

The work of Cerith Wyn Evans creates moments of rupture within the structures of existing communication—whether visual, audible or conceptual—using strategies such as refraction, juxtaposition, superimposition, contradiction, occlusion and revelation. For this exhibition at the Museo Tamayo, Wyn Evans addresses material and immaterial time and the effects that the physical phenomena of light and sound have on space. In this interview, the artist talks about the relationship between the works and the architecture of the museum, presenting visual or sound lines as if there were creating a concert among themselves.



The first work that people can identify when they enter the museum is $E=C=L=I=P=S=E$. It brings together a number of elements present in the show and in your work, but it also depicts a very specific way of looking at an eclipse: the path of the total eclipse, as it goes across the earth.

Yes, in a sense. It's a text which already existed and describes a very specific event: the transit to the moon across the surface of the sun, and they both travel, from certain perspective, across the surface of the earth creating a total solar eclipse. The history of this text and the fact of having choice it comes very close to the relationship that I have with the building. It's even possible to think that it is dedicated, quite specifically, to the space that it occupies: the Museo Tamayo. It's kind of a love letter. One of the things that strikes me about it, is the way in which this space presents itself and the way you're encompassed by this amazing use and application of the sunlight.

Also, during the day, there are shadows cast by the architecture. Even if your visit to the museum is a short one, you'll notice that the sun is moving. This courtyard is somewhat of a sundial, that is why you can see the angles changing, feel a correspondence with the time that you spend there, and notice how the natural light has this extraordinary and beautiful way of articulating the structure. This is surprising, especially for a space so brutal, heavy, concrete, and monumental, with all its references to ancient cultures and Aztec architecture, for which the sun was an incredibly important part of that experience.

This piece it's just a small footnote to something which is happening in the building already. It is just an observation, which strangely happens through this kind of parallel time, moving across the surface of the globe.

There are two things in this text that are interesting in relation to all of your work. One is that, I can imagine, you chose that text



because it affirms the position of the viewer and, at the same time, it distributes it along a line, as it were a very embodied or physical perspective of the total solar eclipse. On the other hand, it's a very poetic text. All your works that are linked to texts related to poetry or music, which are very close to each other as forms of expression. In a way, I feel as if I'm always searching, for want of a better word. It's kind of a *modus operandi*, of constantly looking for other ways to articulate and speak about things that we are experiencing, and which maybe we don't have.

The language is too blunt, too basic, too brutal, too specific, too old-fashioned or too not quite up to speed with our experience. This insufficiency is a great ground of abundance for me: the sense that you can do something with a piece of music and a poetical relationship to rational thought, that you might not be able to do if you were writing a calculus of mathematics.

In this sense, the way the titles are written down in woks such as $S=U=T=R=A$, $T=R=A=N=S=F=E=R=E=N=C=E$ and $S=H=A=D=E$ is significant.

If people choose to spend time to go in, they will notice there are things embedded in the works, which will emerge slowly—as the works do to a certain extent—, throughout the space. Probably the way in which people will perceive the exhibition will be as a pathway through the space. That's unconscious—for want of a better word, because it's a very insufficient term and clouded in all kinds of ways. We we can agree that there's a sort of narrative or a progression, that something is temporal, and it comes from what we can assume is the beginning of the exhibition: several paths that you might be able to take, but not one of them is particularly right or wrong. But likely, the works will reveal themselves in the different spaces through the movement of the viewer, the observant, through the space. These things have, to a certain extent, a corollary with a piece of music that extends and happens through time. It's based in a narrative structure that will have a succession of different events that reveal themselves.

Not that I think in such linear way, because the lines get a little bit more blurred and complicated than that, but there is a consecutive experience of immersing yourself in the pleasures of viewing the exhibition, turning around the corner and seeing things. There are sidelines in the extraordinary and strange porousness of the building, which has very generous and quite surprising vistas that open up.

From a certain position, you're going to be able to see things shining from a space that you've been a few minutes previously or that you are about to enter. I want to be respectful and celebrate these kinds of opportunities that the building offers to the viewer.

In the case of $S=H=A=D=E$, the pages of the poem *A Throw of the Dice will Never Abolish Chance* by Stéphane Mallarmé has kind of a visual rhythmic: the way you encounter it is not through the words. Even if the visitors have never read it, they can know it contents. The erasure of the poem is not really a negation, but more of a bringing forward of these rhythmical elements, a place where poetry gets closer to music.

There is a great deal that can be said about it and there are certain places that are more appropriate, even though "appropriate" is a kind of contestable term regarding how you might look at or approach to what the great writer William Burroughs called "Ports of entry". There are multiple points and ports of entry, windows allowing the person to feel entitled, to have their own experience guided by the various things that the work tries to bring into a kind of material reality in the space.

But we can't expect everyone to know. This Mallarmé poem is a dense, important and historical text about chance: every revolution



Images:
Cerith Wyn Evans (2018).
Installation view at Museo Tamayo, Mexico City.
Photo: © Agustín Garza



is the throw of the dice. In a sense, the revolutionary aspect of this is not lost on me in relation to the history of Mexico and the Museo Tamayo, and the revolutionary politics that have been such a wellspring for so much creativity and a kind of merging of the social and political aesthetic, which has had such an important part to play in art and culture here.

Chance... is a French 19th century poem travelled to Mexico City by the hands and eyes of Marcel Broodthaers, who is such a great poet and a savage critic of bourgeois norms and colonialism. These sorts of things were very much a kind of foundation stone for his poetry, by taking it a step further than him blocking out of the text and then excising it completely. He turned the text into a window, quite literally, where the words are cut out of the paper. I hope, in some sense, that it can supply the lubricating fuel that one might need to let the imagination flow along this territory, along these lines, through the spaces that open and reveal themselves. It's a kind of a microcosm with all that windows that happen on another scale, not only within the building. There's a kind of ripple effect that goes out, that is sort of sonorous on various scales. The work is very acutely involved with notions of the "hic et nunc" (the here and now) in relation to scale. Scale has ways of appearing that haven't just to do with mass, volume and weight, and the rather kind of tortuous rules that the physical world would place on us.

The predominant element is neon. How did you first come into contact with this medium, which has been so present in your work for many years now?

It's strange because it almost comes by default, and I wish that it really hadn't become quite such a predictable sort of signature or over-determined medium.

On one level, there's the history of neon that you could associate with the great artists of the second part of the twentieth century who have made it their own: Mario Merz, Bruce Nauman, James Turrell, etc. I could go on and on and on, but they are by far the most interesting artists who have adopted this medium. However, I wouldn't be interested in being part of a group show gathering all these artists who work with neon. There is something banal about the fact that you would just say "these are artists who work with bronze" or any medium with certain formal, socioeconomic, historical, symbolic properties. I mean, that would be similar to a Google search: you're going to be in a form of decadent, late capitalist, consumerist paradise, gambling, Las Vegas.

There is also a relationship with electricity.

Yes, it needs the electrical supply, which is inherently social and political. We are all kind of plugged into it, and all hell is let loose when your phone is out of battery. This is the world that we live in now, where people are junkies and mainlining into these kinds of powers without questioning one single little thing about it. So, I try to bring forward these cartographies from performances in space, as if they were the movements of a non-actor—an exercise probably prescribed and written down in a text since at least the 14th century—or kind of an homage to Marcel Duchamp, such an important icon especially now as his *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* is just about coming up to its hundredth anniversary.

This is perhaps most evident here in *The Illuminating Gas... (after Oculist Witnesses)*.

The *Oculist Witnesses* by Marcel Duchamp, to a certain extent, is his poetics because he allegedly derived this image from a test card that an optician or an ophthalmologist would use to measure how good



your eyesight was. It comes from this kind of strange, and very *du-champian* notion of lifting something and taking it from its trajectory, in relation to an optic, and then considering it seen from a slightly different angle and then skewing it—in a very strange Duchamp way—into this obviate reflective, two dimensional aspect of what it is to look at these radial forms as if they have been slanted through an axonometric projection.

We do not have insufficient means to be able to speak about work, but I don't want to be seen as perverse by not making it easy for people. Do we not have a responsibility to keep an open mind to these things and come to a point of correspondence, even if it's not an agreement? Francis Bacon would say: "in art as in friendship, agreement is not what we look for." In my experience, which surely can't be unique, the more time that I allow myself to spend with something, the more gratifying it can be, even if it causes me problems.



- Cerith Wyn Evans (Llanelli, United Kingdom, 1958) started his career as a filmmaker. Since the nineties, he has mainly produced pieces focused on language and perception, mainly through *in situ* projects. He has had solo exhibitions at the Tate Gallery (London), Haus Konstruktiv (Zurich), Museion Bolzano (Italy) and TBA-21 Augarten (Vienna), as well as in the Skulptur Projekte Münster (Germany), the 57th Venice Biennale, among other spaces.



Images:
Cerith Wyn Evans (2018).
Installation view at Museo Tamayo, Mexico City.
Photo: © Agustín Garza

S=U=T=R=A, 2017.
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