

## Bernar Venet

The French conceptual artist Bernar Venet (b.1941, Château-Arnoux-Saint-Auban, France) rose to prominence in the late Sixties through the avant-garde 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.

It is Venet's insatiable curiosity and desire to push both his own limits and the frontiers of art, that have led to him making a significant impact on the development of contemporary art. For example, his installation, *Tas de Charbon, (Pile of Coal)*, 1963, is widely recognised as the first sculpture without a specific shape and also as the first recorded instance of an unmanipulated natural material presented as a work of art.

Even whilst in military service in France, during his twenties, Venet created opportunities to experiment with painting and produced sound performance pieces in the parade ground of his barracks. Until 1966 he predominately created paintings with tar and cardboard relief works.

He travelled to New York in 1966 and made a permanent move there by the end of the year, encouraged by fellow French artist and New York resident Arman, who he knew from Nice. In 1971, after four productive years in Soho, 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 with a renewed focus on the line as his main subject.

Focussing now 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. From this point Venet navigates significant sculptural issues such as equilibrium, control and the relationship with the environment.

He created the first of his seminal *Indeterminate Lines* by experimenting in a series of wood reliefs. He soon developed these formalist sculptures in the medium of steel, a material central to his theories, specifically Venet says that his sculptures are about 'how the material resists. It is a test of strength—a battle between myself and the piece of metal'.

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; which went on to tour to 35 cities across the rest of Europe, Asia, and the Americas. More recently, in 2011, Venet became the fourth contemporary artist to be offered a solo exhibition in 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.