

ARTFORUM

Jean Tinguely

GLADSTONE GALLERY | WEST 21ST ST
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For Jean Tinguely, art was a transitive proposition, meant to clatter, clank, and clunk its way to the trash. Tracing the four-decade arc of Tinguely's career, the kinetic objects on display insist on being both seen and heard. Cobbled from disused mechanica, they perform a machine-age scherzo of hiccups, heaves, and hums. Together, they court anachronism, figuring time as a dual matter of patina and motion. Their installation assumes an excavatory feel, like an outlay of industrial relics, mounted on plinths and outfitted with extension cords.

When Tinguely first engaged kineticism in the mid-1950s, it was with a sense of historical urgency. As steam power ceded to circuitry, Tinguely's contraptions, sourced from Parisian junkyards and secondhand stores, indexed the anxieties of automatization.

Hewing to an antiquated logic of axle, wheel, and pulley, they declared their disposability, culminating, at their most extreme, in aestheticized frenzies of destruction. *Study for an End of the World, no. 2*, 1962, found Tinguely immolating one of his signature assemblages near a Nevada nuclear test site. Broadcast on NBC, the piece offered an iconography for the atomic age, wherein viewers could pleasure in the sight of their self-annihilation.

Arranged in the gallery space, Tinguely's constructions lose their apocalyptic edge. A composite of gears and scrap metal, *Vergiss mein nicht* (Forget me not), 1983-91, puns on its titular flora, which line its rightmost edge in plastic, potted form. Obsolescence becomes poetic: melancholy, whimsical, and pleasantly vague, like a latter-day Richard Stankiewicz, stripped of its initial actuality. One wants for cataclysm and meltdown, the smells of singeing and chemical spill. Instead, one finds a display of functioning machines prefaced by Tinguely's trademark red foot switches, now less the dials of a doomsday device than the "Easy Buttons" of Staples. Press them, but not for too long: you might break the art.



View of "Jean Tinguely," 2015.

— Courtney Fiske

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