

"Eternal Flame is the title of the exhibition that I propose for the Palais de Tokyo. It is an artwork, an exhibition within an institution. What I want to do is to create—within an institution—a public space or moments of public space. A space for encounters, dialogue, engagement. A space in which to be, to stay, to spend time and a space in which to think. Eternal Flame is not an interactive exhibition, it is an active work, a work whose activity never ceases. This activity is the act of thinking. This is where the work's title comes from: the "Eternal Flame" of thought, the "Eternal Flame" of art and philosophy, the "Eternal Flame" of poetry, of what escapes us, of what I don't understand. "Eternal Flame" is also the fire that stays alive, the fire of ideas, concepts, projects. "Eternal Flame," it is also the Hearth around which we gather to warm ourselves, to talk and feel less alone, exchange our ideas, our projects, to test our positions. "Eternal Flame" is also a signal. It signals that something is not extinguished, that something is fed and maintained, that the form is always there."

- Thomas Hirschhorn

Since his "first exhibition" at Hôpital éphémère (1992), Thomas Hirschhorn (b. 1957, lives and works in Paris) has realized a great number of memorable projects in Paris: *Jeu de Paume* (1994); "Swiss-Swiss Democracy" (Centre Culturel Suisse, 2004); "Musée Précaire Albinet" (2004)... Ten years after "24H Foucault," Thomas Hirschhorn has returned to the Palais de Tokyo to present "Eternal Flame." Most of Thomas Hirschhorn's artworks play with familiar and urban forms that evoke stalls, flea markets, pamphlets or their mural form in the manner of *dazibao* in popular China. "Kiosques," "Monuments," "Altars," "Sculptures Directes" [Direct Sculptures] form the artist's typology of functional or votive apparatus. The "Kiosques" are directly inspired from the propaganda structures developed by Russian Constructivism; the "Monuments" are an homage to the work of great thinkers such as Spinoza, Bataille, Deleuze, Gramsci; and the "Altars" evoke spontaneous urban commemorations. If the "Sculptures Directes" are usually displayed inside the institutions, inspiration for the first version came from the Flame of Liberty (Quai de l'Alma, Paris) appropriated by the public as a votive altar dedicated to Princess Diana. Thomas Hirschhorn—though he typically rejects calls for retrospective exhibitions—has decided to reactivate the protocol "Presence and Production" for the Palais de Tokyo. Through this process, Thomas Hirschhorn renews with the notion of presence, so problematic throughout successive phases of classic and modern Art History. The usual opposition between the presence of the artwork and the artist in action is no longer relevant. This piece is open in its form, accessible and free, thereby creating an authentic public space inside the institution made available to a non-exclusive audience, welcoming art-lovers as much as those who do not have a particular inclination towards the aesthetic. Thomas Hirschhorn considers "Eternal Flame" as his own temporary studio, like a welcome center for

writers, poets, philosophers, human sciences researchers, who are left free to consider obligation towards the institution to engage in “cultural moderation.”

What is new and what is important in “Eternal Flame”

“Eternal Flame” as an artwork—as opposed to a cultural event—is standing up for “Art” as experience. “Eternal Flame” sets out to make a breakthrough going beyond consensus and the consumption of culture. Only art counts, only poetry, philosophy and literature can help. As an artist I am inviting philosophers, writers and poets, because I think that confronting their ideas and their thoughts can help us confront the time we are living in. They can help us confront the reality we are in, and they can help us confront the world we live in.

That is why I am asking the invited authors to share their work and their passion for what they have always been doing. And that is why I am not asking them to think up a cultural performance, I am not asking them to offer a product or entertain us with a cultural object. What I want to do is create an art space for their thought, their idea, for a concept.

What is new in “Eternal Flame” is for an audience to be created solely thanks to the ideas, thanks to the thoughts, thanks to the concepts of the contributors—poets, philosophers and writers. The audience will be created by the content itself, by the thought itself. The challenge to us—the contributor and me—will be to create the right conditions for the vision and theory of each author who is having a say to produce a resonance chamber, irrespective of whether the public is present or not. There will be no timetable, therefore there will be no program with set times. In my previous works involving philosophers or other contributors, I had never before suggested a physical space with no timetabling framework. In “Eternal Flame” contributors will for the first time themselves decide when to make their contribution. Thus I will be their first listener but also the person who backs them up, helping them to put everything they need in place.

The important thing is to be present, for me, the artist—the person issuing the invitation—to be present, and for me to create the conditions for a one-to-one dialogue, a one-to-one confrontation. But I will not be the only person “present”, there will be guests and the public too to give form to what may be called friendship between art, philosophy, poetry, writing. My problem as an artist is: to give form. “Eternal Flame” is the form of the friendship between art and philosophy, the friendship between art and poetry, the friendship between art and literature.

That friendship is based on what we—artists, poets, philosophers, writers—share: confrontation

with what is beyond us and what we fail to understand. “Eternal Flame” sets out to give form to that expanded friendship. “Eternal Flame” is a work of art, it is a sculpture dedicated to what is active and never stops: thought. The title of the work, “Eternal Flame”, comes from the conviction that the “flame” of thought, reflection, concepts and ideas will never stop burning provided we feed it so that it can become “eternal”. “Eternal Flame” is the form of what is uncertain, what is alive, what is to come, what is not guaranteed, and what is precarious: In other words what really matters. Having an idea, having a thought, having a plan, having a mission means having something to burn, to share, having fuel, creating fuel. The “Eternal Flame” has to be nurtured with this fuel.

“Eternal Flame” occupies an area of approximately 2000 sq. m., accessible free of charge, open from 12 noon to 12 midnight, from April 24 to June 23, 2014. In the course of the 52 days the exhibition lasts, 200 philosophers, writers, poets and intellectuals are being invited to share their work, their vision, their thinking, in two agoras. The artist will be present every day, along with the writer Manuel Joseph and the philosopher Marcus Steinweg. A library, a video library, Internet stations, a workshop, a bar, and a free publication produced daily on site will be available to the public every day.

Thomas Hirschhorn, March 2014

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