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ARTS

Bernar Venet
Art Plural Gallery



- PHOTO: ANDREAS ZIMMERMANN

BERNAR Venet's concept of art is simple: "If it looks like art, I won't do it. If it doesn't look like art, I'm going to do it."

Since the 1960s, the famous Frenchman has passionately argued with gallerists and collectors who looked at his works and proclaimed these weren't art. Be they simple canvases smeared with tar, or a pile of charcoal strewn on the floor, his works were frequent attempts at expanding the debate on what makes art.

Today, the 71-year-old has garnered a fine reputation as a sculptor of monumental works that typically involves huge steel bars leaning against or snaking around buildings.

Smaller sculptures of arcs and rings - small by his standards but certainly bigger than a human being - can be seen in front of Capella Singapore and Scotts Square.

Most of his sculptures are fixed and solid. But some can be changed or painted over by "anyone else", he says. For instance, his famous pile of coal - earnestly titled Pile of Coal (1963) - had no specific dimensions. The pile was strewn over many different gallery spaces in various haphazard ways. But he insisted they were all legitimate ways of showcasing the work. "I was creating a different kind of sculpture, one that involved even the mover's input in pouring the coal on the floor." That pile of coal was what made his name in the art world.

Venet currently has a solo exhibition at Art Plural Gallery that features his famous mathematical paintings - canvases crammed with mathematic formulas - and his gribouillage (scribblings) sculptures - thick flat steel pieces shaped like a child's careless doodles. The works are priced from \$68,000 for a small painting to above \$400,000 for a gribouillage sculpture.

Says Venet: "A lot of people have learnt about art from books, so they think they know art when they see it. But if they can identify something as art, then it can't be groundbreaking and so it can't be art. Art must always be new. Art must always create new parameters."

Bernar Venet's solo exhibition is on at Art Plural Gallery, 38 Armenian Street, from now till Nov 24. The gallery opens Mon to Sat from 11am to 7pm. Call 66368360.