



# EVENT

## An interview with CERITH WYN EVANS

- RAJESH PUNJ



^ Cerith Wyn Evans, *Courtesy Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan, 2019, Photo: Lorezno Palmieri.*

< Cerith Wyn Evans, *The Illuminating Gas... (after Oculist Witnesses)*, 2015, © Cerith Wyn Evans. *Courtesy White Cube Photo: George Darrell.*

Americans Dan Flavin and Bruce Nauman saw coloured light as equal to the promise of paint in the era of Abstract Expressionism, able to alter space by opening it up and as easily closing it down, with the flick of a switch, Flavin explains, “realising that the actual space of a room could be broken down and played with by planting illusions of real light (electric light) at crucial junctions in the room’s composition.” Which is as evident in the neon works of Welsh conceptualist Cerith Wyn Evans, in which ‘real light’, as Flavin calls it, appears like an unflickering flame. Impressively impressing the neon lines of his sculptures with light, becoming these brilliant and equally bizarre spatial drawings. Yet as much as it has that fantastic quality about it, Flavin was equally convinced of the rudimentary relevance



of light to reality. Saying, “one might not think of light as a matter of fact, but I do. And it is, as I said, as plain and open and direct an art as you will ever find.” And it is that amalgam of fantasy and fact that resonates off of the works. Wyn Evans is aptly able to explain the physical properties of neon and glass - of the velocities and volumes of lighting required for any one sculpture, but beyond that he also has a feeling for the ephemeral in everything he creates.

Wyn Evans sees all forms of light, natural as well as artificial, appreciative of the space that they encounter, occupy, dissolve and disappear from, creating works of man-made beauty, his interest as he explains it, lies in the exposure of the sun on electrically generated light, as each impresses the other. And for the artist, it is not just about the ability of light to illuminate a space, but as much about how it gratifies a room with its presence. English novelist E. M. Forster, in his appraisal of man, saw the devil in the darkness, writing, “we cast a shadow over something wherever we stand, - choose a place where you won’t do very much harm, and stand in it for all you are worth, facing the sun.” And it is that influence of light on the human psyche that appears inherent on coming into contact with the work of Wyn Evans, as his choice of neon lavishes the skin as a romance of light and life.

*I prefer the way in which there is an instance shroud, of the sunlight drenching a neon, which is also balanced with the same kind of colour temperature. Creating a haze around (the work), almost erasing it, and when you have direct light on that, at its absolute brightest, the neon will disappear.*

^ Cerith Wyn Evans, *Still life (In course of arrangement...)* V, 2017, *Turntable with Phoenix roebelenii*, Installation view, Museum Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich, 2017, © Cerith Wyn Evans. Courtesy Museum Haus Konstruktiv, Photo: Stefan Altenburger © Museum Haus Konstruktiv.

> Cerith Wyn Evans, *TIX3*, 1996, © Cerith Wyn Evans. Courtesy White Cube, Photo: Stephen White.

For American artist James Turrell light, as he explains it as material matter. Convinced, “that light has ‘thingness’ itself, so it’s not something that reveals something about other things you are looking at, but it becomes a revelation in itself,” a substance that Wyn Evans exploits for exploring many other ideas. Yet where natural light serves as the entire entity of Turrell’s work, for Wyn Evans it acts as a point of departure, for his choice of sculptural objects – his neons elevated as these amusement park-like altar pieces. Whilst Turrell claimed the night as ‘rising’, for Wyn Evans it is daylight that draws him in. Confessing to spending hours at a time in the kitchen looking at the light layer the walls, as though the embodiment of life itself.

For Wyn Evans, it isn’t as he explains, about absolutes, instead, that everything should be available to the elements. In turn, the world can influence and affect art in the same way that an audience is essential for its reception, enabling his work to have a sensory self. “I prefer the way in which there is an instance shroud of the sunlight drenching a neon, which is also balanced with the same kind of colour temperature. Creating a haze around (the work), almost erasing it, and when you have direct light over that, at its absolute brightest, the neon will disappear. It is a bit like having a candle in sunlight. I don’t know if you

have ever seen it, it is extraordinary when you see the shadow of a flame cast, it has that strange uncanny filtering.”

For an artist creating works in neon, we might assume their luminosity was dependent on the darkness, for a greater contrast of colours – white against black, yet Wyn Evans looks to the natural light that illuminates a room as significant to his work. Seeing how the light incumbent in his works responds best to natural sunlight, that leads, as he sees it, to this remarkable reaction of the bleeding or bleaching out of reality, as well as dissolving his work of its physicality. Leading to these moments, seconds, events, of light crossing over light, as the natural works reacts to the artificial. That Wyn Evans explains as, “a transverse trajectory, direction, energy, flow, that goes on a certain level is light intensity, that is the link between the volume and the audible, and of conceivable silence, as your eyes become accustomed to the light. There being a detectable relationship between the natural and the artificial.”

As assemblages of artificial light, Wyn Evans’ neon works are remarkable for their sheer complexity, as though light drawings dancing through space. His interest in the neons being exposed to normal light appears to explain the limitations of receiving



artworks in an enclosed space. Instead, wanting to have the room open to the elements, initially caressing and eventually cancelling out the artificial light generated by his neon works. Talking about light is to acknowledge the sensation of light on our lives, and Wyn Evans sees it as a close acquaintance, arriving unannounced in the morning, leaving as dusk turns to darkness. Observing whilst in New York, "the light moves across from the west, and then you have at this certain point this brilliant sunshine, that hits these deli's and drugstores, and I suppose the fashion of New York from the 1920's onwards, was to choose neon lights to advertise hotdogs, the name of a store, or something similar." And of how American critic and correspondent, Frank O'Hara describes in his writing "this great moment with great poignancy, where the neon lights look rather compromised by the strength of this invasive sunlight, etching it out of existence. And somehow being able to notice, as you do when you have the luxury, to really take your time and be still in a room, to watch the sun moving around." And it is that relationship of light on light that interests Wyn Evans enormously. As if to say the artificial cannot exist alone, it has to react to the real world to become part of it.

Writing about light as though a lover, O'Hara exemplifies the affection Wyn Evans has for the illumination of everything. O'Hara in his prose appears to capture light in his clenched hand before it rejoins the atmosphere. Saying, "the light comes on by itself, and just as independently off." Which is how Wyn Evans wants the world, far from absolute, and not entirely artificial.

#### Interview

**Rajesh Punj:** *I wish we had met in Milan for the opening of your neon show at HangarBicocca last year.*

**Cerith Wyn Evans:** It is hard to tell how these works will turn out. It does present a particular challenge to work in that kind of grand scale of architecture. You are never really quite sure of what to find, or how to tell if it has been successful or not. So it takes a while for it to sink in. All of the logistic and administrative chaos at the beginning, where people don't know if they can do it in time, and when there is a lot of energy and people running around like mad trying to get everything done. And then the exhibition is on, and everybody makes a big noise about it, there is a party, and finally, you go home and wonder what happened.

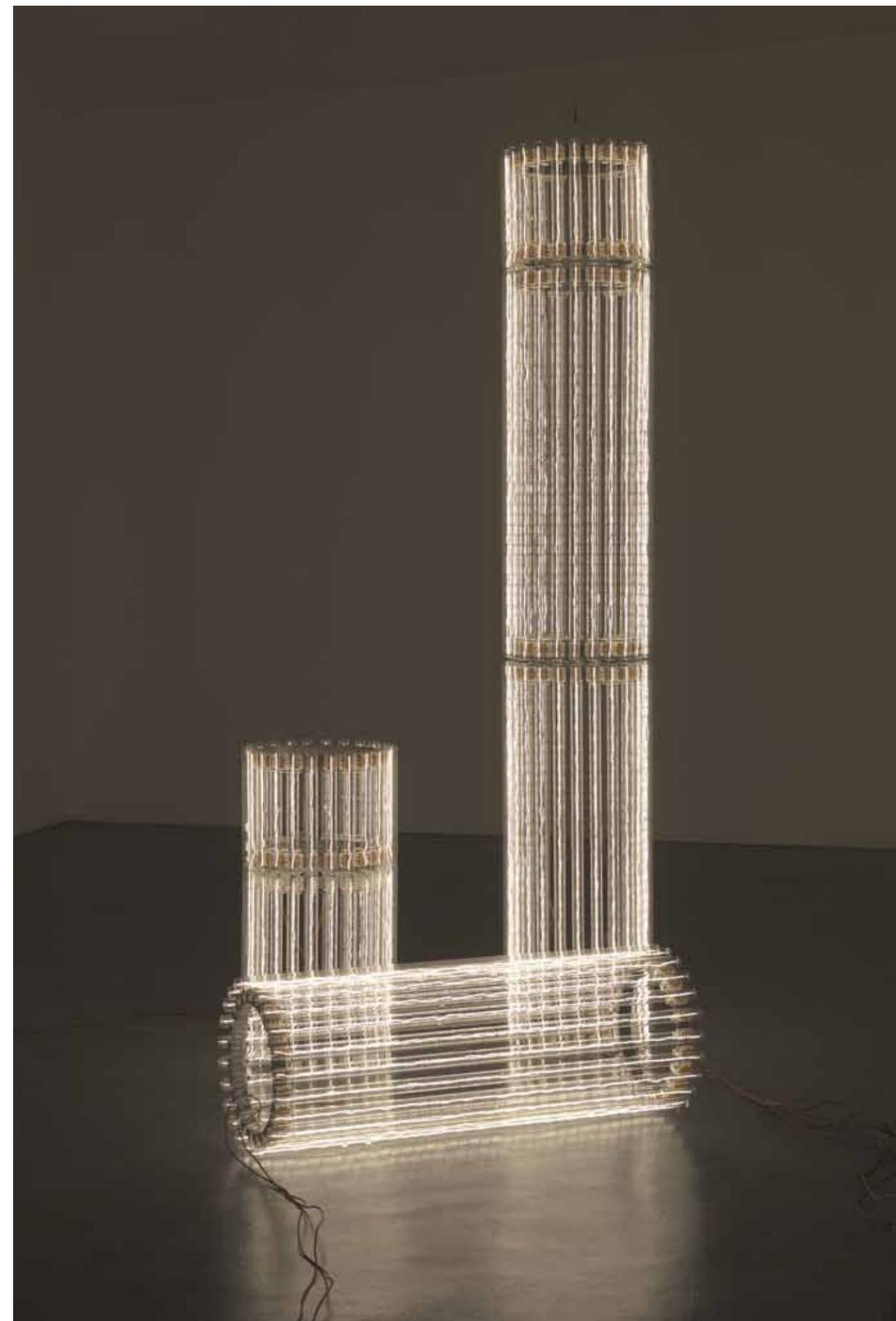
**RP:** *'And then the lights go out' - I think of novelist Joan Bauer who suggested, "you don't understand how much light you have until the lights go out." I wonder without the light what the works become? And I think of your neon sculptures in Milan, and as well your works at White Cube, Bermondsey, that are currently exhibited when I say that.*

**CWE:** Do you mean literally to the 'lights going out'? Or of their presence not being felt when you remove yourself from that space?

**RP:** *Both, I am intrigued by the significance of light, artificially generated, and of its value and volume upon the works, as light gives them life and they live in a space. Without light, and possibly we might think of American Dan Flavin's works in the same way, that they become something else - empty vessels?*

**CWE:** They don't exist without the lights being on, the columns do, StarStarStar/Steer (totransversephoton) 2019, because the columns are about that, the very tall columns, because I guess that is the one thing that you wouldn't appreciate from a photograph, that all of those things happen in time, and it combines with the atmosphere of the room as well. In Milan, you have the occasion at the very end of the space (because you exit from the same curtain you enter), the furthest point from the first doors of the exhibition, receiving natural light throughout the day. The show has been on predominantly throughout the winter and now the afternoons are getting a little longer, but they have had quite a mild winter there so one of the things that happened within the space is that for two hours every morning on a bright sunny day, you have this sort of 'event' that happens where the space is flooded with sunlight at the end. A meteorological event that is a backdrop to the density and compression of that huge amount of neon covering the full length of what they call the 'navate' or nave by the side church (they have these quasi-religious names for part of the architecture), so in a sense, the show in Milan opens with the columns because the feeling is of them being extraordinarily high.

> Cerith Wyn Evans, *Column (Assemblages) V*, 2010, © Cerith Wyn Evans. Courtesy White Cube, Photo: Todd-White Art Photography.





**RP:** *It is interesting to be aware of the manufacture of (artificial) lighting.*

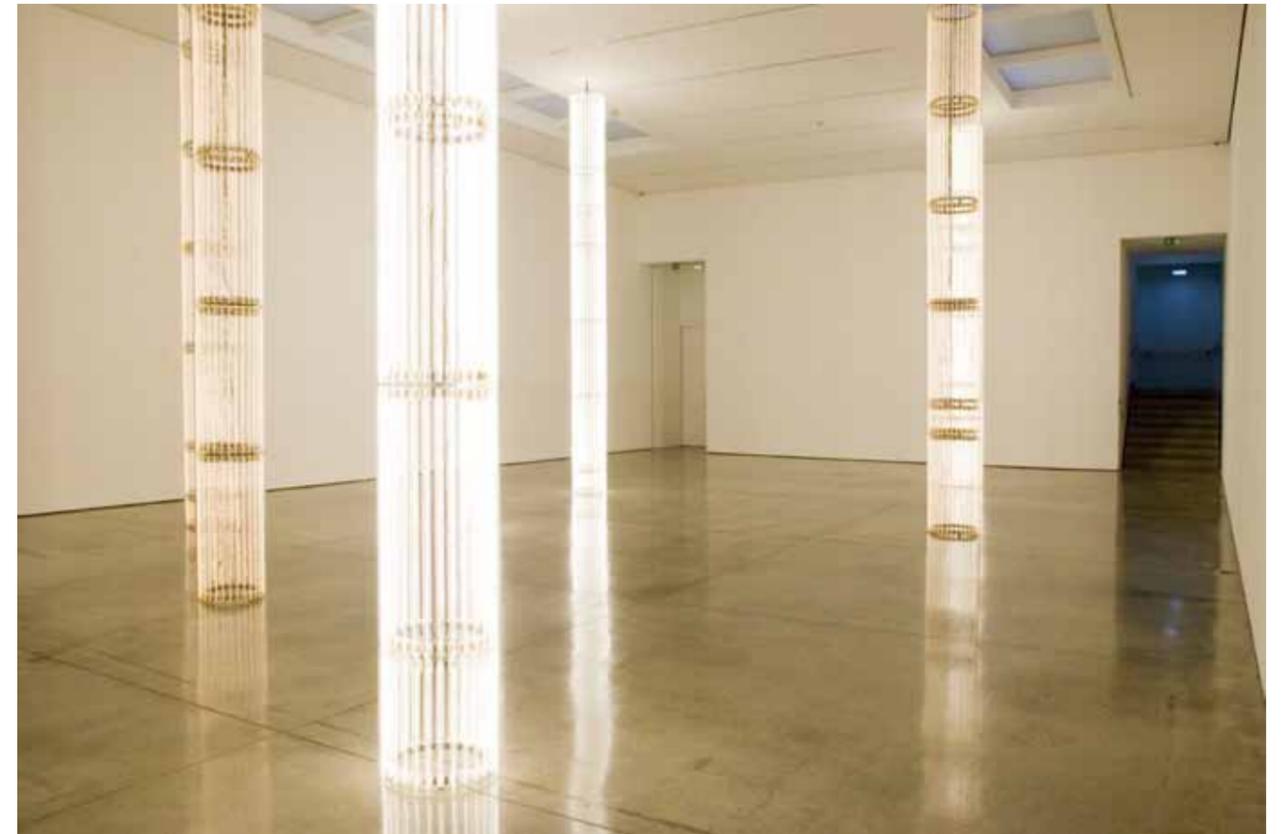
**CWE:** So we looked at ways in which we could maybe surf across that issue, and look at ways it might be possible to examine what these developments were for clearer and much more efficient lighting. We can dim those up and down so that the light moves between the columns, of them illuminating at different levels, and there would be an occasion when, and I have seen it very few times when all the lights are out. Fading very slowly up and down, there is this exchange of energy across the light columns that moves from one to another. So you get this sensation, this sense of rhythm or movement, which is quite slow to the luminosity of the work, and subsequently, people move around the space in a very different way, when there is that kind of activity happening. The other big thing that is part of the Milan exhibition is a sound aspect to the show, which is constantly changing and shifting. And the soundtrack acts as a kind of pedestal or backdrop or something that is coexistent with the appearance of the light, and the other thing, of course, is just the scale of the space is so vast.

**RP:** *I was there at HangarBicocca last for Sheela Gowda's 2019 exhibition - when I saw you all (curatorial committee, assistants) in conversation,*

*There is a transverse trajectory, direction, energy, flow, that at a certain level is about light intensity, that is also the link between the volume, the audible, of conceivable silence, and of your eyes becoming accustomed to the light.*

<sup>^</sup> Cerith Wyn Evans, *Column (Assemblages) I*, 2010, © Cerith Wyn Evans. Courtesy White Cube, Photo: Todd-White Art Photography.

<sup>></sup> Cerith Wyn Evans *S=U=P=E=R=S=T=R=U=C=T=U=R=E* ('Trace me back to some loud, shallow, chill, underlying motive's overspill...'), 2010, Installation view, White Cube, London, 2010, © Cerith Wyn Evans. Courtesy White Cube Photo: Todd-White Art Photography.



*previously before that for Mario Merz in 2018, and Lucio Fontana, in the same year. And I do feel that the space has this monumentality about it, that if I think of the Lucio Fontana environments exhibition, it is capable of reducing everything in scale, to works that become miniature versions of themselves. Did you see either of the exhibitions?*

**CWE:** Yes, a beautiful show. The Fontana pieces were in no way (new), they were a recreation of a historical series of crates, or black boxes, that at a certain level it would be possible to say - even though it was a spectacular exhibition, so many wonderful things in it - it wasn't the best place to have put all these things, because they were all contained within small environments, that was like a chain that ran through the entire exhibition as his environments were presented as a series of self-contained jewel boxes inside a bigger palace. I thought that was successful was the Mario Merz exhibition.

**RP:** *Which I attended as well.*

**CWE:** That was a beautiful show, a really lovely show. And there was something about the consistency, I don't just mean forms, but in a way seeing the development of this image that we had of this iconic, repeated form of the igloo that Merz returned to time and time again. That acquired different meanings in different reiterations. Of different materials, that became a kind of life motif for him, and the huge variety of those things, that you didn't feel like you

were seeing the same thing twice. That came from a creativity trajectory of one thing reflecting off of another, etc., etc. So when Vicente suggested (the retrospective) and I said 'no, no, no', I had a much clearer idea of what I wanted to do, which I didn't really at the time.

**RP:** *The Merz exhibition influenced your thinking?*

**CWE:** I thought not to include a room of films, a room of chandeliers, and of this and of that, which as far as I was concerned would end up being a bit of a dog's dinner. I intended to narrow it down and give it some kind of intensity. An overall impression when you step into the space of appreciating that there is a central unity to the entire exhibition and that everything is somehow concerning all of the other elements. And it is not that I hate using the term, but there was this aspect of - and it was Hans Ulrich Obrist who would always tease me about all these things - 'gesamtkunstwerk' (a total work of art), to have a 'gesamt' quality to the togetherness, in a sense.

**RP:** *And it is interesting to think about togetherness when you have so many of your neon's under one roof at HangarBicocca, and the consequence of that, in terms of light against light and such intense luminosity possibly eliminating the subtleties of individual works. Essentially we naturally think of artworks in isolation, so to introduce an army of works, what did it do to how we see the works?*

**CWE:** I have always thought of the works in that way, that they fundamentally coexist. I never see them as separate pieces, I have always been confident of that and that it will continue. But its days are numbered, because anything in a series is limited to a certain extent, so you embark on research and a whole exploration along certain lines, and narrow some of the parameters around that, physically in terms of the nature of the material, that you might work with and explore. And so I suppose these neon works have for some years now been part of a series, that I suppose as long as there is interest from me, and by extension, interest from other people, there will be the means to continue making them. Very few of these things exist in the real world, with anything like the theatricality that HangarBicocca provides. Because it is a huge dark space, we are far more accustomed to theatre or contemporary performances happening in this kind of space.

**RP:** *Yes, of course. You touch on something incredibly important there, of art in a theatre-like setting.*

**CWE:** In this vast space the trajectory was that, like the powerhouse that was Tate Britain, industrial buildings being converted into culture factories. So we are a little more familiar in the post-industrial age with that reappropriation of a space like this, where there was the production of locomotives of some kind. I think it went from trains to cars, including, I think, making turbines for aeroplanes. Which all has to do with space and the works having this phenomenal shell to contend with. You wouldn't think of an artist like Sheela (Gowda) excelling on that kind of scale, because many of her works can be held in your hand, which is so intimate in the way of a substance transforming into another and that form of transformability. However she makes very big pieces, and when you are confronted with that you have to feel something, to be able to engage with it.

Otherwise, if you try and make things to fit (the space)..., in a sense for me it was quite straightforward because there are so few places where, on the scale of the Duveen Galleries at the Tate, that we knew that we could accommodate the work in the HangarBicocca space, and still have only filled a tenth of it. What it gave us was an anchor at a certain level, for the kinds of works to place around (that first piece). And then it just became like one big piece, because you were arranging the works from a sight line that was from where the viewer would stand on the ground.

**RP:** *Something I spoke to Sheela about last year, was that with HangarBicocca you have so much empty or negative space that hangs above the works, or in your case, surrounds the work, and it is that, that overwhelms my imagination - of how you negotiate between the void and the visible?*

**CWE:** Well that doesn't exist where you have



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^ Cerith Wyn Evans, *Mantra*, 2016 (detail)  
© Cerith Wyn Evans. Courtesy White Cube,  
Photo: George Darrell.

> Cerith Wyn Evans, *Mantra*, 2016  
© Cerith Wyn Evans. Courtesy White Cube,  
Photo: George Darrell.





something that exudes light; as far as you can see them they occupy the space.

**RP:** *That is interesting when we think of works having parameters or endpoints, and your neon works radiating beyond themselves, that afterglow being very much part of the work. So as Flavin saw it, of light being able to eliminate space.*

**CWE:** Yes indeed, as an observation for HangarBicocca, you can have one fairy light or candle right at the far end of the enormous building, and if you can still see the light from where you are, to a certain extent it still occupies the space. So, what to me was most fascinating, was the compression of space, and the success in a sense of my intuition to play with scales and gages within that. I know this sounds like a reactionary and very formalist perspective to take, this take on things is relatively

^ Cerith Wyn Evans  
 "...the Illuminating Gas", exhibition view at Pirelli Hangar Bicocca, Milan, 2019, Courtesy of the artist and Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan, Photo: Agostino Osio.

fresh for me. But knowing that in certain instances I have tried to, how should I put this, interrogate a certain confidence people have with a perceptual verisimilitude, or lifelikeness. So I played with that on several occasions, pushing and pulling things according to what the camera can understand, and what the eye will want to do to measure the grounding of space. And that has been about tearing into notions of, for want of a better word, perspective. So knowing that I could replace or repeat a form, say a curve, an angle of a triangle, in these receding gages, you can stretch the perception a great deal by doing that. It is like putting a full-length mirror in a room, if you remove the mirror, the room becomes a good deal smaller.

**RP:** *A welcomed illusion. As well you spoke of (Marcel) Duchamp, and Surrealism, so it applies when you speak of the uncanny, and the perception*

*of space, and the certainty of one's surroundings.*

**CWE:** Yes, I think it is part of a palette. One of the media we rely on is history, and I think of it as one of the tools that I use.

**RP:** What is interesting, when I think of the two exhibitions, at HangarBicocca in Milan, and the White Cube exhibition in Bermondsey, or even Marian Goodman, Paris before that, was to understand negative and positive space with you, and what I mean by that is the black or white backgrounds of HangarBicocca and White Cube. I wonder as we might all think if the neon works have a greater resonance or register against black than they would against a white wall?

**CWE:** Yes they do. It is ostensibly black, and everyone reads it as black, but if you go to HangarBicocca itself you realise that there is this whole other veil



happening there because it isn't black at all but navy blue, because before Pirelli owned it the building was Alfa Romeo. So you have this signature brand, Alfa Romeo blue on the walls, and if you put a point of really strong light on them, you realise it is navy blue. You read it as black, and because there is so much of it, your mind reacts to it as black, but if you look at a chip of paint in daylight, it is dark blue. That is okay because it is a slight technicality. But in a way, and very often, I have felt the need to look for where natural light comes into as space. Now there is only one room at White Cube that has natural light when it appears not to have natural light because it is excluded, shrouded by these fluorescent tubes in this nine-by-nine room. Where you have this big, hybrid machine that is hanging from the ceiling, fig. (O) 2020, of a helicopter - whatever you want to call it.

**RP: Yes I recall that being photographed as I was in the room, with you behind me.**

**CWE:** Well the light above that particular work is in fact daylight coming into the room. When you go there for the private view, and during the winter, it is dark outside and you don't get to see that, but on a sunny day there is much more sunlight that comes into that room; and it is much lighter. If you were to switch the neon off on a sunny day, there would easily be enough sunlight, daylight in that room. So it was important for me that we took the temporary ceiling away to bring in natural light, and I suppose

^ Cerith Wyn Evans  
 "...the Illuminating Gas", exhibition view at Pirelli Hangar Bicocca, Milan, 2019, Courtesy of the artist and Pirelli Hangar Bicocca, Milan, Photo: Agostino Osio.

> Cerith Wyn Evans  
 Neon Forms (After Noh XIII), 2018 (detail), Courtesy of the artist; Marian Goodman, Gallery, New York, Paris and London, and Pirelli Hangar Bicocca, Photo: Agostino Osio.

the ideal place for me to show these neon works is a space that is open to changes in the season. Very often photographers have misunderstood, and they photograph these things against black backgrounds, or whatever it is because they think that if you really want to see a light properly and clearly (then it needs to be photographed in such contrast).

**RP: Possibly I am guilty of thinking like a photographer, of white neon against black, not seeing the significance of natural light on your work, instead, thinking of two very distinct states, of artificial light illuminating from the darkness, that gives the works licence if you like. But what you suggest is the enhancing of neon by natural light, and that the natural world can be involved with the artificial, each illuminating the other.**

**CWE:** The most successful ways to explain (the significance of natural light on the works) involved the big piece at HangarBicocca, which was in the open room at the end - described as the transit of the moon across the surface of the sun, as a total eclipse - on a sunny day, there is a diagonal bar of sunlight scanning across this image and this piece of text, that describes a total eclipse moving over the world. And for how long is the geography of the world in total eclipse at any one time, and how everything moves on from there. So I look for the sunshine in rooms, I am going on Monday to San Francisco, where I have been invited to make a commission for a building

that looks extraordinary. And of course, it will have a lot of California direct sunlight coming onto the neon. And I think those are the conditions and the occasions the neons work best in.

**RP: It is interesting to think of your neon works outside in-situ. But then we have had neons illuminating burger bars and restaurants in the modern period. That was always intended for the outside world, for the attention of the masses.**

**CWE:** Because outside, the neon is in direct competition with natural light.

**RP: Which goes back to our discussing neon illuminating best in the darkness.**

**CWE:** I prefer the way that in this instance there is a shroud of sunlight drenching a neon, which is also balanced with the same kind of colour temperature (6500 k). Creating a haze around (the work), almost erasing it, and when you have direct light on that, at its absolute brightest, the neon will disappear. It is a bit like having a candle in sunlight.

**RP: Something I wrote down whilst at White Cube, was making the 'ephemeral physical', something you feel yourself attempting to do? I think of your concentrating on 'light' and 'sound', which are elements we think of as beyond the physical.**

**CWE:** They are always in a flux, nothing is ever really nailed down, and that I think goes across the

board. There is a transverse trajectory, direction, energy, flow, that at a certain level is about light intensity, that is also the link between the volume, the audible, of conceivable silence, and your eyes becoming accustomed to the light. There being a detectable relationship between the natural and the artificial. Frank O'Hara in his writing describes this with great poignancy, where the neon lights look rather compromised by the strength of the invasive sunlight, etching it out of existence. And somehow being able to notice, as you do and have the luxury to really take your time and be still in a room, that you can follow the sun moving.

**RP: Do you understand light better by looking at it? And if we think of light's omnipresence, can we consider it appearing differently in Osaka over Sydney or Seoul? It intrigues me, the idea of our 'understanding of light', physically and emotionally.**

**CWE:** Perhaps understanding should be cast in the light of 'experiencing'. Different places have different atmospheres, and you are constantly, in a way, aware of the specificity of many occasions, that will influence where something is placed, and the amount of time it is given, or the amount of precedence it has in a certain situation. I am constantly considering how the light falls in a room.

**RP: And to hear you talk about space as occupied when we might think of it as empty.**

**CWE:** I anticipate you could read, or observe composer John Cage, and appreciate that there is no real absolute silence, darkness, or complete light and that all these things have a relational capacity, and quite often just working on the fringes and edges of these things, is fruitful and rewarding, because something's that we take for granted are then open for exploration. So a whole new field opens up... Those things to do with the frayed edges of things are fascinating, and there is recourse to occupy those spaces where something is either full or empty, or you appreciate after a while that there are relatively few absolutes. And it is worth considering, as a norm, you might expect common sense overrules these things, but I think as an artist it is worth throwing down and questioning some of the things that we take for granted.

**RP: One of the things that I am curious to ask you, having spoken to your assistant at White Cube, was about the Folds works in the North Galleries, of glass and bronze inter-pinned, that take on the shape and form of Japanese folding screens. I want to understand how you decided on the breaking of the glass, that appears as much composed as accidentally carried out. And very quickly you can see that there are nuances to the nature of your damage, a vocabulary even. How do you explain those intensities of deliberate damage?**

**CWE:** I suppose I was looking at many things there, and I have collected photographs of broken glass forever, and whenever I see anything broken in that way, it is one of the things that I photograph. I won't photograph my food, but I will take pictures of broken glass. John Latham was interested in making these drawings that were..., I mean making glass break takes such a short amount of time. I did all of the breaking of the glass myself with hammers, in a glass studio, and you realise that you are so out of the control with the trajectory that all of those broken lines take, and that glass has an innate structure to it, and so it is possible to make these tiny punctual gestures. It takes one knock with a hammer on a sheet of glass and the whole thing will crack. If it is too hard (a hit) you will shatter the thing, but we are working with a glass that we have rehearsed over and over again, and we have researched into because it is laminated, suitable for protecting people from breakage. So it appears completely transparent but in fact, there is a layer of very ultra, less than a microbe of polymer, which is cleverly sandwiched between two sheets of glass, and is the thing that keeps the whole thing together.

> Cerith Wyn Evans  
S=U=T=R=A, 2017, Installation view at Pirelli Hangar Bicocca, Milan, 2019, Courtesy of the artist; Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, Paris and London, and Pirelli Hangar Bicocca, Photo: Agostino Osio



Certain glass will shatter - you see it at bus stops where it just crumbles, and others like windscreens will if there is chipping, or more familiarly they appear as these gunshots. It just means that a bullet, a hammer, a little stone, or anything, with sufficient force, will result in that kind of damage. If you have one puncture point then you can create a flower effect, like a stone dropping into shallow water. You will have 'radio shocks' appearing as these concentric circles going out from around that central place, and cracks going off as a spider's web from an anchor point. In principle, a crack will want to run its course to the edge of the piece of glass, but there are all these other properties that it has, so in as much as I am thinking of the immediacy of this, if you 'talk to glass', which is something John Latham did as well, and I saw him get into an argument in a museum in Paris about thirty years ago because he wanted to hang a piece of plate glass by a little corner from the wall, so the glass could bend. But if that had broken it could have killed someone, because the glass would have just exploded across the room in the most dangerous kind of way. Also, there is the 'large glass' (La Grand Verre), by Marcel Duchamp...



Cerith Wyn Evans  
C=O=N=S=T=E=L=L=A=T=I=O=N  
(I call your image to mind), 2010  
Installation view at Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan, 2019.  
Courtesy of the artist; Maja Hoffmann/Luma  
Foundation and Pirelli Hangar Bicocca, Photo: Agostino Osio.



**RP:** You referring to (Marcel) Duchamp, recalls more of the conversation I had with your assistant whilst at White Cube, of the control and the equal amount of chance that goes into producing one of these works.

**CWE:** Yes, once you have done it, you have to learn to accept that you have done it and that either you are going to agree according to (John) Cage's chance procedures, because the Cage/Duchamp axis is equally important, as Cage would say 'first thought, best thought', so once it is smashed, you can't do a great deal about smashing it again, you have to accept it, otherwise you see it as one that didn't work. So it offers up this kind of ego - non-ego business of appreciating that pretty much all work has to work. I would only discount something on principle, which I never did with these. I might refuse something if it started very strongly having the appearance of something else. If you made an accident and all of a sudden it looks like 'mickey mouse holding onto a swastika' I would properly declare we don't go down that road. Or something that has those associations that are so over determining that you let the glass be the glass. It is a funny one actually, and I don't know how I haven't thought it through. But I think if something takes on an appearance that you can't wipe out of your mind, and either you have to embrace

^ Cerith Wyn Evans 'No realm of thought No field of vision' White Cube Bermondsey, 7 February - 19 April 2020, © Cerith Wyn Evans. Photo © White Cube (Ollie Hammick).

> Cerith Wyn Evans 'No realm of thought No field of vision' White Cube Bermondsey, 7 February - 19 April 2020, © Cerith Wyn Evans. Photo © White Cube (Ollie Hammick).

*Those things to do with the frayed edges of things are fascinating, and there is recourse to occupy those spaces where something is either full or empty, or you appreciate after a while that there are relatively few absolutes.*

that with those sets of associations. Then there would have to be some sort of contingency to say, 'no this is too suggestive of something else, so therefore it limits the scope of the piece.'

**RP:** I don't know if I have a final moment to ask about the neon work F=O=U=N=T=A=I=N, which appears as a wall of Japanese text in neon, that references French 19/20th century novelist writer Marcel Proust. Can you talk a little about that particular work, having touched on translation?

**CWE:** If you speak two languages, then it is possible to attempt a transversal process, whereby you translate from one language to another. But now I am not sure whether Welsh being my first language, English I learned when I was a young child, but still aware enough to know what this process, this intriguing fascinating thing, this process of translation, and maybe even though the Welsh word 'côch' for red, is a different thing, and I don't mean as a reductivist nationalistic reading of it because it is so emotive, but Welsh red, or the word 'côch' is somehow a slightly different colour from the word 'red'. And I imagine 'rouge' is slightly different from my word for red or côch. Because there are somehow coordinates that they come with, there are sets of associations, and there are veils that colour the context of everything

as we understand it. So essentially what I wanted to do was to create an area of meaning in which its most important presence was not necessarily to do with being able to read it, and it recalls something I very much felt when I... the best person who bought this up was Mark Cousins, a dear friend of mine, a psychoanalyst and critical theorist, who taught for many years at the AA, the Architectural Association. A very important figure in my life, he attended an exhibition I did in 1992, and he wrote a brief piece about the show, and the last thing that he said, and I still stick by it, because it holds such resonance for me, was that he said 'it was like the experience of a deaf man staring at a radio', you know, and that gives you the kind of difference in a way.

**RP: Wonderfully articulated.**

**CWE:** It is about not being able to get it, but at the same time, well what is there to get? Because as you enter the gallery, if you are curious about it, you can read the English translation from the original French, and all of the White Cube press releases and language material are in English, it only takes you to look at your mobile phone or go to a computer anyway, and see how so many languages have taken their translations, and put prove to different points of access, points of entry, for that meaning. Showing that there is difference, that there is diversity, that there is an index that is coursing through a register allows for an appreciation that, and somehow I feel it is important that we just interrogate 'common sense', and 'woe be unto him', and him as opposed to her, that calls 'a spade a spade'. The laws of nature are conditional, and 'plain speaking' by its nature is apt to occlude.

**RP: And it is remarkable to consider what those symbols as words transmit into the space, the idea that they evoke or adequately describe Proust's original description of water falling from a fountain.**

**CWE:** Yes, there is a nod to poetry compressed into that these are words in space, hanging like a veil. And there is concreteness to the text that could kill you.

**RP: Which has one wondering of the ability of words of any kind, as the symbols of any language can create a sensation of something in a different space, in a different location from the one that you are in.**

**CWE:** In F=O=U=N=T=A=I=N, 2020 - This transposition is very much the soul of the work, the fabric of what you are looking at. It is the work of self-conscience if you like, and Proust's text is an extraordinary passage which ends with this amazing thing that throws us back into the room again because it is only a gust of wind that would otherwise drench the reader to their skin.

*I suppose I was looking at many things there, and I have collected photographs of broken glass forever, and whenever I see anything broken in that way, it is one of the things that I photograph. I won't photograph my food, but I will take pictures of broken glass. John Latham was interested in making these drawings that were..., I mean making glass break takes such a short amount of time. I did all of the breaking of the glass myself with hammers, in a glass studio, and you realise that you are so out of the control with the trajectory that all of those broken lines take, and that glass has an innate structure to it, and so it is possible to make these tiny punctual gestures. It takes one knock with a hammer on a sheet of glass and the whole thing will crack.*

> Cerith Wyn Evans 'No realm of thought No field of vision' White Cube Bermondsey, 7 February - 19 April 2020, © Cerith Wyn Evans. Photo © White Cube (Ollie Hammick).

