

# BERNAR VENET

## *Looking Forward: 1961-1984*

8 June — 22 July 2017

Private View: Wednesday 7 June, 6-8pm

Blain|Southern  
4 Hanover Square  
London W1S 1BP



Bernar Venet in his studio, New York, 1978  
Courtesy Archives Bernar Venet, New York and Blain|Southern

Bernar Venet, *Looking Forward: 1961-1984* traces the development of the artist's distinct conceptual mode, focussing on examples of works that were pivotal in defining his practice. It will be the French artist's first solo show in London since the ICA in 1976. He was in his thirties at the time yet had already been the subject of a career retrospective in New York and was widely esteemed for his role in the development of conceptual art.

1961 was a significant turning point for the young artist. While conscripted to military service in France he was preoccupied by the question of how to free his art work from personal expression. He started employing performance, sound and randomised painting in order to avoid the idioms of pictorial art. After noticing tar dripping down the cliffs in an old quarry, he became fascinated by the physical qualities of this material and how it adhered to the surface, beginning two new bodies of work as a result. By dripping industrial paint onto discarded cardboard he created *Déchets*, whereas in his *Goudron* works he demonstrated a different application using tar, firstly onto paper and later onto canvas. On occasion he even used his feet to avoid identifiable form or obvious signs of the artist's hand. Later the same year, with *Gravier Goudron*, he became one of the first artists to create a solely auditory work from recorded noise. By 1963 he had presented *Tas de charbon (Pile of Coal)*, the first sculpture to have no determinable form or fixed dimensions.

The timing of these events is notable when considered in relation to the rise of Arte Povera in Italy, and Minimalism and conceptual art in New York, where Venet found himself in 1966 as his interest moved towards science and mathematics as starting points for creating art. He began his exploration of information specific to an esoteric area of study, presenting a bevelled industrial cylinder alongside an annotated diagram of the object (*Tube n° 150/30/45/100*). Presenting them unchanged and without metaphor, Venet began his pursuit for total monosemy, where an object refers to nothing beyond itself.

He began to mine the rich seams of information from highly specialised professions that were readily available in New York. From academia to Wall Street, Venet pinpointed individuals who were experts in their field and over the following four years he created wall-based work from visual presentations of their data such as diagrams, graphs, equations, weather and financial market reports (as seen in *How to Pick a Fund*, 1969). He also staged and recorded performances in the form of lectures by such experts, notably with physicists from Columbia University at Judson Church Theatre, NY in 1968.

Venet found that the precise geometrical definitions of angles, arcs and chords that determined an outline, allowed him to reengage with aesthetics. Firstly as in *Position of Two Angles of 120° and 60°*, 1976, it dictated the shape of his canvases and then, in 1979, the outline alone became the work in itself, as in *Position of Two Major Arcs of 268.5° Each*.

In 1979 Venet also made *Position of an Indeterminate Line* and shifted his focus from pure geometry. Created randomly without the aid of instruments, this graphite-on-wood work was in sharp visual contrast to earlier works. The introduction of chance into his practice, over time, created various opportunities for him to explore new aesthetics in works that remained rooted in mathematics.

Whether geometrically defined or indeterminate, the relief of Venet's wall-based works moved closer over time towards sculpture, first connecting with both the wall and the ground in *Indeterminate Line*, 1984. His free-standing three dimensional sculptures of *Arcs*, *Angles*, *Straight* and *Indeterminate Lines* have been exhibited in museums and institutions around the globe, from The Guggenheim, New York to the Château de Versailles.

Alongside this comprehensive exhibition, Blain|Southern is also proud to announce Bernar Venet at Cliveden, an outdoor exhibition of Venet's sculptures at the National Trust property in Buckinghamshire. This is the first exhibition in the National Trust's contemporary arts programme, at this historic location.

Venet will also feature in Frieze Sculpture from 5 July – 8 October in Regent's Park, London.

## Notes to Editors

### About the artist

The French conceptual artist Bernar Venet (b.1941, Château-Arnoux-Saint-Auban, France) rose to prominence in the late Sixties as a pioneer of the conceptual art scene in New York. He moved to the city in 1966 and quickly became instrumental in developing a radical new proposition involving the use of mathematics and scientific language alongside artists such as On Kawara, Lawrence Weiner, Joseph Kosuth, Art & Language and Robert Barry.

In 1971 Venet broke off his artistic activities as part of a plan he had defined years before. He devoted himself to theory and teaching at the Sorbonne in Paris, and was the subject of a retrospective exhibition in New York at only 30 years old. He resumed his art-making practice in 1976, focussing on all variants of the line as a fundamental subject. *Arcs*, *Angles* and both *Straight* and *Indeterminate Lines* have come to define his aesthetic, with mathematical investigations of chance and chaos providing a conceptual grounding to how his sculptures are realised.

In 1994 he was invited by Mayor Jacques Chirac to present twelve sculptures from his *Indeterminate Line* series on the Champ de Mars, beneath the Eiffel Tower, Paris, and his large-scale sculptures went on to tour to 35 cities across Europe, Asia, Australasia and the Americas. In 2011, Venet became the fourth contemporary artist to be offered a solo exhibition on the grounds of the Château de Versailles. He has been awarded France's highest decoration, the *Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur, Commandeur dans l'ordre des Arts et des Lettres* from the French Ministry of Culture and was the 2013 recipient of the *International Julio González Sculpture Prize* from Valencia's IVAM and the *Grand Prix des Arts de la Ville de Paris*. In February 2016 the *International Sculpture Center* in New York presented him with the *Lifetime Achievement Award* for his exemplary contributions to the field of sculpture.

### About Blain|Southern

Blain|Southern is a contemporary art gallery based in London and Berlin. The gallery represents an international roster of contemporary artists and is the world-wide representative of The Estate of Lynn Chadwick. The gallery's recent exhibitions include Mat Collishaw, Jonas Burgert, Amy Feldman, Tim Noble & Sue Webster, Nasan Tur, Chiharu Shiota, Ed Moses, Bruce Nauman and the critically acclaimed group show, *Revolt of the Sage*.

### **About National Trust**

The National Trust is a conservation charity founded in 1895 by three people who saw the importance of our nation's heritage and open spaces, and wanted to preserve them for everyone to enjoy. More than 120 years later, these values are still at the heart of everything the charity does.

Entirely independent of Government, the National Trust looks after more than 250,000 hectares of countryside, 775 miles of coastline and hundreds of special places across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Over 20 million people visit every year, and together with 4.5 million members and over 62,000 volunteers, they help to support the charity in its work to care for special places forever, for everyone.

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk)

### **About Cliveden**

In 1666 Cliveden was acquired by George Villiers, the 2nd Duke of Buckingham. The estate he purchased consisted of 160 acres and just two small lodges. Due to its commanding position on a chalk cliff, the name Cliff-dene was given to the estate. The Duke was a favourite of King Charles II and wanted a residence, close to London, at which he could entertain in style.

William Winde, Buckingham's architect, created a terrace upon which to build the house. This terrace has formed the foundations of the two subsequent houses at Cliveden and, although altered over time, much of Buckingham's design remains. Huge amounts of earth were excavated and moved from the north to the south side to create the 400-foot long platform that today is known as the Parterre.

The current house owes its elegant architecture to Sir Charles Barry, famous for designing the Palace of Westminster. His masterpiece, created for the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland in the 1850s, is the third house here, the other two having burned down.

<http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/cliveden>

### **About Frieze Sculpture**

Frieze Sculpture is London's largest outdoor exhibition. Featuring 23 leading artists from 5 July to 8 October, it offers a free outdoor exhibition for London and its international visitors throughout the summer months. Selected by Clare Lilley (Director of Programme, Yorkshire Sculpture Park), Frieze's first-ever summer exhibition in The Regent's Park will bring together 23 new and significant works by 20th-century masters and leading contemporary artists from around the world, including Rasheed Araeen, John Chamberlain, Urs Fischer, Gary Hume, KAWS, Alicja Kwade, Michael Craig-Martin, Eduardo Paolozzi, Jaume Plensa, Thomas J Price, Ugo Rondinone, Hank Willis Thomas and Bernar Venet.

<https://frieze.com/article/frieze-sculpture-2017>

Blain|Southern  
4 Hanover Square  
London W1S 1BP

Monday to Friday: 10am - 6pm  
Saturday: 10am - 5pm

+44(0) 20 7493 4492  
blainsouthern.com

For further information on the exhibition, please contact Laura Callendar at Blain|Southern

T: +44 (0) 20 7493 4492

M: +44 (0) 79 3904 9731

E: [laura@blainsouthern.com](mailto:laura@blainsouthern.com)