

**The Last Art-Of-Peace
Biennale
Dr Roddy Hunter**

The Last Art-Of-Peace Biennale

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Inspiring global professionals



Project Description

The Last Art-of-Peace Biennale was an exhibition held to celebrate the 30th anniversary of *Zugehend auf eine Biennale des Friedens* (or *Towards an Art-of-Peace Biennale*) organised by René Block at the Kunstverein, Hamburg, Germany, in 1985.

This inquiry uses live action curatorial research (drawing together work by some of the principal artists involved in the original exhibition for a new presentation at Richard Saltoun Gallery, London) to reflect on the enduring relevance of the themes of peace and harmony in 2015, and to understand the relationship between Robert Filliou's concept of the 'Art-of-Peace' and René Block's curatorial approach. The project contributes to both exhibition history scholarship and curatorial practice research.

Project Duration:

13 February - 20 March 2015

Funding:

N/A

Research partners/collaborators:

Richard Saltoun Gallery, London

Research Aims & Objectives

Research Aims:

- To celebrate the 30th anniversary of *'Zugehend auf eine Biennale des Friedens'* (or *Towards an Art-of-Peace Biennale*) organised by René Block at the Kunstverein, Hamburg, Germany, in 1985.
- To understand the relationship between Robert Filliou's concept of the 'Art-of-Peace' and René Block's curatorial approach in making that exhibition.

Research Objectives:

- Produce a new exhibition containing original work either featured in the earlier exhibition or at least related work by exhibiting artists.
- Write a catalogue essay reflecting on the curatorial approach of *Zugehend auf eine Biennale des Friedens* to consider how an exhibition contributing to 'the Art-of-Peace' would look today by comparison.

Research Context

I began a dialogue with Richard Saltoun when I discovered he was planning the exhibition 'Robert Filliou: Honi Soit Qui Mal Y Pense' which would be the first posthumous solo show of Filliou in London. I'd been interested in Filliou's thinking and practice for over 20 years and have also published on his concept of 'The Eternal Network' or 'La Fête Permanente'.¹ Our mutual interest was timely given increasing curatorial attention toward Filliou as seen from his first significant solo exhibition in the UK two years earlier, 'Robert Filliou: The Institute of Endless Possibilities' (Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, 2013), and then later major retrospectives including 'Robert Filliou – The Secret of Permanent Creation' (M HKA, Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp, 2017) and a thematic reference in The Eternal Network (Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, 2020) at Transmediale 2020. After Saltoun accepted my suggestion to curate a programme to celebrate Art's Birthday during 'Robert Filliou: Honi Soit Qui Mal Y Pense'² I outlined my interest in researching Filliou's concept of the 'Art of Peace' and more specifically the exhibition 'Zugehend auf eine Biennale des Friedens' (or Towards an Art-of-Peace Biennale) organised by René Block at the Kunstverein, Hamburg, Germany, in its 30th anniversary year. Since discovering the existence of Block's 1985 exhibition in Chris Thompson's *Felt: Fluxus, Joseph Beuys, and the Dalai Lama*³ I wanted to understand the extent to which that exhibition responded to Filliou's ambition for a different kind of 'biennale or a triennale or a quaterennale, of work by artists that deals with the specific problem of making the world a world with peace and harmony?'.⁴ Understanding this was necessary research in turn for my plans to become the self-appointed curator of a contemporary edition of the Biennale following the Richard Saltoun show.

<http://www.peacebiennale.info>



Figure 1: Installation view of The Last Art-of-Peace Biennale at Richard Saltoun Gallery (13 February - 20 March 2015). Photograph courtesy Richard Saltoun Gallery.

1. Hunter, R. (2016). 'Curating the Network-as-Artwork after Globalisation'. *Acoustic Space*, 15 (OPEN FIELDS. Art and Science Research Practices in the Network Society), Latvia: RIXC Center for New Media Culture, pp.20-29.

2. Richard Saltoun Gallery. (2014) Robert FILLIOU: "Honi Soit Qui Mal Y Pense" [Press release]. Available at: https://www.richardsaltoun.com/usr/documents/exhibitions/press_release_url/38/pr-robert_filliou_fc.pdf [Accessed 20 September 2020].

3. Thompson, C. (2011). *Felt: Fluxus, Joseph Beuys, and the Dalai Lama*. 1st ed. Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press.

4. *ibid.*, p. 153

Research Methods & Process

Richard Saltoun's enthusiasm was such that he wanted to hold an exhibition revisiting 'Towards an Art-of-Peace Biennale' immediately following 'Honi Soit Qui Mal Y Pense'. As such, I set about researching an exhibition history, obtaining the original catalogue (Figs. 2-3), assembling a list of works, and communicating with anyone I could who was involved or had significant knowledge of the 1985 show. I had already arranged to meet René Block informally at Raven Row, London in November 2014, when he was speaking at an event connected to an exhibition of KP Brehmer. Although not a formal interview and not recorded, he was able to outline the curatorial policy of the 1985 show and crucially disclosed the idea of The Art-of-Peace Biennale as a mobile biennale. Moreover, an essential discovery through meeting with Block and other research was the discovery of the 'Friedenskonzert' (also known as Abschiedssymphonie) by Henning Christiansen, which was performed with Nam June Paik and Joseph Beuys (by telephone, in absentia) at the opening of the Hamburg exhibition. I managed to obtain a vinyl recording of the concert (Fig. 4) which we digitised to play in the gallery throughout the exhibition, thereby lending temporality to the experience.

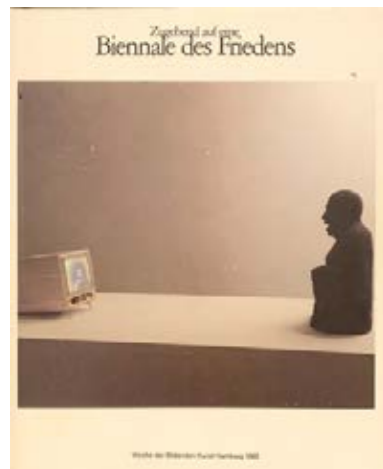


Figure 2: Zugehend auf eine Biennale des Friedens, [exh.cat.] Hamburg: Kunstverein, 1985.

It became clear that any ambition to restage or recreate the exhibition would neither be possible nor desirable given that the Hamburg exhibition had featured 391 artists from 33 countries across 'invited', 'curated' and 'open' sections. Undeterred, Richard Saltoun decided to go ahead with a thematic exhibition which while not restaging the earlier exhibition instead featured some of its artists together to reflect the context of the work. Curated around Filliou's 7 Childlike Uses of Warlike Material (1970) (Fig. 5), the exhibition also included works by Joseph Beuys, Henning Christiansen, Barry Flanagan, Sol LeWitt, Tony Morgan, Wolf Vostell, and Franz Erhard Walther (Figs. 1, 6-9). Saltoun mainly showed available work by these artists as opposed to works that had featured in the 1985 exhibition.

One exception was Sol LeWitt's Proposal for Walldrawing (1985) which was drawn on the gallery wall with permission from, and under the supervision of Sol LeWitt's estate (Figs. 8-9). As my intention wasn't to curate a thematic exhibition in this way, I agreed with Saltoun to be named as 'consultant curator' on the project. This agreement recognised my proposal of the concept, research of the exhibition and artists, and was reflected in a 2,000-word essay in a specially prepared, extended publication made for the exhibition (see Appendix I).



Figure 3: Sol LeWitt, 'Proposal for Walldrawing': Within a two-meter circle (pencil) each person may make one continuous straight abstract line, in pencil'. Courtesy the Estate of Sol LeWitt.

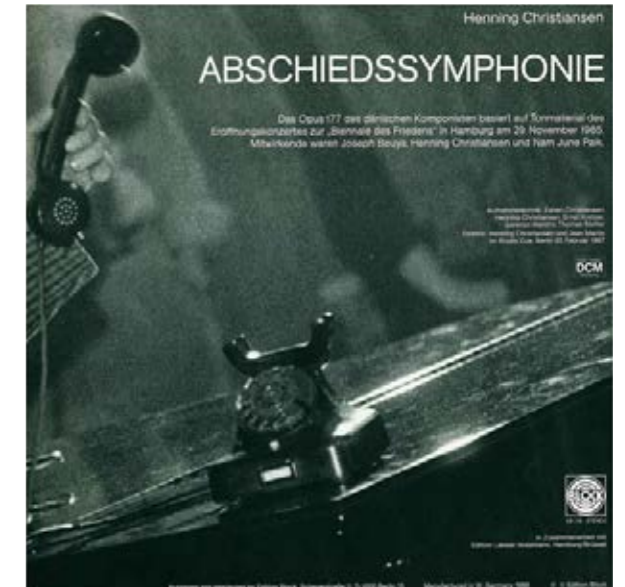


Figure 4: Henning Christiansen, Abschiedssymphonie [Vinyl], Germany: Edition Block 1988.



Figure 5: The Last Art of Peace Biennale [exhibition], 13 February–20 March 2015, Richard Saltoun Gallery, London. Installation view of Sol LeWitt and Robert Filliou.



Figure 7: The Last Art of Peace Biennale [exhibition], 13 February–20 March 2015, Richard Saltoun Gallery, London. Installation view of work by Franz Erhard Walther and archival work by Barry Flanagan, Tony Morgan and Henning Christiansen. Photo courtesy Richard Saltoun.



Figure 6: The Last Art of Peace Biennale [exhibition], 13 February–20 March 2015, Richard Saltoun Gallery, London. Installation view of work by Robert Filliou, Joseph Beuys and Franz Erhard Walther: Photo courtesy Richard Saltoun Gallery.

Research Outcomes & Dissemination

Exhibition: The Last Art-of-Peace Biennale at Richard Saltoun Gallery.

Curatorial essay: Hunter, R. (2015). 'The Last Art-of-Peace Biennale', exh. cat., London: Richard Saltoun Gallery, London.

Conclusion

There were sixteen works by eight artists in the show, three of which works were shown in the 1985 exhibition (see Appendix I). These were Tony Morgan's *Dante's Inferno* (1985) and Sol LeWitt's *Proposal for Walldrawing: Within a two-meter circle (pencil) each person may make one continuous straight abstract line, in pencil* and *Proposal for Walldrawing: Within a two-meter circle (pencil) each person may make one continuous not straight abstract line, in pencil* (1985). The catalogue had not included a definitive list of works, and we could only surmise there were two Lewitt drawings rather than one from close inspection of image captions. It was unclear whether visitors to the original exhibition were able to add to the wall drawings, or whether it was installed by other exhibiting artists (Fig. 3). LeWitt's estate confirmed the existence of both and instructed the works needed to be pre-installed by Saltoun's technicians under supervision. While we would not claim to have discovered a lost LeWitt drawing, it seems probable at least that this was a rare exhibition of the two works together. The broader achievement of the research was its dissemination of knowledge of the 1985 Hamburg show and Fillou's work and practice through a high-profile London exhibition which remains accessible through the gallery's online catalogue of exhibitions.

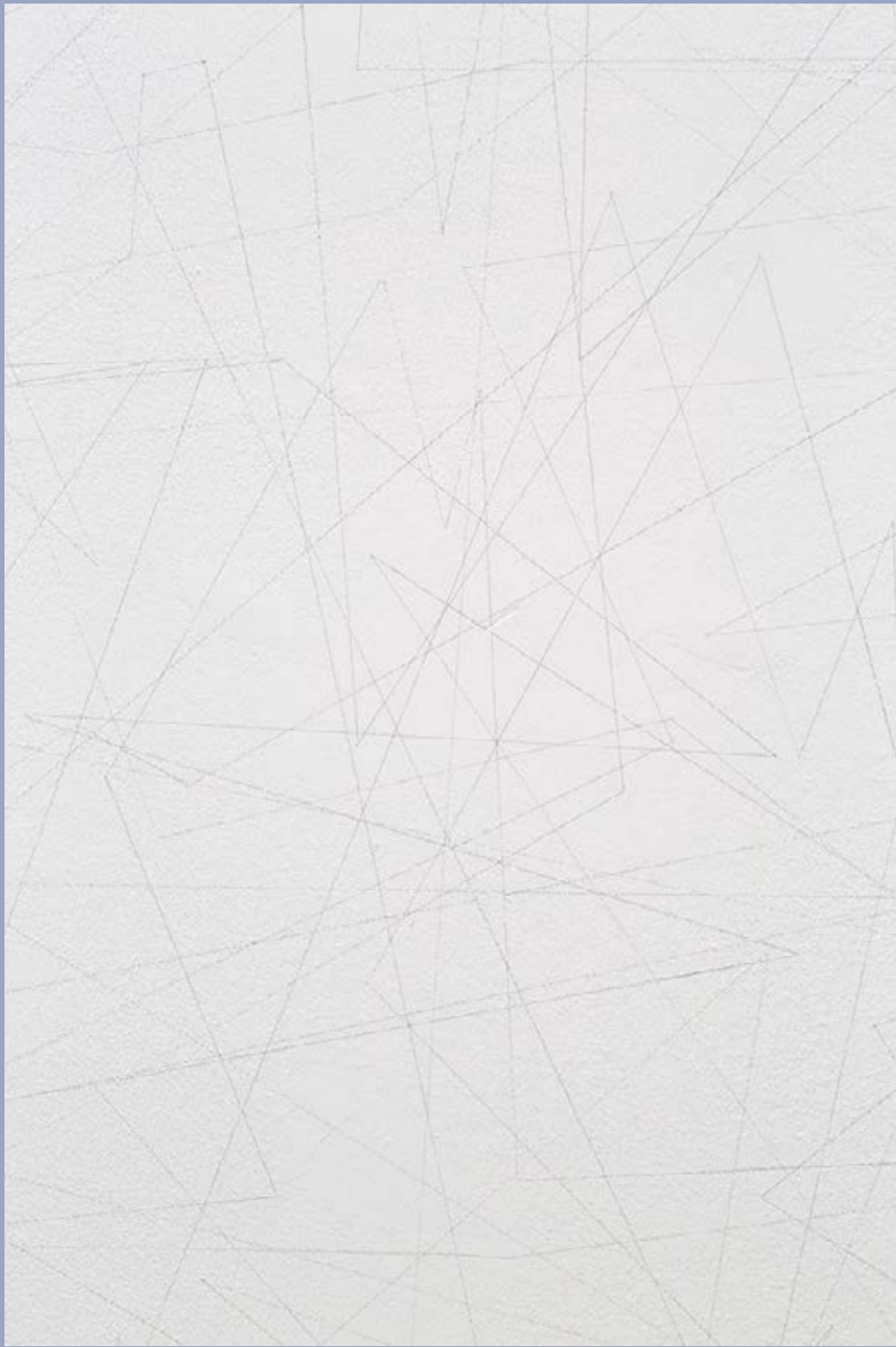


Figure 8: Sol LeWitt, 'Proposal for Walldrawing: Within a two-meter circle (pencil) each person may make one continuous straight abstract line, in pencil' (1985/2015)



Figure 9: Sol LeWitt, 'Proposal for Walldrawing: Within a two-meter circle (pencil) each person may make one continuous not straight abstract line, in pencil' (1985/2015)

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Output Type:

Curation of exhibition