

Call for Papers

Jean Tinguely Revisited: Critical Rereadings and New Perspectives

An international conference at Museum Tinguely in Basel. Organized by Dr. Sandra Beate Reimann with Roland Wetzler, Dr. Andres Pardey, Annja Müller-Alsbach, Tabea Panizzi and Andrea Absenger.

Museum Tinguely, Basel, March 20–22, 2025
Deadline for submissions: September 1, 2024

To mark the centenary of Jean Tinguely's birth, Museum Tinguely in Basel will host an academic conference from March 20 to 22, 2025. The conference aims to initiate, encourage, discuss, and publish new art-historical research as well as interdisciplinary studies on the work of Tinguely and his circle. The conference's main objective is to update and critically examine Tinguely's art in terms of contemporary issues, theories, and discourse.

Jean Tinguely (1925–1991) was one of the most important artists in the second half of the twentieth century. His oeuvre was fundamental to the renewal of art that occurred in the 1950s and 1960s. The key feature of his work is movement. Starting in 1954, he created kinetic reliefs and sculptures in his studio on Impasse Ronsin in Paris. Tinguely used sound as an integral part of his works (*Reliefs sonores*), integrating chance and conceiving interactive works such as his drawing machines (*Machines à dessiner* and *Méta-Matics*). He was an adherent of Nouveau Réalisme and maintained many contacts with artists and artist networks.

Tinguely's destructive performance *Homage to New York*, held on March 17, 1960, in the sculpture garden of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, catapulted the artist to international fame. His actions and happenings make him one of the early European practitioners of performative art. Particularly characteristic of his kinetic assemblages from the early 1960s is the use of scrap metal and waste products of civilization. In 1963 he decisively ended this phase of his work as well as his association with Nouveau Réalisme when he began to uniformly cover his machine sculptures with matte, black paint.

Collaborative work was central to Tinguely's art practice, ranging from his shared projects with Yves Klein, Eva Aeppli, Niki de Saint-Phalle, Robert Rauschenberg, and Larry Rivers to exhibition and architecture projects that took on the form of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* and involved up to fifteen artists (*Dylaby*, *HON—En Katedral*, *Le Crocodrome de Zig et Puce*, and *Le Cyclop*). Tinguely was also active as an artist in various theater projects, creating stage sets and working as an actor with his artist friends in shared theater productions.

In the 1970s Tinguely's work became increasingly monumental; his large mechanisms became more and more spectacular, culminating in 1987 with *Grosse Méta-Maxi-Maxi-Utopia*, which extends over eight meters high and seventeen meters long. In this period, his music machines (*Méta-Harmonies*) were a pivotal group of works. Tinguely's interest in cars and car racing were also reflected in his oeuvre. The use of animal bones

and skulls, often in the form of altars that refer to Catholicism, was particularly characteristic of his late work.

Tinguely's sculptural oeuvre was accompanied by constant drawing. His drawings include a broad spectrum—ranging from creative jottings, letter drawings, preparatory sketches, and processual production drawings to independent works—that are characterized by their spontaneity, collage technique, multilingualism, and an ironically associative interplay of words and images.

Although Tinguely experienced his breakthrough as an artist in 1959 and was successfully pursuing an international career by 1960, his work has played a subordinate role in art-historical research for a long time. It was not until the first and especially the second decade of the twenty-first century that his work began to be studied and contextualized in art-historical research as well as in exhibition projects and accompanying catalog publications. Many aspects of his oeuvre have not been explored extensively or have yet to be examined at all. The artist's pioneering achievements (including performativity, dissolution of sculpture into ephemeral occurrences, choice of material and criticism of consumerism, interactivity, and immersive situations), which in the late 1950s already had a decisive influence on the development and understanding of art, are not well known, considering that writing on the history of sculpture is essentially focused on the development of Minimalism and Postminimalism. At the same time, changes in discourse (performativity and event terms, actor-network theory, and machine concepts) provide scholars with an opportunity to view Tinguely's work from a contemporary perspective and, most of all, to challenge it critically (especially in terms of gender, postcolonial discourse, as well as animal ethics and aesthetics). With this call, the Museum Tinguely would like to create a platform for the newest research on Tinguely's oeuvre and inspire scholars to consider it in new ways.

We would particularly like to encourage young scholars to submit a contribution. In addition to art-historical studies, we also welcome contributions from the context of media studies and other relevant humanities.

While the following **possible subjects** are envisioned for the conference, this does not rule out other proposals:

- the role of kinetic art in the development of sculpture and installation, especially the overcoming of its status as an object in the second half of the twentieth century; ephemeral, performative, participatory, and multisensorial aspects of Tinguely's art as well as his artistic context; immersion; *Gesamtkunstwerk*, art total
- institutional criticism; criticism of monuments; antiart; art in the streets; art and everyday life
- a postcolonial perspective on Tinguely's *Baluba* series and the reception of Patrice Lumumba in art and culture circles of the 1960s
- codification of gender characteristics in the work of the artist and in collaborations with Niki de Saint Phalle and Eva Aeppli (such as *Le Paradis fantastique* and *La Vittoria*)
- the use of bones in Tinguely's late work and ethical aspects regarding animal bones and human remains

- collective art projects in Tinguely's work and artistic context; the meaning of European and transatlantic artist networks for Tinguely's work and for the development of art in the second half of the twentieth century
- Tinguely's theater and stage projects and the convergence of visual arts and theater starting in the 1960s
- Tinguely's understanding of machines and the development of machine concepts in art in the second half of the twentieth century
- Tinguely's realm of thought and his recourse on specific philosophical positions (such as the *Philosophers* series)
- social criticism and criticism of consumerism in the artist's work
- connection between high art and popular culture; strategies of accessibility; role and enhancement of the dimension of playfulness in twentieth-century art
- irony as an artistic strategy
- size and spectacle as an artistic strategy
- the artist's media strategy and artistic self-representation in Tinguely's work and in artistic circles starting in the 1960s
- history of the reception of Tinguely's oeuvre
- etc.

Proposals for alternative formats such as moderated discussions, short workshops, performances, and interventions on the conference's subject matter are equally welcome.

The conference will be held in German and English. The physical presence of participants is required. (Please contact us regarding any language barriers or physical limitations; we are happy to propose individual solutions.) Lectures will be remunerated with 600 Swiss Francs. Video and audio recordings of the contributions are to be posted on the museum's website. Following the conference, a written publication of chosen contributions in their original language will be made available online.

Submissions:

Please submit a short proposal (no more than 500 words) for a twenty-minute presentation and a CV of your academic profile (no more than 250 words) by email to tinguelybasel.conference@roche.com

Submissions may be made in German or English.

Suggestions for alternative formats may be submitted by email to the same address with a detailed proposal and the intended participants.

Deadline for submissions: September 1, 2024

You will receive a response regarding your participation by September 30, 2024.

Travel policy: For ecological reasons we prefer to organize transportation by train (second class). The museum will organize accommodation in Basel for all participants.

Location:

Museum Tinguely
Paul Sacher-Anlage 1
4058 Basel
Switzerland

www.tinguely.ch

The Museum Tinguely is a cultural commitment of Roche

[>> Link to the conference and the Call for Papers](#)