

## Tickets and information

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Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary

## Cerith Wyn Evans and Florian Hecker **No night No day**

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an abstract opera commissioned by  
Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary  
for the 53rd International Art Exhibition,  
La Biennale di Venezia 2009

## Gala world premiere

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at Teatro Goldoni, Venice

**Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary presents**  
**No night No day**

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Gala world premiere: 4th of June, 2009 at 8:00 pm  
5th and 6th of June, 2009 at 8:00 pm and 10:00 pm  
at Teatro Goldoni, Venice

53rd International Art Exhibition  
La Biennale di Venezia

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7th June – 22nd November 2009

Fare Mondi // Making Worlds

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Curated by Daniel Birnbaum

## Cerith Wyn Evans and Florian Hecker

### No night No day

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an official project of the 53rd Venice Biennial  
commissioned by Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary

*What are the conditions that make an event possible? Events are produced in a chaos, in a chaotic multiplicity, but only under the condition that a sort of a screen intervenes. (Gilles Deleuze)*

*This spectacle and its music form multiple resonances with the chosen texts and form a sort of sonorous string pulled tight by mankind through cosmic space and eternity; a string of ideas, of science, of revelations coiled around it. The spectacle is created from the harmonics of this cosmic string. (Iannis Xenakis)*

In apparent opposition to the audio-visual marriage, this abstract opera by Cerith Wyn Evans and Florian Hecker departs from the very notion of diffusion of both sonic and projected image. Such polymorphic structure heads off from the central perspective of the opera stage and constantly shifts across the entire space of the Goldoni Theatre, over the duration of 40 minutes. The compositional elements include: a film and an electro acoustic sound piece spatialized through a 24-channel loudspeaker system; a display, where the sonic, visual and their means of projection are treated as sculptural elements of the same piece. Yet, in the tradition of performative productions, Wyn Evans and Hecker will work on visualizing, proposing, testing and expanding the medium's possible present

and past image(s). Revisiting some of the radical innovations, which happened in music, dance, art and acoustics in the past 50 years.

Though accepting the space's inherent parameters, they propose to examine and experiment with the diversely coded visual and auditory layers of performative and spatial expressions, offered through the used referential materials. From, Japanese Bunraku and Noh theatre, passing through the films of Peter Gidal (No Night No Day, 1997), Kenneth Anger (Rabbit's Moon, 1950) and Guy Debord (Hurlements en faveur de Sade, 1950); the structural sonic conceptions within Iannis Xenakis' S.709 as well as Herbert Brün's Dust, the Psychophysics of Human Sound Localization research of Jens Blauert and the auditory Gestalt phenomena as described by Albert Bregman.

Integral to the work will be the simultaneous and constant revelation of certain production mechanics such as of the stage, the performance and the performer-audience relationships. It is this very screen where the major principles or rules of perceptual organization of the interweaving structural elements apply to both, vision and hearing.







## The Arena of Contradiction

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Chris Sullivan in conversation with  
Cerith Wyn Evans and Francesca von Habsburg

*No night No day* is a collaborative art work by the esteemed Welsh artist Cerith Wyn Evans and German artist Florian Hecker that, commissioned by Francesca von Habsburg, founder of Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, is loosely described as an “abstract opera” yet, in truth, defies categorization.

“We were always interested in trying something new. It was easier agreeing on what we didn’t want, than knowing where to go,” clarifies Wyn Evans sitting outside a West London restaurant resplendent in an impeccable Martin Margiela purple blazer and an impossibly luxurious silk scarf. “Every single showoff on Earth goes to Venice in order to somehow sell their narcissistic wares. So against this principle we have made this piece for the up-coming Venice Art Biennale. Florian is my friend and fellow artist/musician who has worked for a long time on these very experimental computer programs that deal with aural hallucinations around space; and so there’s stuff that some people might not think of as music but might describe as sound that moves around the room and so causes this distortion of the space within. I’ve tried to marry that by making a film which is 40 minutes long and while, there’s everything to it... some people might think that there’s nothing to it at all.”

To create the piece both Wyn Evans and Hecker have worked “together” in isolation neither knowing ex-

actly what the other has fashioned so that, at the unveiling at the Goldoni Theatre in Venice, each might be just as enthralled and surprised as any one of the audience. “So Florian does what he does and I do what I do,” chuckles Wyn Evans his dulcet Welsh tones carefully enunciating every considered syllable. “And then we meet in the middle somehow at a point at which we both press play at the opening night. So it’s all a bit of a dare.”

Wyn Evans has long confounded the critics with his work that he once described as “romantic existentialism.” His previous confederacy with T-B A21 at the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo fielded magnificent illuminated fluorescent tube pillars and flickering crystal chandeliers that expressed the artist’s long fascination with light and language but, while *No night No day* is characterized by a similar wonderment, one gets the feeling that, for Wyn Evans, it is a crucial juncture in his artistic journey. “For years I’ve been troubled by abstraction,” explains the artist who began his career in the 1980’s making experimental films. “And I feel at the age of 51 I’ve been able to entertain a moment at which it’s possible to actually say, ‘Well, why not?’ So there are no pictures – it’s like kind of an aural visual sphinx – as I’m close to the point where as John Cage says, ‘I have nothing to say and I am saying it.’ But it’s really not a revival of that but in a way I really feel that, deep down, I am in touch with a strange intimacy which is an open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constitutive elements of anyone’s perception of anyone’s subjectivity (aren’t made or can’t be made)

to signify monolithically.” “In effect I dared myself to do something that was extreme,” he continues. “Extreme in the way of how it’s possible to look at and be looked at by something; I want the person, persons who look at *No night No day*, to spend some time in it without it being just conventional psychiatric support... but really almost nothing happens in my film. So you will be bored, you will be in love, and you will be stimulated, it’s a particular film.”

Named after a favorite film of Wyn Evans’ that, directed by British experimental filmmaker, Peter Gidal, *No night No day* characterizes T-B A21’s romance with projects that rupture artistic convention. “It is an opera but it is not,” enthuses Francesca von Habsburg as she presides over our West London symposium. “In a sense it is a film and a piece of music, but it’s a completely abstract work and in my opinion abstraction is probably the most refined and exciting reemerging art form today, and is tremendously exciting to return to it after the American’s killed it in the 1960’s. Cerith, who is one of the most important artists in the world today, was extremely straightforward and honest from the beginning of this project. He said: ‘Francesca, can I do absolutely what I want to do without any interference from your side whatsoever?’ It took me half a breath to answer: ‘Absolutely you can do whatever you want,’ and that freedom is something you don’t give to somebody you don’t know, love, and trust. It’s like with all relation-

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Exhibition views “The Kaleidoscopic Eye: Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Collection,” Mori Art Museum, Tokyo 2009







ships that are important to you – you want to take huge leaps of faith together – and without those ingredients you are only living up to other peoples expectations. That is the essence of collaborative work and it is the trademark of T-B A21.” “But we’re breaking the rules as we go along,” continues von Habsburg after a pause. “Yet that’s not the reason we’re doing it; breaking the rules of opera is just a by-product if you will. And even though I am not going to spoil your experience by giving anything away, I will say that what I saw of Cerith’s film brought me to tears. It is truly, truly beautiful.”

“It is also very, very, very particular, very awful and very fantastic,” interjects Wyn Evans. “I think that NOW is the time to say: ‘Let’s NOT do pictures anymore.’ There are enough in the world. I’ve had enough of photography, lets look ahead. I have had enough! I want to say: I’m trying to do something new. It’s an experiment. Let’s send it out and see what comes back from nowhere even though I’m not expecting any return from it at all. I’m just thinking this is what I want to do and it’s called *No night No day*, so let’s see. I don’t even care where it goes. It’s just something that I’ve made that I have wanted to do for a long time. Let us enter the arena of contradiction where pleasure and reality embrace!”

London, May 1, 2009

## Event – Stream – Object

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Florian Hecker with Robin Mackay and Sónia Matos

The creation of *No night No day* as an (one) event remains the task of its audience. And to reverse an old cliché, here the whole is bound to be less than the sum of its parts: As Henri Bergson observed, consciousness does not supplement but subtracts; what comes to consciousness is a drastically reduced and schematized portion of that which is immediately given in sensation. This negative labor of reduction and integration immediately reconfirms the inaugural Duchampian declaration of artistic modernism: “it is the viewers who make the pictures.” Accordingly, the incomplete synergy of *No night No day* demands from its audience a selective piecing-together of distinct units into an overall gestalt.

Firstly at the level of the collaboration itself – a film screening and the diffusion of a pluriphonic sound-piece – a collaboration which is as much argument as dialogue, which refuses complementarity or seamless integration, instead producing a complex *interference pattern* in which, aperiodically, each element takes the upper hand, creating distinct peaks, points of tension, waves, tides, advances and retreats.

Secondly, at the level of the sound element itself, as the same polymorphism creates a conflict between *hearing* and *listening*. In taking the overall concept of abstraction in sound to a new discursive and experiential level, I intend to expose a ‘phenomenological

gap’, a faultline in the traditional categorizations of auditory events (Blauert), auditory objects (Kubovy / Van Valkenburg) or streams (Bregman). Challenging these tendencies, that see the only possible interrelation between (auditory) objects as residing in their common holistic destiny, instead I celebrate their most singular character, their dynamic materiality – a feature that allows them to participate in events, unleashing their forces within transient “wholes,” without this ever exhausting their infinite potential as abstract objects. (As in philosopher Graham Harman’s neo-occasionalism, for which objects perennially withdraw from contact, only ever interacting on the interior of a third object, without this relation ever exhausting their real, autonomous being).<sup>1</sup>

The presence of two opposing structures allows the audience to experience this interference, this drifting into and out of events: On one hand a set of sounds synthesized by computer DSP functions, abstract in origin; and in apparent contrast, a continuous shift and rupture of principles of auditory grouping in the fusion and fission of acoustic streams. What appears at first to be a sequence of pulsating rhythms with a clear localization in space, turns into a localization blur, contradicting the prior perception of spatial position. This shift emphasizes the impossibility of a unified description or consensus as to what has been heard, from where, at what time, and by whom.

Since the piece itself refuses to deliver any satisfactory integration of these elements on any immediately evident (rhythmic, harmonic, textural) level, the audi-

ence is challenged to operate their own amalgamations. Here, one can choose: Select, embrace and depict a sonic stream, or get lost in the *overall orientation* of these abstract auditory objects (or both?).

This spatio-temporal distortion occurs permanently on the micro-sonic level, mobilizing non-linear and a-cyclical drifts within waveforms for the prehension of distinct groupings of continuous tones and the formation of larger audible patterns; whilst on the macro-level of auditory organization, a mutating inversion of the figure-ground segregation takes place: The acoustic background – that of the recorded piece as well as the ambient noise in the Goldoni Theater – is taken over by the auditory figure – foreground – and vice versa. Both micro and macro operations disrupt the classical features of sound prehension – *similarity, proximity, good continuation, familiarity, belongingness, common fate* and *closure*, as described by Albert Bregman – restructuring them according to new patterns and demanding semantic renegotiations. Each listener will complete the work; but no number will ever abolish the infinite, hazardous reserve of these heterogeneous abstract objects which ‘flicker vaguely from the ocean floor: unable to make contact, yet somehow managing to do so anyway;<sup>2</sup> and whose true domain lies ‘in those regions of the wave in which every reality is dissolved’.

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1 See G. Harman Guerilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things (Chicago: Open Court, 2005); ‘Vicarious Causation’ in R. Mackay (ed.) Collapse vol. II (Oxford: Urbanomic, 2007).

2 Harman, ‘Vicarious Causation’, 177.

**Cerith Wyn Evans and Florian Hecker**

## **No night No day**

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Commissioned by Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary  
for the 53rd Biennale di Venezia

Gala world premiere: 4th of June, 2009 at 8:00 pm

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5th and 6th of June, 2009 at 8:00 pm and 10:00 pm respectively

Location: Teatro Goldoni, San Marco 4650B,

Calle Goldoni, Venice

Single-channel film projection and 24-channel  
electro-acoustic sound with computer controlled  
spatialization system

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Duration: 40 minutes

Film editing: Scott Martin

Sound spatialization and synthesis design: Alberto de Campo

Assistant to Cerith Wyn Evans: Natalie Lazarus

Technical support: ESTEBAN AV, Vienna

Exhibition architect: Philipp Krummel



## Cerith Wyn Evans

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Born 1958 in Wales. Lives and works in London.

Wyn Evan's conceptual practice incorporates a wide range of media, including installation works, sculptures, photography, film and text. Since the 1990s, his work could be characterized by its focus on language and perception, as well as its precise, conceptual clarity that is often developed out of the context of the exhibition site or its history. Selected group exhibitions Venice Biennale (1995 and 2003), 9th International Istanbul Biennial (2005), Documenta 11 (2002). Recent solo exhibitions: MIT List Visual Arts Centre, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (2004), Frankfurter Kunstverein (2004), Kunsthaus Graz (2005), BAWAG Foundation, Vienna (2005), Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris (2006).

## Florian Hecker

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Born in 1975 in Augsburg, Germany. Lives and works in Vienna.

Hecker's work discards all formal habits embedded in our listening patterns. Computer-generated sounds evolve into a phantasmagoria of acoustic impressions where, spatial movement and psychoacoustic phenomena intertwine. Specifically designed software is constantly manipulated by the artist, continuously allowing a stretch of our perceptual fabric where, new textures cannot be analyzed by former and definite aesthetic idiosyncrasies. He has presented his work as part of *The Morning Line*, commissioned by T-B A21, at Biacs3, Seville (2008); Manifesta 7, South Tyrol, Italy (2008); WDR, Cologne (2007); Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville, Paris (2006); Casa Da Musica, Porto (2005).

## Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary

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Founded in 2002 by Francesca von Habsburg.

Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary represents the fourth generation of the Thyssen family's dedication to the arts. Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary is committed to supporting the production of contemporary art and is actively engaged in commissioning and disseminating unconventional projects that defy traditional disciplinary categorizations. The foundation sustains a far-reaching regional and international orientation and explores modes of presentation that are intended to provoke and broaden the way viewers perceive and experience art. Collaborations have also been a focus of the foundation's work, namely with the Biennales of Venice, Sydney, and Seville, Documenta, Public Art Fund in New York, Artangel in London and Wiener Festwochen. Exhibitions drawn from the foundation's collection are regularly presented to the public.

The Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary exhibitions program is generously supported by Vienna Insurance Group.

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Francesca von Habsburg

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Daniela Zyman

## Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary

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