Cerith Wyn Evans was born in Wales, U.K., in 1958. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Saint Martin’s School of Art, London, in 1980, and a Master of Arts degree in film and video from the Royal College of Art, London, in 1984. Wyn Evans lives and works in London.

Selected Recent Solo Exhibitions
2002
“Cerith Wyn Evans,” Institute of Visual Culture/Kings College Chapel, Cambridge, U.K.

2001
“Cerith Wyn Evans,” Galerie Daniel Buchholz, Cologne, Germany
“Cerith Wyn Evans,” Kunsthaus Glarus, Glarus, Switzerland
“Cerith Wyn Evans,” Georg Kargl Gallery, Vienna, Austria

2000

1999
“Cerith Wyn Evans,” Deitch Projects, New York, NY

Selected Recent Group Exhibitions and Film Screenings
2002
“Documenta 11,” Kassel, Germany
“Cardinales,” Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Vigo, Vigo, Spain
“Meltdown at Modern Art Inc.,” The Art Newspaper, March 1999, no. 90.

1998
“From the Corner of the Eye,” Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Selected Recent Bibliography


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Cerith Wyn Evans: Centre for Contemporary Art, Kitakyushu, Japan, 1999.


Work in MATRIX
Take your desires for reality, 2003

University of California
Berkeley Art Museum

February 9, 2003
University of California
Berkeley Art Museum

Cerith Wyn Evans / miniMATRIX 201c

Concerned with the phenomenology of time, language, and perception, London-based artist Cerith Wyn Evans has been described by New York art critic Jerry Saltz as “a philosopher-artist who mixes traditions, materials, and techniques into elegant works full of intellectual anxiety.” He has worked in a wide variety of media including Morse code, strobe lights, mirrors, neon lights, and even orchids fertilized with his own urine. For his miniMATRIX exhibition, Wyn Evans continues an exploration of quotations crafted from fireworks and mounted on wooden scaffolding. He created his first firework piece in 1996; since then he has completed six pyrotechnic works, three of which have been ignited. The remaining three have been exhibited, unlit, in galleries and museums. Wyn Evans selects texts from literature, film history, and politics specific to the location in which the works are installed. He sees his pieces as captions or subtitles to a larger, unseen narrative, and uses them as a means to explore the role viewers play in the representation, perception, and translation of visual language. For the artist, the unlit gallery pieces represent suspense and propose a promise of articulation. A large indoor piece exhibited, unignited, at the ARC, Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, quoted Karl Marx: “BETTER THAT THE WHOLE WORLD SHOULD BE DESTROYED AND PERISH THAN THAT A FREE MAN SHOULD REFRAIN FROM ONE ACT TO WHICH HIS NATURE MOVES HIM.”

The text for Wyn Evans’s miniMATRIX firework piece: “TAKE YOUR DESIRES FOR REALITY,” a variation on a well-known quotation by Situationist Guy Debord, is the same as the first firework sculpture he ignited in 1996 on a rooftop in Rome. The Situationist International was born in September 1957 out of 25-year-old Debord’s desire to gather artists and writers to rethink the role of individuals in determining their own lives. The Situationists took from Jean-Paul Sartre their impetus for creating, as well as simply experiencing, “situation.” Focusing on the “suppression of art,” they intended to transform art and culture so as to fuse them into the everyday. They were against capitalist ideas of work and looked to play and spontaneity as the cornerstones necessary to modern life.

The Situationists achieved their greatest notoriety in May 1968 when students provoked a revolt against the Gaullist regime in the streets of Paris. At the end of 1962, a radical manifesto by Debord had surfaced that proved to have a major influence on events in France. Graffiti started appearing on walls all over Paris: “I take my desires for reality because I believe in the reality of my desires. Boredom is always counterrevolutionary.” The bastardization Wyn Evans presents is a particularly amusing twist, as it is altered to become a directive for material consumption. The artist originally spotted the phrase outside a boutique in Tokyo.

While Wyn Evans’s sentences made out of fireworks are legible in their unlit state, they metaphorically come alive when ignited, bringing forth the text’s meaning. The first letter is set alight and takes some time to catch, then the fire spreads slowly to its neighbor, and so on. The meaning appears to build faster and faster until it loses control and spills over the remaining lines of text, filling out so fast that it almost obscures itself. For a fraction of a second, the whole structure is ablaze, replete, and then the first letters begin to fizzle out at exactly the same pace that they had lit up. Then they disappear, leaving the text as it was before: legible, but only a ghost of its fully realized sense. Poignancy derives from the knowledge that the presence, and subsequent disappearance, are the sum total of the meaning of the sculpture. Art critic Greg Hilty aptly explained that the pace of the burning gives the meaning the added resonance of a historical act.

Wyn Evans says, “The lit fireworks I always saw as subtitles burning into the image, into the scene. (The texts are ignited in half-light, at twilight or dawn.) So the setting somehow ‘frames’ the text and determines it.” His choice of a revolutionary slogan associated with students and art for presentation at the UC Berkeley Art Museum is apt. As E.M. Forster noted, “How do I know what I think until I see what I say?”

Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson
Phyllis Wattis Matrix Curator

2 Cerith Wyn Evans, e-mail conversation with the author, March 20, 2002.
5 The description of the burning is from Hilty’s Parkett text. Ibid., p. 8.
6 Wyn Evans, e-mail conversation with the author, March 20, 2002.