

Museum Tinguely acquires a key work by Jean Tinguely from the 1960s

Museum Tinguely has purchased one of Jean Tinguely's key works from the 1960s: *Éloge de la folie*, 1966. Tinguely made the work for the ballet of the same name by Roland Petit. The large-scale work is an important addition to the museum's collection and was last shown in Wolfsburg and Basel over 20 years ago. As part of the new permanent exhibition *La roue = c'est tout*, it will be made accessible to the public again from 8 February onwards.



Jean Tinguely, *Éloge de la folie*, 1966

540 x 780 x 75 cm, aluminium frame with wooden wheels, wire, rubber bands, balls, electric motors, all painted black

For the ballet *L'Éloge de la folie*, Tinguely made one of his key contributions to the dramatic arts and one of his most important works of the 1960s. Tinguely's machine, known like the ballet itself as *Éloge de la folie*, is a flat gear train that acts as a silhouette- and relief-like backdrop. Like his early *reliefs méta-mécaniques* whose coloured metal parts danced to the rhythm of the rotating wire wheels, now it was large, flat wheels cut out of plywood and painted black that rotated in front of a white curtain lit from the back. A dancer pedalling on a bicycle-like frame drove the gear train via transmission belts and set balls rolling on a slide running across the relief. While referring back to old themes and motives, Tinguely found a new form of expression for this large-scale stage presentation. Lighting from behind evokes a shadow play and gives a feeling of

weightlessness, an effect the artist had considered before, as explained in a letter to Pontus Hultén: "I'll put the shadows of the machines to work, too, using three or four cinema projectors." In many later works, shadow play and its staging became important elements in his artistic concepts. Today, the wheels are driven by an electric motor, the pedalling dancer replaced by a cutout human silhouette.

The choreographer and founder of the Ballets des Champs-Élysées', Roland Petit, was inspired by Erasmus of Rotterdam's *In Praise of Folly* to create a contemporary ballet. Erasmus's literary work is a learned discourse, a (timeless) mirror of the times that renders human weaknesses and futile struggles in ironic and exaggerated form. The libretto was written by the author Jean Cau: "It is a eulogy to our life and our world. A eulogy in black-and-white, with a thousand colours and contrasts of violence and tenderness. Noise, sound, and music. Bodies that seek and question one another..." The music was written by composer Marius Constant as a series of structures in concerto form for 19 musicians focusing on solo instruments.

Niki de Saint Phalle, Martial Raysse, and Tinguely were asked to contribute sets for the ballet's nine scenes, designing three each. In order of performance, they were: 1. Les Empreintes, 2. La Publicité, 3. L'amour, 4. La Femme au pouvoir, 5. Les Pilules, 6. La Guerre, 7. La Machine, 8. L'interrogatoire and 9. Count Down. Tinguely supplied designs for scenes 1, 7 and 9.

In the film of the performance (also on view within the new permanent exhibition from 8 February onwards), the ballet begins with Tinguely's 'Machine' as the first stage set and ends with his 'Count Down' as the final scene. The premiere of the film took place on 7 March 1966 at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris. The positive reviews in the French press were due not least to the specially designed stage sets.

Éloge de la folie was last shown in public over twenty years ago in the exhibition *L'esprit de Tinguely* at Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg (2000) and then at Museum Tinguely (2000-2001). The work was sold to an important private collection during the time it was shown in Basel and has now been acquired directly from the collector's estate by Museum Tinguely.

Museum Tinguely

With over 120 kinetic sculptures and 1,500 works on paper, Museum Tinguely holds the world's largest collection of works by the Swiss artist Jean Tinguely (1925-1991). For the first time since the museum was founded in 1996, the collection will be shown in the great exhibition hall from 8 February 2023 onwards. There, visitors will be able to discover the intricate and poetic early works, the explosive happenings and collaborations of the 1960s, and the musical, monumental and sombre works of Tinguely's late period, all presented in an entertaining and eventful tour with many opportunities for hands-on participation. The exhibition will present a new overview of his oeuvre spanning four decades. Based on Tinguely's world of ideas, Museum Tinguely offers a multifaceted exhibition and event programme that seeks dialogue with other artists and art forms, offering an interactive museum experience that appeals to all the senses.

Press material: [tinguely.ch/en/press-download](https://www.tinguely.ch/en/press-download)

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