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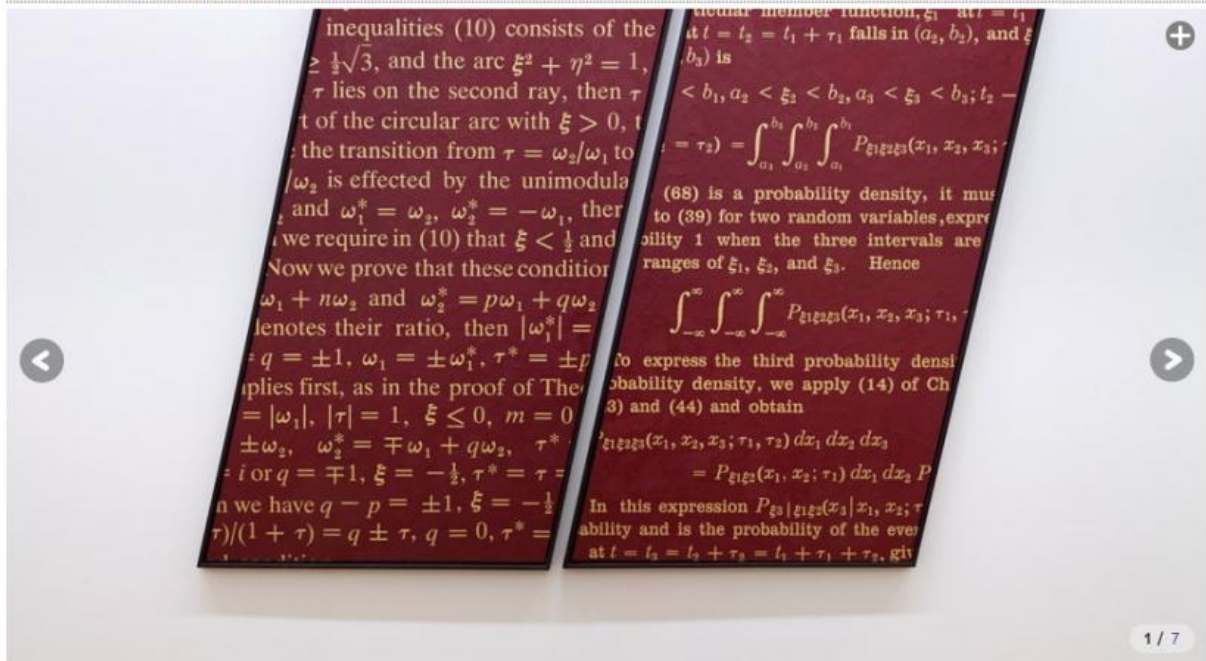

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**ARTS**  
**INTERVIEW: BERNAR VENET**  
 SCIENCE, MATHS, ART.

Words Joseph Ho

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*Whether he likes it or not, Bernar Venet is one of the most important contemporary artists living in our world today. Over the past 50 years, Venet has artistically pushed creative boundaries, blending science, mathematics and art together to form works that truly fascinate. From conceptually ground-breaking lectures, to the flowing large-scale sculptures he has become famous for, Venet has achieved an enormous amount. However, despite being awarded France's highest national decoration and having work permanently featured in the likes of The Guggenheim and the Centre Pompidou, Venet still feels that there is more to be accomplished...*

**How would you describe your art?**

It is difficult to summarize more than fifty years of artistic activity in just a few lines. Nevertheless, certain aspects can be considered to be characteristic of my whole body of work, even if, over the course of the years, some have encountered fluctuations and either gained or lost in terms of their importance. For example, certain critics have spoken of the concept of immanence as it relates to my work, in opposition to the transcendence of artists like Mark Rothko or Yves Klein. Neutrality, sobriety, the "specific" character of my first pieces made with tar, or especially my *Pile of Coal*, served to announce the monosemic character of my mathematical works, which emerged between 1966 and 1970. The paintings from the 1976-1978 period, the reliefs that succeeded them, and then the sculptures composed of "Arcs", "Angles" and "Straight lines", were all supported by this relation to mathematics and self-referentiality, which eventually paved the way for the "Indeterminate Lines". These lines represent the liberation of these geometric forms and their relation to minimal art. They allow for the notions of disorder and chaos, and take a lot of formal freedoms. The "Indeterminate Lines" then yielded to the "Random Combinations of Indeterminate Lines", followed by the "Accidents" and "Collapses" ["Effondrements"]. The "GRIBS" that I am making today are related to this entire evolutionary process of my work, in the sense that they are the product of scribbled sketches made in a spontaneous and uncontrolled manner.

**What inspires you on a day-to-day basis? Have these inspirations changed much over the course of your career?**

My work is self-generated. Nothing around me serves as a particular inspiration; I work, and I make discoveries while remaining open-minded to anything that might present a new possibility in the context of my work; this framework looks to enlarge its scope as a result of new formal and conceptual discoveries.

**Much of your collection revolves around some mathematical and scientific themes. What interests you about these subjects?**

If my artistic research led me to use disciplines such as mathematics or science, it is due to the fact that in 1966 I was able to free myself from everything that had hitherto been explored in art, that is to say, figuration and abstraction. For me, it was the only way to propose a new direction for art. After figurative art (polysemic) and abstract art (pansemic), my works incorporating mathematical symbols have but one level of meaning, and are therefore monosemic.

**Who or what has been your greatest influence?**

I have no attraction to figurative art, even if I respect the creativity of certain artists in that field. In contrast, I have always had an affinity for sober, abstract art, works that are difficult, not sensational, or unattractive.

There is so much left to create that I always try to avoid being influenced by my immediate surroundings. But it is obvious that I cannot escape the environment created by the artistic accomplishments of my time.

**Your work is featured in some of the world's finest contemporary art galleries, including, the Guggenheim in New York and Bilbao, along with Paris' own the Centre Pompidou. How does it feel to have achieved such milestones?**

I have so far only accomplished what I have accomplished, and the recognition that I've received is relative. It is only in two or three hundred years' time that the true estimation of my work will deserve to be taken into consideration. I still have a lot of work ahead of me.

**Amongst the other international awards and acclaim you have received, how did it feel to achieve France's highest decoration for excellent civil or military conduct, the Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur?**

It is only a small step.

**What reactions do you aim to draw out of your audience when displaying your work? Is there a way you would like them to respond?**

Exhibitions in galleries only show a small part of my work. I prefer retrospectives that present the entire journey, that allow a larger audience to become more familiar with the whole of an artist's body of work. I willingly hold lectures to help the public understand my vocabulary. My works are nothing more than a series of formal propositions. Before anything else, they are ideas, concepts, and are dependent upon a conceptual matrix that generates new creations, which in turn continue to self-generate, themselves enriched even further by these new propositions.

**What was your experience like at the Sorbonne? Do you have any good stories about your time as a teacher?**

I don't like teaching what I know; I prefer to spend my time learning. I was invited to teach at the School for Visual Arts in New York, but I declined. I have neither the time nor the desire.

**At this point in your career, what piece of work are you most proud of?**

Probably my exhibition at Versailles last year. Also my retrospective at the New York Cultural Center in New York City in 1971.

**A lot of your work has been exhibited in numerous international locations. Do you feel that some countries appreciate your work more than others?**

No, it is really individuals who react most positively to my work. It's true that certain countries have more Museum or Institutional Directors that wish to present my works. This has been in the case in South Korea, where I have had several important museum exhibitions. The city of Seoul is also now home to several of my monumental sculptures, the largest of which measures 38 meters.

**What are some of your other hobbies and interests? What do you do when you're not making art?**

I don't play any sports, and I am not a big fan of games. It is my work that interests me most, and I practice 26 hours a day, 9 days a week... The rest of the time, I sleep.

**After already accomplishing so much in your lifetime, do you still feel pressured to maintain a certain standard of work?**

I have many doubts. It's an important trait, so that I don't fall asleep and rely on what I have already accomplished. I don't live on the memory of what I have done, but I remember what it is I still need to do. Time goes by quickly, so there is always a sense of urgency. I have only one wish: to deliver a few more surprises! And on that score, I continue to be optimistic.

**bernarvenet.com**