

**DIRECTION  
DE LA COMMUNICATION**

**PRESS PACK**

# **VOIDS**

## **A RETROSPECTIVE**

**ART & LANGUAGE, ROBERT BARRY, STANLEY BROUWN,  
MARIA EICHHORN, BETHAN HUWS, ROBERT IRWIN,  
YVES KLEIN, ROMAN ONDÁK, LAURIE PARSONS**

**25 FEBRUARY - 23 MARCH 2009**

**Centre  
Pompidou**

# VOIDS

## A RETROSPECTIVE

ART & LANGUAGE, ROBERT BARRY, STANLEY BROUWN, MARIA EICHHORN,  
BETHAN HUWS, ROBERT IRWIN, YVES KLEIN, ROMAN ONDÁK, LAURIE PARSONS

### 25 FEBRUARY – 23 MARCH 2009

MUSÉE, LEVEL 4



**Direction de la communication**  
75191 Paris Cedex 04

Director of communications

**Françoise Pams**

telephone

00 33 (0)1 44 78 49 08

Press relations manager

**Isabelle Danto**

telephone

00 33 (0)1 44 78 42 00

Press officer

**Dorothee Mireux**

telephone

00 33 (0)1 44 78 46 60

e-mail

dorothee.mireux@centrepompidou.fr

**Direction des Éditions**

press contact

**Évelyne Poret**

telephone

00 33 (0)1 44 78 15 98

e-mail

evelyne.poret@centrepompidou.fr

[www.centrepompidou.fr](http://www.centrepompidou.fr)

## CONTENTS

1. PRESS RELEASE	page 3
2. PLAN OF THE EXHIBITION	page 6
3. ORGANISATION OF THE EXHIBITION	page 7
4. AROUND THE EXHIBITION	page 8
5. PUBLICATION	page 10
6. VISUALS FOR THE PRESS	page 15
7. PRATICAL INFORMATION	page 17

The exhibition is co-produced by the Centre Pompidou, Paris,  
and Kunsthalle Bern, Berne



Centre  
Pompidou



## PRESS RELEASE

# VOIDS

## A RETROSPECTIVE

ART & LANGUAGE, ROBERT BARRY, STANLEY BROWN, MARIA EICHHORN,  
BETHAN HUWS, ROBERT IRWIN, YVES KLEIN, ROMAN ONDÁK, LAURIE PARSONS

# 25 FEBRUARY – 23 MARCH 2009

MUSÉE, LEVEL 4, ROOMS 18 TO 31

*"I had, precisely, endeavoured to reduce my intervention as a painter to the very minimum for this exhibition. Those few words I pronounced, they were already too much. I shouldn't have come at all, and my name shouldn't have appeared in the catalogue."* Yves Klein

With **VOIDS, A RETROSPECTIVE**, the first exhibition of its kind at an art museum, the Centre Pompidou offers an opportunity to explore a crucial chapter in the history of art. After Yves Klein's exhibition at the Iris Clert gallery in 1958, the empty space became a recurrent artistic theme. This chronological exhibition brings together reconstructions of nine empty exhibitions, from Art & Language in 1966 to Roman Ondák in 2006.

The exhibition is co-produced by the Centre Pompidou, Paris, and Kunsthalle Bern, Berne



Direction de la communication

75191 Paris cedex 04

director of communications

**Françoise Pams**

telephone

00 33 (0)1 44 78 49 08

press relations manager

**Isabelle Danto**

telephone

00 33 (0)1 44 78 42 00

press officer

**Dorothee Mireux**

telephone

00 33 (0)1 44 78 46 60

télécopie

00 33 (0)1 44 78 13 40

mél

[dorothee.mireux@centrepompidou.fr](mailto:dorothee.mireux@centrepompidou.fr)

[www.centrepompidou.fr](http://www.centrepompidou.fr)

© Centre Pompidou

Architects: Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers

*"Nothing seems to me to be the most potent thing in the world."* Robert Barry

Yves Klein's emblematic exhibition, an empty space presented as such to the viewer, is considered to mark a crucial stage in the history of modern art, like the Armory Show of 1913 in New York, or 0,10 in St Petersburg in 1915. The empty space as exhibited object thus became, in a way, a classic of radicalism, and would be repeated and remade in other contexts, other places and other times by other artists whose intentions might be similar, different or even opposed to Klein's. The principle of the exhibition at the Centre Pompidou is to present only exhibitions where the space is left rigorously empty, without the addition or subtraction of anything. This excludes, for example, shows or works involving the modification of lighting, the installation of sound, the construction of partitions or the exclusion of the public. And it is no part of its goal to reconstruct the original physical space.

*"Nothing is less easy to describe than emptiness, nothing more difficult to render than monotony."*  
Stefan Zweig

Each project offers a different reading of the empty space, representing, perhaps, a claim, a renunciation, or, indeed, a celebration of the architecture of the Centre Pompidou. Contemplating emptiness, one confronts nothingness and absence, the invisible and the ineffable, destruction and negation. VOIDS is offered for what it is, and for what it allows. The visitor encounters the empty exhibitions now in 2009, here at the Musée National d'Art Moderne. This accumulation of empty spaces, similar in appearance but radically different in reality, has echoes and implications beyond its walls.

*"I don't want to add anything at all. I believe that it's all there already and I have no choice but to work with what is there."* Bethan Huws

This exhibition brings together the work of artists who have attempted this extreme gesture, to show without showing an object, without making any intervention but a single announcement. In this respect, Laurie Parsons' exhibition at the Lorence-Monk Gallery of New York in 1990, announced by a card bearing only an address, with neither dates nor the name of the artist, is perhaps the most radically minimal formulation. From the search for a renewal of perception, through political or ideological statement, to the deconstruction of the very principle of exhibition, these projects pose a range of crucial questions about the role of the museum, and this unprecedented marshalling of eloquent emptiness within the Centre Pompidou represents a true challenge to the institution.

*"Let's do nothing, and it will probably be art."* Andy Warhol

For an unprecedented exhibition, an unusual curatorial team. VOIDS, A RETROSPECTIVE, which is both an exhibition in the most traditional sense and an art event in its own right, has been put together by John Armleder, who has always been interested in nothing; Gustav Metzger, a key figure in auto-destructive art; Mai-Thu Perret, a young conceptual artist; Mathieu Copeland, a curator who explores the limits of the exhibition; Clive Phillpot, a writer; Laurent Le Bon, curator at the Centre Pompidou; and Philippe Piroette, director of the Kunsthalle Bern.

The exhibition is accompanied by extensive interpretative provision that establishes the context

of each exhibition under consideration. A colloquium is scheduled for the 25th of February, and a catalogue includes a number of original essays by art historians and interviews with the artists. In August 2009, VOIDS, A RETROSPECTIVE, will be shown at the Kunsthalle Bern, where, forty years ago Harald Szeemann curated the key exhibition, "When Attitudes Become Form."

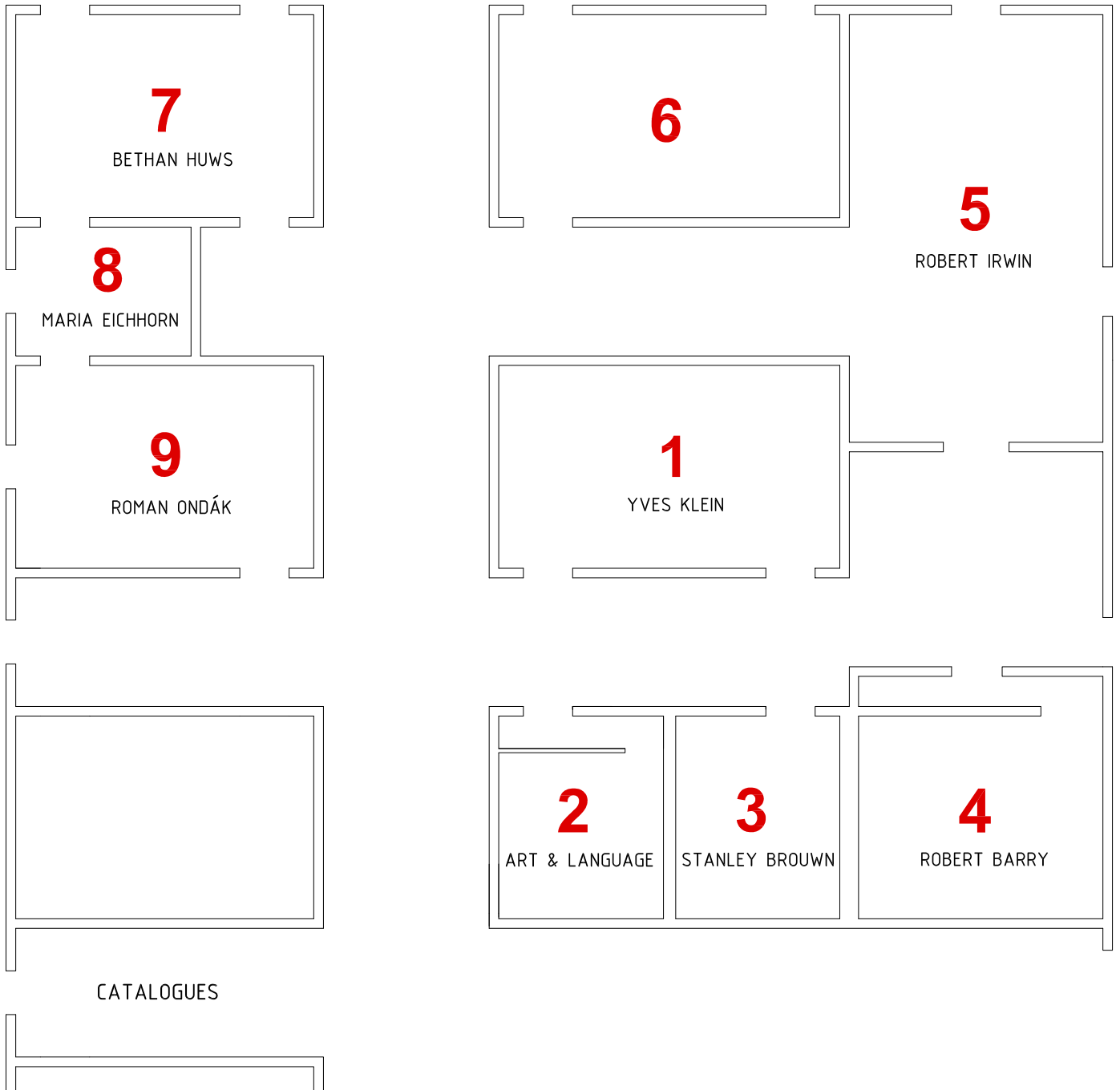
*"With the void, total empowerment."* Albert Camus, on Yves Klein's exhibition.

In media partnership with





## 2. PLAN OF THE EXHIBITION





### 3. ORGANISATION OF THE EXHIBITION

#### YVES KLEIN

##### ***La Spécialisation de la sensibilité à l'état matière première en sensibilité picturale stabilisée, Galerie Iris Clert, Paris, 1958***

Opening on the 28th of April 1958, Yves Klein's exhibition at the Iris Clert gallery in Paris marked another step in the artist's investigations into monochromy and pure sensibility. This was *La Spécialisation de la sensibilité à l'état matière première en sensibilité picturale stabilisée* *The Specialization of Sensibility in the Raw Material State Into Stabilized Pictorial Sensibility*, commonly referred to as the "Void." Following on from his first immaterial works, presented at the Colette Allendy gallery in May 1957, the artist painted the gallery interior white, to create "an ambiance, a pictorial climate perceptible and as such invisible." In 1961, at the Haus Lange in Krefeld (Germany), Klein presented an empty room, painted white, that can still be seen today. A few months before his death on June 6th 1962, he produced his last "void," taking down paintings hung in one of the rooms of the musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris for the Salon Comparaisons. This series of radical interventions marks the advent of empty, unmodified space as a work of art, a founding artistic gesture that has taken on mythic status.

Yves Klein was born in Nice in 1928 and died in Paris in 1962.

#### ART & LANGUAGE

##### ***The Air-Conditioning Show, 1966-67***

A founding group of Conceptual art in the late 1960s, Art & Language developed a radical artistic practice based on a rereading of the relationship between art and language. For Art & Language, the work of art is characterised not by its materiality or visibility but by its capacity to generate thought. Treating the written description of a work as equivalent to its possible realization in space, *The Air-Conditioning Show* was conceived in 1966 and appeared for the first time in 1967 as an article in *Arts Magazine* [Michael Baldwin, "Remarks on Air-Conditioning"]. The text posits the presentation of a volume of air in the gallery space, specifying that the space is to be left white and empty. The aim was not so much to designate a new, more or less unexpected object as a work of art, as to question deeply rooted convictions about the nature of art and its relationship to its discursive and institutional context.

Art & Language was formed in Coventry (UK) in 1968, by Michael Baldwin, David Bainbridge, Terry Atkinson and Harold Hurrell. Between 1968 and 1982, more than fifty people took part in activities associated with the group. Its key members today are Michael Baldwin, Mel Ramsden and Charles Harrison.

#### ROBERT BARRY

##### ***Some places to which we can come, and for a while "be free to think about what we are going to do." (Marcuse), 1970- First shown at Galleria Sperone, Turin, 1970***

The question of materiality is central to Robert Barry's work. A pioneer of Conceptual Art, he has constantly sought to escape the physical limits of the art object. His first exhibitions sought to reveal the physical space of the gallery, through the organisation of works in space. In 1968, he radicalized this approach by making works immaterial in appearance, releasing radio waves, then radiation, in an empty gallery space, and later noble gases into the atmosphere. For solo shows in Amsterdam, Turin and Los Angeles, he decided to declare the galleries closed (*Closed Gallery Piece, 1969-1970*). The gallery becomes the very material of the work.

*Some places to which we can come, and for a while "be free to think about what we are going to do." (Marcuse)* is a work begun in 1970 and still in progress. Here, Barry invites the visitor to consider the exhibition space not for what it is or what it has to show, but as a place to meet and reflect. In this way, he points out that the substance of the work is situated as much in the mind of those who contemplate it as it is in the empty space.

Robert Barry was born in 1936 in New York. He lives in New Jersey, U.S.A.



## **ROBERT IRWIN**

### ***Experimental Situation, Ace Gallery, Los Angeles, 1970***

Just as he refutes time, *cosa mentale*, Robert Irwin refutes the existence of the void. For him, a gallery is never truly empty, as every space has specific qualities that we can perceive. Associated with Abstract Expressionism at the beginning of his career in the 1950s, Irwin's practice became progressively more radical. He stopped painting at the end of the 1960s and abandoned his studio in 1972 to work only with the physical characteristics of the exhibition space, "being interested uniquely in the quality of the room's space without adding any object." His thinking on the limits of art and perception led him to conceive installations making direct use of space and light. With discreet modifications (rounding corners, filtering light through almost invisible fabric), he created sometimes disorienting environments that act on the viewer's perception. For his exhibition at the Ace Gallery in Los Angeles in 1970, he left the space empty, returning regularly to think about what could be done there. This work occupies a unique place in the artist's practice, and led to his next exhibition, *Scrim Piece*, at the same gallery, in 1971.

Robert Irwin was born in 1928. He lives in San Diego, U.S.A.

## **Laurie Parsons**

### ***Lorence-Monk Gallery, New York, 1990***

Laurie Parsons' artistic practice is centred on a number of strong gestures that question the nature of art and its system. She gained recognition in the late 1980s with works consisting of pieces of wood, earth, and detritus gathered from wastelands on the periphery of New York. The artist's intervention was minimal, being limited to collecting and arranging the materials. In 1989, she began to ask the galleries she worked with not to sell her works. In 1991, for an exhibition at the Forum Kunst in Rottweil in Germany, she moved into the exhibition space, living there for seven weeks, inviting the inhabitants of the city to come and meet her. Prefiguring her withdrawal from the art world in 1994, after a career of only eight years, in 1990 Parsons decided not to present anything for her third solo exhibition at the Lorence-Monk Gallery in New York. The invitation card bore only the address of the gallery, with no artist's name or exhibition dates. Questioned about this, she replied: "I felt it essential that I consider the gallery itself, rather than continue to unquestioningly use it as a context." Later, Parsons deleted the exhibition from her biography, as if to complete its erasure.

To respect Laurie Parsons' original gesture, there is no label bearing her name in the exhibition room.

Laurie Parsons was born in 1959 and lives in the U.S.A.

## **Bethan Huws**

### ***Haus Esters Piece, Museum Haus Esters, Krefeld, 1993***

"Space is the most concrete thing for each of us, yet no one can see it" says Bethan Huws, underscoring her work's concern with the perceptible. For her first exhibition, at London's Riverside Studios in 1989, she did no more than raise the floor of the gallery by creating above it a second, exact copy of the first. By doubling the surface in this way she produced a work that both highlighted and put into question the physical preconditions of the gallery space, now envisaged as a ready-made. Bethan Huws engages with the characteristics of a given environment, its history and the way it is seen, as well as the specific significance of the site. Invited to do a solo show at Haus Esters in Krefeld in 1993, Huws was struck by the beauty of the Mies van der Rohe building and decided to leave it empty, with a text available for visitors. Taking up and surpassing the codes of readymade, the artist asserts the a priori presence of art and the non-necessity to add anything at all.

Bethan Huws was born in Wales, in 1961. She lives in Paris.



## MARIA EICHHORN

### **Money at the Kunsthalle Bern, Kunsthalle Bern, Berne, 2001**

Working with the void out of necessity, Maria Eichhorn concentrates her action and the attention of the viewer on the realities of the institution. For her show at the Kunsthalle Bern in 2001, she researched the history and funding of the institution and decided to devote the budget for the exhibition to the renovation of the building, leaving the exhibition spaces empty. It was not a question of presenting the space as a work, but of inscribing an action in time and in the real world, extending beyond the exhibition and its dates. The artist here acts to fix the institution, in doing so revealing its flaws. A practitioner of institutional critique, she engages with convention to disclose modes of artistic production and to reveal the economic parameters of the work of art. For *Skulptur Projekt Münster 1997* she bought a vacant plot of land and designated as a "sculpture" the immaterial monetary exchange (*Erwerb des Grundstückes Ecke Tibusstraße/Breul, Gemarkung Münster, Flur 5, n° 672*).

Maria Eichhorn was born in Bamberg, Germany, in 1962. She lives and works in Berlin.

## ROMAN ONDÁK

### **More Silent Than Ever, gb agency, Paris, 2006**

Roman Ondák engages with different possible perceptions of the gallery space, site of both creation and exhibition. This orientation, with its attention to context, means that the empty gallery is a central figure in his work. For *Guided Tour*, at the Josip Ra i Gallery in Zagreb in 2002, he organised tours of the empty space; more metaphorically, in *Untitled (Empty Gallery)*, 2000, he asked friends and family to draw an empty gallery from his description. Pushing the codes of conceptual art to their limit, in 2003 Ondák asked the Slovak government to fund his plans to establish a virtual museum of contemporary art, a museum without walls, without even a site. Highlighting the ambiguous character of the gallery and his artistic position as a transformer of space, in 2006 Ondák presented *More Silent Than Ever*, an installation whose empty space is supposed to be equipped with hidden listening devices. The work leads the viewer to believe that something invisible is escaping him, questioning the viewer's position in relation to the artist and his work.

Roman Ondák was born in Žilina, Slovakia, in 1966. He lives in Bratislava.



## 4. AROUND THE EXHIBITION

### VOIDS: LE SYMPOSIUM

**In connection with the exhibition: "Voids: a retrospective"**

WEDNESDAY 25 FEBRUARY, 7.30 PM, PETITE SALLE

Admission free, subject to availability

"Voids: A retrospective," the first exhibition of its kind, brings together in the Musée National d'Art Moderne the work of nine artists who have chosen to show empty spaces – the pioneer being Yves Klein, with his exhibition at the Iris Clert gallery in 1958. It includes projects by Klein, Art & Language, Robert Barry, Robert Irwin, Laurie Parsons, Bethan Huws, Maria Eichhorn, Roman Ondák and Stanley Brouwn.

If all these artists showed nothing, leaving the space completely unaltered, the meaning they attached to the gesture differed in each case. Whether seeking to heighten awareness or to sharpen perception, to make a political or ideological statement, to promote philosophical or theoretical reflection, or to deconstruct the very idea of exhibition, their varying use of the empty space in these apparently similar exhibitions raises a host of often complementary questions that present a radical challenge to the function and legitimating authority of the institutions of art.

The symposium is thus a necessary pendant to this unique retrospective, offering an opportunity to articulate and explore these interrogations together with the curators and a number of the exhibited artists.

Among the speakers will be artists Robert Barry, Bethan Huws and Roman Ondák, philosopher of religion Françoise Bonardel, and curators John Armleder, Laurent Le Bon, Mathieu Copeland, Gustav Metzger, Mai-Thu Perret and Clive Phillpot.

### RENCONTRES

**guided tours with the exhibition curators**

SUNDAYS 1, 8 AND 15 MARCH 2009, 3.30 PM, MEET AT MUSEUM ENTRANCE, LEVEL 4

€4.50, concessions €3.50, + Museum and Exhibitions ticket at reduced rate

€3.50 with annual pass

### UN DIMANCHE, UNE ŒUVRE

SUNDAY 22 MARCH, 11.30 AM, PETITE SALLE

€4.50, concessions €3.50, free with annual pass or Ircam card.

In this series of talks organised by the Education Department, an artist, curator, writer, musicologist, art historian or critic offers a personal look at a work in the collection of the Musée National d'Art Moderne or a piece of music by a composer associated with the Ircam.

Yves Klein, "Une sorte de bon d'entrée gratuite" pour l'exposition dite du "Vide," 1958.

A talk by Denys Riout, art historian and emeritus professor at Université Paris 1.

Klein's show at the Iris Clert Gallery (3, rue des Beaux-Arts, Paris), which opened on the evening of 28 April 1958, was the first "empty exhibition." Planned in every detail, it had no title, and the artist showed no painting, sculpture or any other object. Yet we need consider more closely the nature of the "void" for which the exhibition became famous, for Klein himself would say, the following year, that the space was indeed empty, "but only in appearance."

## 5. PUBLICATION

### VIDES / VOIDS

The catalogue is a co-publication by JRP/Ringier, Zurich, and Editions du Centre Pompidou, Paris, in partnership with the Kunsthalle, Berne.

540 pages, size : 21,5 x 28 cm  
100 colour / 200 black & white illustrations  
price : €39, £35, \$49



All these quotations are extracts from the exhibition catalogue VIDES / VOIDS, Ed. Centre Pompidou, Paris / JRP/Ringier, Zurich, 2009

### HE WHO DARES NOTHING, WINS NOTHING

Laurent Le Bon

*Voids: A Retrospective* is an exhibition which contains nothing: no objects and no content, other than its visitors and spectators. It could be described in the words of Stefan Zweig, "Nothing is harder to describe than the void." Far from being a practical joke, *Voids* in fact asks a series of simple yet radical questions about the nature of museums today. What does it mean to conserve, display, and collect works? [...] Cuts in acquisition budgets and the cost of the day-to-day management of works means that institutional buyers have to be ever more inventive. The exhibition also raises the issue of how museums handle information. *Voids* would not exist without titles or labels. The project requires a vessel -the museum- to define the space of the retrospective and to demarcate a succession of enclosed spaces, in the form of rooms that visitors can wander through at their leisure with no predetermined constraints, even if the layout is chronological. Thresholds thus become significant in indicating where the updated works/rooms/historical exhibitions begin. The aim is to enfold the space in one single idea, expressed in different ways.

The project is only interesting insofar as it takes place in an internationally renowned institution, thereby legitimizing fifty years of experiments with artistic voids, like a traditional retrospective. The context of economic crisis gives rise to a new possible reading of the project, although it should be underlined that *Voids* was planned long before the earliest signs of the credit crunch. [...] *Voids* hopes to bring a different point of view to this dash to maximize the profitability of space and to represent a pause in the onward rush of cultural productivity. It is a group exhibition that pays no attention to ego. Each room corresponds to an exhibition that is also an *œuvre*. No particular activity takes place, yet even a simple stroll becomes an event. Putting on an exhibition has become an unwieldy process with numerous participants. [...] Genuine works of art are on display, even if the space appears empty. It is a key part of the institution's remit to support this sort of limitless and atypical project. *Voids* is an anti-blockbuster, an exhibition of possibilities rather than an impossible exhibition, with a certain multi-disciplinarity in presenting the concept in various ways beyond the museum rooms, with blank films, unprinted books, and silent concerts, but with a very complete catalogue and conference programme. [...]

*Voids* is located in the museum and nowhere else. There would have been very little point in installing the retrospective in the spaces traditionally used for temporary exhibitions. On the contrary, the contrast with the space filled with collections that precedes it in the visitor's experience is key to understanding the exhibition. When visitors enter the museum, they are often eager to discover the works, sometimes with the sole aim of recognizing rather than looking at them. *Voids* may give visitors a better appreciation of the rest of the collections on display by making them more receptive. Their gaze is refreshed, as it were, by the void. Daniel Buren demonstrated his understanding of this phenomenon when he alternated empty and filled spaces in his anti-retrospective at the Centre Pompidou, *Le Musée qui n'existait pas* (The Museum that did not Exist) -this was in fact one of the rare exhibitions to use the Centre's empty spaces to extend the event out toward the surrounding city. *Voids* occupies three spans on the northern side of level four, each 12.8 meter apart. It is also an architectural experiment. Museums are sometimes more interesting empty than they are full, as some commentators have noted about Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin. The rooms used for *Voids* are in the same condition they were left in following the Centre Pompidou's renovation in 2000. Nothing interrupts their uniformity—the void is never exactly the same, yet the visitor has the impression walking through similar rooms. The voids are both solutions and lacks of continuity. There is no clear division other than the labels identifying the works, which are placed in the visitor's path, very much like the layout of the main rooms. [...]



*Voids* was planned as potentiality, a dreammaking machine, similar to the Centre Pompidou's original utopia - a building offering seven expanses waiting to be filled, and where, by extension, art projects could be carried out. [...] It would be fascinating to write a brief cultural history of the struggle between plenitude and the void at the Centre Pompidou, very much like the history of transparency and opacity. It would start with the young architects' fascinating choice to leave the building space half-empty by including a plaza. The huge Centre, which dominates the surrounding area, draws attention to the air-conditioning system and other utilities networks and, as a building, only lives thanks to the void surrounding it. The building is never so surprising as when it hosts projects that highlight its transparency, as in the south gallery. It offers a vast empty space just inside the entrance in the form of the forum, which some people wanted to fill, and which was eventually reduced in size. The glass escalator affectionately known as "the caterpillar," which has come to symbolize the institution, invites visitors to play with the void and comes alive through them. The Centre is a step towards the artist Robert Smithson's dream of a museum of emptiness. For Smithson, visiting a museum means moving from one void to another - an interesting parallel with *Voids*. Nothing takes up more room than the voids of this exhibition, which in turn takes up more room than the largest installations in the Centre's collections. The visitor is caught up in a sort of dizzy whirl.

*Voids* is the tail of a certain postmodernist comet, but also part of the debate on the repetition and reproducibility of the exhibition, which has at long last become an object to be analyzed by art historians. The retrospective exhibition of exhibitions arose in particular with *Stationen der Moderne* (Berlin, 1988). At the first Brussels Biennial in 2008, *Once is nothing* took notions about recreating exhibitions even further. Fragmentary "I was there" and infrequently preserved archives mean that memories of exhibitions are all too often partial and personal. Who has never tried to recall some barely glimpsed work as soon as they have left the exhibition? It is often an unforgiving exercise. Yet museums are tending to broaden their focus from simply conserving works and are no longer neglecting the conditions in which they are displayed. By clearly stating that a perfect repetition would be impossible, *Voids* adds to the current debate by undermining the desire for the purposeless reconstitutions which are now flourishing - wrongly - in the historical monument milieu. It is much more exciting to rethink what took place and to avoid the easy solution of a commission. By contacting the artists who created the empty exhibitions selected for *Voids* and requesting their approval to update their original project in a new spatio-temporal setting, the curators have organized a retrospective that in a way is timeless and detached from the original sites, prompting an odd feeling of being everywhere and nowhere at the same time. [...]

*Voids* presents projects whose primary function is to analyze what makes art art, exhibitions exhibitions, and museums museums. It is challenging rather than provocative. It demands attention to detail. The visitor is offered the possibility to look at the void and to gaze into empty space, perhaps because he is lost in his own thoughts. At a time when museums, adopted and conquered by artists, are somewhat aseptic and placed in a vacuum, *Voids* creates a space for astonishment, criticism, and debate, and even for empty words, like the dull, empty chatter heard at some museums or openings where not everyone comes to see the art. The voids on display are positive and constructive in connotation. Visitors can discover a new side to the institution, with the same depth and density as the rest of the museum, full of materialized works. *Voids* opens us up to metaphors and removes our blinkers, not without creating a slight feeling of lack, nostalgia, and frustration. Visitors are invited to project their imagination onto the space. Mind and spirit work in the reflection of their own perception, and the act of looking itself becomes an instant artifact, according to Brian O'Doherty, who has done so much to identify the issues around the subject, highlighting the power of the white cube.

[...] *Voids* shows nothing as a way of highlighting the force of language and context, whether architectural, social, political, or other. It does not put forward an authoritative argument: it is more about unveiling the dimension of contingency in modernity. Sometimes we need absence to think about what we're looking at. *Voids* is rather different from the blockbuster exhibitions which visitors sometimes attend as a form of reassuring pilgrimage. The exhibition is a whole, a radical homage to Dylaby (1962): it is a spatial continuum where visitors travel through history, like in Aleksandr Sokurov's *Russian Ark*, imagining what is no longer there, what is there, and what will be there. *Voids* is the ultimate solution to problems about how to hang and display works, somewhere between the degree zero of curating and an art project. *Voids* creates a fertile, in-between dialectic. Where is the border between the material and the conceptual? Contrary to Malcolm de Chazal's statement that their void is no way out, the exhibition offers a certain plenitude of emptiness. In a very different context from Picasso's declaration upon being appointed honorary director of the Prado in 1936 that he was head of an empty museum, the team of curators behind *Voids* has manipulated the museum space to create a void. What sort of void? Low, moderate, high, and ultra-high, to borrow a terminology from physics. The artistic context creates an impression of mystery and enigma. As the Chinese proverb says, "Men may conquer things, but the void gives them meaning." Move along, people—there's everything to see!



## QUALIFYING THE VOID

Mathieu Copeland

The void cannot be considered from just one point of view. Of both spiritual state and physical nature, it infiltrates all fields of the possible and in fact allows the advent of the(se) possible(s). [...] When considering the void we are immediately confronted with nothing, absence, vacuity, emptiness, the invisible and the ineffable, with destruction and rejection, and finally with negation -the void as the opposite to life, as the absence of everything.

This book, with its anthology of essays from all viewpoints and all disciplines, offers possible readings of the void -or rather the voids- through the historical prism of a retrospective on empty exhibitions. How do we define these exhibitions? They are exhibitions left strictly empty, with no element added or subtracted, without the space being altered, leaving it free of any content other than itself. This collection of contributions proposes contemplating the nature of the void, how it changes in content and form according to our comprehension of it, and how each void defines itself by its own quality, so showing its inherent relationship to reality. [...]

The experience of the void is not emptiness: it is not about nothing, nor is it about absence.

To the contrary, it is about a whole, yet a whole which has no noticeable reality. The void does not have a positive or negative connotation. It just is.

Considering the void in art brings us to an impossible definition. The desire to work with "nothing" can manifest itself in many complementary ways and generates numerous approaches: pure voids, spaces left empty, "assisted voids" (to borrow John Armleder's apt expression), voids emerging from the desire to empty everything, voids resulting from the desire to add nothing, voids as signature, unfulfilled voids and conceptual voids, voids as refusal etc.

Exhibiting the void turns out to have been a recurring motif in art history since the 1950s, to the point where the approach -whether it be direct or "quotationist"- has practically become a cliché of contemporary artistic practice.

### A Retrospective of Empty Exhibitions

[...] In this light, it is also fundamental to consider the qualities of the void in the reductionist, uncompromising practice of Emilio Prini. For his exhibition entitled *Il Vuoto* at the Sound Art Museum in Rome in 2007, the artist left the gallery entirely empty. An emblematic representative of *Arte Povera*, with this work the artist pursues his commitment to the minus and the absence and shows the naked reality of the gallery. Invited to this retrospective, the artist answered with these precise words: "Yves; *Il Vuoto*" [Yves; The Void].

The void enjoys a complex character. Considered in all its critical dimensions, it is tied into the physical aspects that characterize it as much as the precise context of a given place. Invited to participate in this retrospective, Michael Asher turned down our invitation, specifying that: "Each of my installations which have no objects, and present just the exhibition space, addresses specific questions or concerns about that space which are particular to its context. These exhibitions are not transportable, and to actualize any of the works would imply that the original exhibition would lose its meaning entirely and become a different artwork, which would, very likely, address other issues."

Since the end of the 1960s, Maria Nordman has worked with and embraced the qualities of places, viewing empty space through all of its sculptural possibilities. For her, the existence of the void is an impossible thing— no one can be witness to the void, since this state is clearly nullified by the presence of witnesses. In *Unnamed*, a work begun in 1967 in Los Angeles, the artist envisaged the empty spaces between the buildings as an ongoing artwork. In 1979, she made a proposal to the Berkeley Art Museum, University of California, which involved emptying the museum of all works and opening it to the public and to the path of the light of the sun for seven rotations of the earth. Even though it was not carried out, a similar work was proposed to the Kunstmuseum in Lucerne in 1993. The museum's exhibition of Maria Nordman's drawings was emptied for twenty-four hours and the rooms were made "open to the sun and the full moon and any person arriving." We should also remember her exhibition held at the Museum Haus Esters in Krefeld in 1984 -again Krefeld, as with Yves Klein and Bethan Huws!- in which Nordman celebrated the qualities of natural light by filling the empty spaces uniquely with sunlight throughout the duration of the exhibition.



Firmly asserting that it is impossible to “renew” an artwork, working with and celebrating the qualities of natural light and refusing the idea of participating in a retrospective (rather one which would be prospective), the artist ultimately preferred not to be present in the retrospective, stating that, “People visiting will not find a white room with my name on it, as I have been working solely with solar illumination for some decades. It is a concrete thing to acknowledge a difference.”

### “Void If Opened”

The void is as much the result of artistic reasoning as it is a deep engagement in what guides our contemporary lives. The void as a state of occurrence asserts the importance of not creating, to paraphrase Douglas Huebler, not adding another object to this already saturated world. To think of the void as a refusal to create is a supreme political action.

An option would be to consider the void as an ecological affirmation and to reason with a world in agony. Effectively, in reaction to the overproduction of recent decades, to make nothing and leave space empty would allow for creating without contributing to this physical overproduction.

[...] For many artists, it is fundamental to consider the void as an act of commitment and defiance.

To quote Gustav Metzger again, it is important to question “how artists endeavoured to come as close as possible to the extremity of the world which they are forced to inhabit, and forced to reject, and how they responded by not showing, by emphasizing nothing and by bringing in destruction.”

[...] To return to a more pragmatic stance, a retrospective of empty exhibitions leaves us in front of an empty space, and an exhibition of the void can have certain similarities to an exhibition of the place. Using full exhibitions as reference, a retrospective of empty exhibitions shows the museum through the works and what they represent. To make light of an undesired yet perhaps very present role within a void exhibition, it is also very possible to see the most beautiful exhibition on architecture there ever was! Just the unaltered space!

To follow up on this thought, we are right to ask ourselves if an exhibition on the void called Voids does not reassert what is supposed to be questioned in the first place. In any case, the exhibition is neither about the void nor an assertion of the void. Having made the void, exposing the void brings about a number of new and radical problems, and the first is to know what happened to the original void. In a number of ways, this retrospective pursues the initial questionings of each of the works shown and proposes a possible continuity of the void.

This exhibition goes beyond the understanding of possible definitions and apprehends the sufficient relevance of conceivable questions. Proceeding from historical experiences, the void is hinged between a possible return to zero and its opposite, to draw a tabula rasa— two antithetical possibilities for a result that is identical in appearance.

[...]

This retrospective proposes neither to replay past exhibitions—which is impossible—nor realize new empty exhibitions. [...] A retrospective of empty exhibitions presents itself as an exhibition of memories, empty places commemorating their own empty place pasts. A retrospective of exhibitions, a genre of its own to be explored, is similar in many possible ways to a progressive accumulation of memories; the void of these spaces shows nothing, just the memory we project into it; voids distant in terms of space and time; and the most beautiful thing is how it is impossible to define the void, which continually escapes all definitions. The closer we come to grasping a possible understanding, the more it fragments, revealing thousands of other aspects that also need to be defined. The void changes in texture and qualities according to the chosen perspective. And finally, as in its origins, through the void we experience its fundamental quality, namely the presence of its absence.

## 6. VISUALS FOR THE PRESS

### Note:

- Two images may be reproduced free of charge, no larger than 1/4 page each, but only in connection with the promotion of the exhibition;
- For a greater number of images or reproduction in a larger format, permission must be obtained from the Press Department of the ADAGP, for which a fee will be charged;
- Reproduction on the cover or front page requires permission;
- Whatever the origin of the image or the location of the work represented, the copyright notice that must accompany any reproduction (or in the art press, appear in the photo credits) will take the form: © Adagp, Paris 2007.

ADAGP: 11, rue Berryer, 75008 PARIS - tel. 01 43 59 09 79 - fax 01 45 63 44 89

Further information: <http://www.adagp.fr>

01.

Exhibition « La spécialisation de la sensibilité à l'état matière première en sensibilité picturale stabilisée » or « Le Vide » of Yves Klein, Paris, galerie Iris Clert, 28 april – 12 may 1958  
courtesy Archives Yves Klein, DR, ADAGP, Paris



02.

Bethan Huws  
Haus Esters Piece, 1993, Krefeld – Germany  
View Exhibition  
Museum Haus Esters Krefeld, 1993  
© photo: Volker Döhne, Krefeld  
ADAGP, Paris



03.

Maria Eichhorn  
Money at the Kunsthalle Bern, 2002  
Kunsthalle Bern, skylight room  
© photo: Dominique Uldry  
ADAGP, Paris



04.

Maria Eichhorn  
Money at the Kunsthalle Bern, 2002  
Kunsthalle Bern, entrance hall  
© photo: Dominique Uldry  
ADAGP, Paris



05.

Roman Ondák  
More Silent Than Ever, 2006  
Room with a hidden eavesdropping device  
Courtesy Roman Ondák and gb agency, Paris  
© photo : François Doury  
© Roman Ondák





## 7. INFORMATIONS PRATIQUES

### CURATORS

**John Armleder**, artist, was born in Geneva in 1948 and lives there today. Armleder's anti-establishment and anti-formalist practice has included the production of drip- and pour-paintings, "furniture sculptures" and monumental neon-based installations. In 1969, together with Patrick Lucchini and Claude Rychner, he founded Groupe Ecart, in order to take in hand every phase of artistic production, from creation to exhibition to publication. His work has been shown worldwide.

**Mathieu Copeland**, independent curator, was born in Lagny-sur-Marne, France, in 1977; he lives in London. After graduating from Goldsmiths College, London, in 2003, he has developed a practice that seeks to subvert the traditional role of the exhibition and to promote new ways of seeing. In 2004, he organised "Expat-Art Centre / EA C." In 2006, he curated "Soundtrack for an Exhibition" at the Musée d'Art Contemporain de Lyon, and launched the travelling exhibition "A Spoken Word Exhibition." In 2008, he produced "A Choreographed Exhibition" at Kunsthalle St Gallen and La Ferme du Buisson, Noisiel. In 2003, he published the first and last issue of Perfect Magazine, and a collection of artist's videos on DVD.

**Laurent Le Bon**, curator at the Musée National d'Art Moderne, director of the Association de Préfiguration du Centre Pompidou-Metz

**Gustav Metzger**, artist, was born in Nuremberg, Germany, in 1926. He lives in London. An artist and political activist, Gustav Metzger is the pioneer and leading exponent of auto-destructive art. In 1959, he published its first manifesto, and in 1966 co-organised the Destruction in Art Symposium held in London. In 1977, he called a three-year art strike, and continues today to energetically promote his ecological, political and artistic principles.

**Mai-Thu Perret**, artist, lives and works in Geneva. In 1999, she embarked on the continuing art project entitled *The Crystal Frontier*, which revolves around the life of a utopian community of the same name. Perret is obsessive in her exploration of the different ways in which the author/artist can disappear. In 2007, a monographic study of her work was published by JRP-Ringier, under the title *Land of Crystal*. Nothing pleases her more than a recurrent motif.

**Clive Phillpot**, writer. His most recent work is *Ray Johnson On Flop Art*, London, 2008. He was Librarian of MOMA, New York, from 1977 to 1994, and before of Chelsea School of Art, London.

### PRACTICAL INFORMATION

**Centre Pompidou**  
75191 Paris cedex 04  
telephone  
00 33 (0)1 44 78 12 33  
metro  
**Hôtel de Ville, Rambuteau**

**Opening**  
11 am – 9 pm  
every day ex. Tuesdays

**Admission**  
€10 - €12, depending on time,  
concessions €8 - €9  
ticket valid the same day  
for the Musée National d'Art  
Moderne and all exhibitions  
Free for members  
of the Centre Pompidou  
(holders of the annual pass)

Information on  
**01 44 78 14 63**

Buy on-line and print at home:  
**www.centrepompidou.fr**

### AT THE SAME TIME AT THE CENTRE

**MATIÈRE À RÉTROPROJETER !**  
4 FEBRUARY - 1 MARCH 2009  
Press officer  
Céline Janvier  
+ 33 (0)1 44 78 49 87

**ASGER JORN, DESSINS**  
11 FEBRUARY - 11 MAY 2009  
Press officer  
Céline Janvier  
+ 33 (0)1 44 78 49 87

**CALDER,**  
**LES ANNÉES PARISIENNES**  
**1926-1933**  
18 MARCH – 20 JULY 2009  
Press officer  
Dorothee Mireux  
+ 33 (0)1 44 78 46 60

**QUEL CIRQUE !**  
**UNE EXPOSITION-ATELIER**  
**AUTOUR DE CALDER**  
18 MARCH – 20 JULY 2009  
Press officer  
Céline Janvier  
+ 33 (0)1 44 78 49 87