

# sculpture

## NEW YORK

### Charles Ray

#### Matthew Marks

Charles Ray's wizardry with boundary-breaking was conspicuous in this low-tech but high-interest exhibition. Three works from a little more than 20 years ago defied ceiling, floor, and wall, showing the viewer how simple interventions can result in sculptures of startling intelligence and rough beauty. In each piece, Ray conceals a motor or pump that causes the sculpture to do what it does, but his instruments, while concealed, feel rudimentary. Ray is a thoroughly classical postmodern sculptor, if such a characterization makes sense. He creates one-off pieces that range widely without necessarily relating closely to each other—for example, there are the pictures of him wrapped around a branch in a tree, which contrast with the Minimalist *Ink Box* (1986), a black steel cube filled to the brim with black ink (the latter is a cousin of *Ink Line* [1987], one of the three works in the show).

Much of the pleasure of this exhibition derived from speculation about how the sculptures were devised. Press materials confirm that machinery of a basic sort is involved, but still, we don't know *how* each sculpture was built, and so a mystery attaches itself to the works. *Ink Line* is a marvelous trick of the eye, consisting of a thin column of ink



Charles Ray, *Ink Line*, 1987. Ink, electric motor, pump, and plastic, dimensions variable.

running from ceiling to wall. Using an electric motor and pump, Ray has created a compelling illusion whose subtle changes document movement—from a few feet away, the line feels solid and static, but up close one notices small aberrations on the surface, which demonstrate that the ink is, in fact, mov-

ing. Just as the viewer must focus sharply on the ink surface of *Ink Box* in order to know that the top of the cube is liquid and not solid, so he or she must closely investigate the line of ink to determine that it is not *Wire* (1988), while not so dramatic, are also prepossessing. In *Spinning Spot*, a section of the floor, a circle



Charles Ray, *Spinning Spot*, 1987. Aluminum, electric motor, and electric components, 24 in.

24 inches in diameter, rotates at 33 rpm. Bemused at first, viewers wonder about its reference as well as its construction: Does the spinning spot refer to music LPs, which were ubiquitous at the time? Whatever its meaning, *Spinning Spot* exists as a compelling visual conundrum in which a piece of the floor rotates at a consistent speed. The gee-whiz factor, present in all three sculptures, is particularly strong here. *Moving Wire* (1988) also has a seemingly simple appearance; it is

composed of a single strand of wire 8.5 feet in length. Both ends come out of the wall some 14 inches apart from each other. Gradually the wire moves in and out of the wall—as one end lengthens and pulls out toward the viewer, the other end diminishes and moves back into the wall. *Moving Wire*, like its two companions, may seem conceptually simple; however, all three pieces develop a singular sleight of hand and prove compelling as art.

—Jonathan Goodman