

PRESS
RELEASE

Basel, February 2013

Les mille lieux de l'art. Photographies by Ad Petersen

Museum Tinguely, Basel: 27. February – 26. May 2013



Museum Tinguely is showing a selection of extraordinary photographs of artists by Ad Petersen. Born in 1931 in Zaandam, the Netherlands, he organized numerous exhibitions from 1960 until 1990 as a conservator at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Petersen, museum man and self-taught photographer, is driven by fascination and passion for art and artists. During his 30 years' activity at the Museum he used his camera to portray and document the work of famous artists of Tinguely's generation, among them Joseph Beuys, John Cage, Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Lucio Fontana, Niki de Saint Phalle, Edward Kienholz, Claes Oldenburg, Markus Raetz, Robert Rauschenberg, Martial Raysse, Jesús Rafael Soto, Daniel Spoerri, Roland Topor, and many others. Drawings, letters and

documents, bearing witness to Ad Petersen's often life-long, friendly ties with the artists, complete the exhibition.

Petersen's black-and-white photographs, which he realized in the early years using a Rolleicord and later using handier compact cameras, a Pentax and a Leica with an ultra-bright 35mm lens, carry the viewer away with them to a "thousand places of art." Here, the "mille lieux de l'art" are also an acoustic wordplay on the exhibition's title, evoking the specific "milieu" and the atmosphere of the art scene of the 1960s and 1970s. Petersen's shots are "milieu studies" from a time of revolutionary awakening, when across borders and in close dialogue between the artists of America and Europe a variety of new art forms came into being and were presented, even beyond museum walls, with the audience's direct involvement, for example in the form of happenings, actions, and performances. Ad Petersen found himself "in the thick of it" and enthusiastically took part in international art events of the time, which were based on close networking and lively collaboration among the period's trend-setting European museum and art galleries.

He commenced his activity as an art historian in 1960, during the final years in office of Willem J. H. B. Sandberg (1897–1984), who, as an exceptionally gifted self-made graphic artist and museum director, together with his employees, had turned Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum into one of Europe's most innovative and most active contemporary art institutions. Ad Petersen got to know numerous artists during his many years' work at the Museum. He visited them in their ateliers, devised exhibitions and publications with them, and also met them privately. Over the years, hundreds of photographs thus came about: sensitive portraits of the artists and their private surroundings, images of their works and actions, and fascinating shots that show the artists at work in the Museum or in their ateliers.

As a photographer, Petersen tried to proceed as unobtrusively as possible so that the portrayed were not even aware that they were being photographed. Extraordinary picture series were the result, in which he succeeded in using his camera to capture the perfect moment when the artists are entirely engrossed in their work. With his camera he documented many major art events of the 1970s: besides actions by Gilbert & George, John Cage, or Richard Serra at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, also the Festival of the Nouveaux Réalistes in Milan in November 1970 or the show, organized in the same year by Harald Szeemann, "Happening & Fluxus" at Cologne's Kunstverein. Many of the artists made it clear to Petersen that he was one of them. They invited him into their homes, to their actions and to wild parties, and dedicated highly personal works to him as thanks.

Petersen's shots are not only important period witnesses, but they also able, decades later, to convey to the viewer the charisma of the various artists' personalities. This applies above all to the portraits, in which a clear understanding and familiarity between artist and photographer can be sensed. The photographs by Ad Petersen testify to creatively anarchic energy and joie de vivre, and often spontaneously put one in mind of John Irving's uttering, "Life is serious, but art is fun!"

Catalogue

The exhibition is accompanied by a lavishly illustrated publication by the title of "Ad Petersen. Les mille lieux de l'art," with articles by Jean-Christophe Ammann, Ad Petersen, and a preface by Annja Müller-Alsbach and Roland Wetzel, 176 pages, Edizioni Periferia, Luzern. German version ISBN 978-3-906016-12/ Price at Museum Tinguely Shop: 38 CHF.

General information:

Opening hours: Thursday – Sunday 11 - 18 h (closed on Mondays)

Admission prices:

Adults CHF 15

Students, trainees, seniors, people with disabilities CHF 10

Groups of 20 people or more CHF 10 (per person)

Children aged 16 or under: free

For further information and press images please have a look at our website: www.tinguely.ch/presse