

Joseph Grigely *The Gregory Battcock Archive*  
 Marian Goodman Gallery, London 21 June – 29 July

In any visit to an exhibition there's always something of the shifty air of dumpster-diving; sifting through someone else's stuff, trying to piece together what kind of person, or persona, has moved on from the things that have been left behind. We're only temporary trespassers, haunted by the absent spectres we conjure from the remains. *The Gregory Battcock Archive* is doubly haunted, a small room of seven elegant vitrines filled with photographs, letters, scripts, zines, postcards and other ephemera, accompanied by several posters and one small, moody painting on the wall; the ghosts in this room are not only Battcock, a writer and critic who was active in the heyday of 1960s and 70s New York City and was found murdered in 1980, but also Joseph Grigely, the artist who accidentally stumbled upon Battcock's papers during the 1990s after a storage company closed, and left its clients' possessions strewn across a floor of Grigely's studio building. Grigely's resulting artwork, *The Gregory Battcock Archive* (2009–16), isn't so much an archive as a subjective selection from Battcock's papers – or, more specifically, some stuff that Grigely held on to before the rest was donated to the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art – that has been shown in various places over the past seven years, including the 2014 Whitney Biennial, and now here in the UK for the first time.

Admittedly, before visiting this show I was familiar with neither figure; Grigely's work is apparently usually based upon formal arrangements of personal notes, observations and doodles on scraps of paper that have resulted from the deaf artist's written conversations. This is a different kind of ordering, Grigely piecing together a portrait of a man he never knew directly from salvaged bits and bobs. Unlike most other archivists, Grigely gets his name on the door as the author of the work, but once we're inside, he is completely eclipsed by the ebullient Battcock, who we first meet, wearing only a white T-shirt and a jock strap, clutching a baseball bat and staring cheerfully over his shoulder out from a photograph. The sense gleaned from the remains presented is that Battcock was almost manically energetic; if he wasn't writing about the incipient Minimalism, Conceptualism or video art of the time, or writing letters to his local post office to complain about the service, he was taking cruise ships around the world, or cruising in the parks of New York – activities he still also found the time to document in meticulously explicit diaries. In between sombre exhibition leaflets, art-history lecture notes and pictures of a technicolour tanned Battcock in dapper suits, it seems that whether it was art,

food or sex, he was always chasing a new fix with a bright-eyed intensity.

An unexpected highlight is simply the mundanity of it, such as a 1972 letter to Lawrence Weiner in which Battcock expresses his interest in writing a feature on the artist, while also asking for the money to do so from Weiner's gallerist. Weiner's reply is a cool and unhelpful no, but it's both depressing and oddly comforting to know that even in the hallowed days of art dematerialising it was still the same old wrangling, finagling artworld. Battcock's way of dealing with this is evidenced in copies of *Trylon & Perisphere*, the zine he edited, as well as his contributions to *Gay* magazine and *The New York Review of Sex and Politics*, with a personal, candid style of art criticism: catty and social, his own way of exposing the mechanisms of the artworld. It's both excessive and touching, and a potent reminder of potentials that criticism has yet to fully explore. 'Do not upstage Professor Battcock!' it says at the top of one set of typed notes for a talk; Grigely took this to heart, perhaps too much so. But if this archive does bring Battcock back into the present, it is in a manner that is staid and settled – exactly what, as much as I can tell from this far distance, Battcock wouldn't want to be.

Chris Fite-Wassilak



*The Gregory Battcock Archive* (detail), 2009–16, various inscribed and printed documents from Gregory Battcock's personal archive, printed captions, seven vitrines, five framed posters and one painting, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, Paris & London