

UP AND RUNNING AGAIN!

The full-scale restoration of Jean Tinguely's *Méta-Harmonie II* (1979) at Schaulager is finished

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PRESS RELEASE

The rattling, clanking, humming and hammering of Jean Tinguely's colossal 'sound-mixing machine', *Méta-Harmonie II*, had become ever fainter in the course of its thirty-eight-year-long lifespan. The restoration of this remarkable work of art, pieced together out of scrap metal, musical instruments, toys, hundreds of screws, drive belts and springs, could not be put off any longer. So a team under the guidance of Schaulager working in collaboration with Museum Tinguely got down to the job of restoring the work to its erstwhile glory. Over a year later, this very tricky project has been successfully completed and *Méta-Harmonie II*, a perennial favourite among visitors, is to return to Museum Tinguely on permanent loan from the Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation.

Jean Tinguely's sound sculpture *Méta-Harmonie II* had to be temporarily shut down just over a year ago after a run of nearly forty years. Too many mechanical parts were badly worn and some of the instruments had fallen silent. The piano built into the frame was no longer producing any sounds at all, several beaters and clappers were missing their targets, and without swift intervention by conservators certain objects that had been in constant motion were at risk of breaking apart. The time was ripe for a major overhaul of this enduringly popular piece. The goal of the project was to repair and restore the work to the condition it had been in during the artist's own lifetime. The most severely affected components were to be reconstructed and any further wear and tear of the mechanical parts and instruments minimised. It was a complex undertaking on a work whose acoustic dimension is at least as important as its visual impact. The team of conservators headed by Marcus Broecker and Carole Maître of Schaulager as well as Jean-Marc Gaillard, conservator at Museum Tinguely and former assistant to the artist, took up the challenge and now, just over a year, have completed what was clearly a very demanding project.

Conservational measures

The 'sound-mixing machine' was to be comprehensively restored right down to the last detail. The innumerable operations that this entailed called for interdisciplinary collaboration in a range of fields, including musical instrument restoration and musicology. There are historical recordings and photographs of *Méta-Harmonie II* that the conservators were able to consult when trying to coax the original sounds out of the built-in instruments. Other components had to be replaced – among them a plastic Disney figurine, which had become so brittle it was disintegrating. Although the team was able to find a replacement for this one, sourcing such serially made products is becoming increasingly difficult in the future. The conservators also developed a method of filling critical areas with a reversible plastic to cushion moving metal parts against wear and tear and were able to test it in close cooperation with the Eidgenössische Materialprüfungs- und

Forschungsanstalt (Empa). This and all the other conservational interventions were documented in meticulous detail so that in future the restoration of *Méta-Harmonie II* can serve as a case study for scientific research purposes.

Jean Tinguely's machine art

As a co-founder of Kinetic Art, Jean Tinguely was in the vanguard of the artistic developments of the second half of the twentieth century. What fascinated him most were machines – contraptions of his own creation with neither function nor purpose. Their appeal lay in their movements and mechanisms, the mystifying beauty of so many interacting parts and, not least, the noises they generated. Pieced together out of scrap metal and found objects, Tinguely's own creations clank, creak, groan and throb – all of which is music to the ears of those for whom tunefulness is not confined to harmony and rhythm. The Swiss artist developed four such *Méta-Harmonies* altogether.

Acquisition and exhibition history

Méta-Harmonie II was first exhibited at a joint show of the works of Jean Tinguely and Bernhard Luginbühl at the Städtische Galerie im Städel in Frankfurt am Main in 1979, and since then has featured in other major exhibitions of his works, including at the Kunsthaus Zurich (1982) and the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg (2000). It entered the collection of the Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation in 1980, when it played a part in the festivities held to mark the opening of the Museum für Gegenwartskunst Basel. The family that gifted it, and thanks to whose generosity and impulse the Museum für Gegenwartskunst was built, had been personal friends of 'Jeannot' his whole life long.

Schaulager as a research centre

Most of the difficult and extensive conservational work required to restore *Méta-Harmonie II* to its original kinetic and acoustic glory was undertaken in Schaulager's conservation department. Such projects, alongside exhibitions and the scientific study of the works in its collection, are an integral part of Schaulager's mission. Thanks to the excellent collaboration with Museum Tinguely, *Méta-Harmonie II* will once again be on view there from 24 November onwards, on permanent loan from the Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation.

Further information and visuals

www.schaulager.org/de/medien

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