, salmon pink objects made from

Allan McCollum is continuing with his exploration of the uniqueness of the artwork and its reproduction using the technique of molding. This is a paradox he expounds to spectacular effect in his works. Speaking of his *Surrogate Paintings*, a series begun in 1978, he has pointed out that uniqueness can be defined only by its opposite. In fact, in the seemingly endless series of works which he lays out with meticulous care in the spaces of galleries and museums, each individual piece differs from the others by virtue of a tiny detail of form or format, or by a subtle feature of its paint or color. Thus, while the works initially look like multiples, each one is in fact unique, the exception being the strictly identical copies of *The Dog from Pompeii* (a series begun in 1990), featur-



Allan McCollum, *The Dog From Pompeii, 1991.*

casts of everyday objects and constituting a repertoire of forms that can be combined in pairs to make new objects; and the *Drawings* (begun in 1988), heraldic forms done in pencil and composed from the unlimited permutations afforded by straight lines and curves which could easily run into billions. In the latter, apart from *The Dog from Pompeii*, there are 180 elements from the *Lost Objects* (begun in 1991), which are painted casts of fossils of dinosaur bones from the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh; the *Natural Copies from the Coal Mines of Central Utah* (begun in 1994), painted casts of dinosaur foot prints of which, to date, the artist has realized 352 elements.

It goes without saying that, apart from its suggestion of a parallel with museum collections and of a fascination with arithmetic and filling spaces, the sheer quantity of pieces in each series also makes it necessary for the artist to keep a numbered inventory for storage and for installation, the form of which is different for each exhibition. One wonders, might not the choice of "natural" referents freighted with memory, the series of which also tend to be smaller, be the expression of a certain unease on the part of the artist faced with the aestheticism of the objects in the previous series? But then, given that the objects are always casts, these works continually signal an absence, the loss of something that is given no name.

(Translation, C. Penwarden)



Allan McCollum, *Lost Objects*, 1991.