

ARTFORUM

Július Koller and Jiří Kovanda

LUDLOW 38

38 Ludlow Street

July 7–August 16

The only witness to Jiří Kovanda's 1977 act of scooping debris into a pile and scattering it again was his friend Pavel Tuc, whose photograph of a moment in the process is a trace of this private and eccentric performance. Kovanda's labels for such documents describe the contents of his actions, and place the photographs in brief, droll narratives. Those displayed at Ludlow 38 include *I carry some water from the river in my cupped hands and release it a few meters downriver . . .*, 1977, and *I arrange to meet with several of my friends . . . Suddenly I started to run*, 1978. The exhibition also includes works by Július Koller made in Bratislava around the same time. A cutout from a photograph of a landscape is shaped like a flying saucer and tilts menacingly, while diagrammatic drawings on postcards variously expand on the acronym UFO with words like UTOPIAN, UNIVERSAL, OBSERVATION, and FUTURIST. Koller and Kovanda are split between two rooms, but—in a curatorial flourish resonant with the artists' works—a stray piece by each hangs out of bounds. The juxtaposition of the two encourages a comparison between disturbances in two types of environments, urban and verbal. Koller's use of the flying saucer as the embodiment of the non sequitur accentuates Kovanda's choice to be an alien in his own city.

Amid the selection of photographs and documents, an assemblage of two wooden boards roped together and inserted between two corners of the front gallery is the only work with heft. Kovanda made it for Ludlow 38. It demonstrates that his interventions extend beyond performative actions, as do two concurrent solo shows in Chelsea on view until August 14. Andrew Kreps is showing his drawings and collages from the 1970s and '90s, so slight they are little more than traces of the artist's touch on the paper, while a new installation at WallSpace measures the gallery's perimeter with a rope strung along the wall. The endurance and consistency of Kovanda's art suppresses the temptation to read his or Koller's work as a politicized chafing against Czechoslovakia's socialist bureaucracy. Like other contemporaneous Conceptual artists, Kovanda and Koller confronted prescribed patterns of living and thinking to explore other ways of being.

— *Brian Droitcour*



View of "Július Koller and Jiří Kovanda," 2009.