

FINANCIAL TIMES

Blast from the past

Historic works | Large-scale

installations created before

2000 feature strongly in Art

Basel's Unlimited section.

Gareth Harris explains why

Unlimited, the section of the Art Basel fair dedicated to large-scale installations, is not just about 21st-century art. Curator Gianni Jetzer, who is presenting his sixth edition this year, also looks to the 20th century so that visitors can join the dots on the art historical timeline. Here are five works that blazed a trail before the year 2000.

Stan VanDerBeek,
'Movie Mural' (1965-68)

The Box gallery, Los Angeles
Seeing Stan VanDerBeek's multichannel video installation in the mid-1960s must have felt like leaping into the future. Collaged newsreels, found films, slides and the artist's stop-motion collage and computer-based films flicker across several floor-to-ceiling screens, enveloping the viewer.

"VanDerBeek was exploring the idea of a new universal visual language very much formed by his belief in the power of images and technology," says Jacqueline T Kennedy, director of The Box gallery. "It's apparent now that his visionary work anticipated the age of the internet." His layering of images using multiscreen projections that collide and intersect was particularly innovative.

"Movie Mural" was shown in the exhibition *Dreamlands: Immersive Cinema and Art 1905-2016* last year at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. Its curator, Chrissie Iles, says it "held a kind of magic for viewers whose optical senses have been dulled by our ubiquitous commercial projective urban environment". (The price is undisclosed.)

Mac Adams,
'The Bathroom' (1978)

Gb agency
Bubbles overflow a running bath, a sickly perfume permeates the air and blobs of face cream are peppered with tufts of hair in Adams's sinister bathroom *mise en scène*. It looks like a crime scene — but is it? How viewers fill in the gaps in this fictional narrative is key.

"The construction of fictional environments which involve a crime lead to the inclusion of real-time elements, such as the bubble bath," Adams says. "This effect of immediacy is important in the process of including the viewer, who seems to stumble upon a scene he



From top: a still from Sylvie Fleury's 'Skylark' (1992); Klaus Rinke's 'Mutations I. Düsseldorf, Primary Demonstration, 112 Gestures of the Upper Body' (1970); Otto Piene's 'Blue Star Linz' (1980)

or she is not supposed to see.” Voyeurism is a particularly pertinent topic, the artist adds. “It’s a terrible violation of privacy, but also something that is happening every day on a global scale; just look at social media.” The film-noirish work sits somewhere between sculpture and film; it is priced at €82,500.

Klaus Rinke, 'Mutations I. Düsseldorf, Primary Demonstration: 112 Gestures of the Upper Body' (1970)

Kicken Berlin gallery

In 1970, the German artist Klaus Rinke turned towards a stationary camera and twisted and turned his arms into 112 different poses, creating symmetrical patterns with his fingers across his face. This early example of performance and action art presents a “new vocabulary of body language”, says Jetzer.

“Mutations I’ is an expression of inner states, performed before an audience,” explains Annette Kicken of Kicken Berlin gallery. “They were improvised before the camera’s eye, and shot by Rinke’s partner, the photographer Monika Baumgartl.” Rinke undertook the laboratory work, developing the film and making prints, and he decided the sequence of the images, which does not correspond to the chronology of the photo shoot.

The montage, priced at €950,000, exists in an edition of three sets. Two have been in international museum collections since their creation: Tate in London and the Nationalgalerie, Berlin.

Sylvie Fleury, 'Skylark' (1992)

Salon 94 gallery/Galerie Mehdi Chouakri/Karma International/ Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac

The Swiss artist Sylvie Fleury turns the idea of the car as a boy’s toy on its head with “Skylark”. Her vintage 1960s Buick Skylark features prominently in her “Car Wash” videos (1995) and her 1998 film *Between My Legs*. The golden car (price undisclosed) is a unique piece.

Jetzer stresses that “Skylark” is a ready-made sculpture. Its windows are rolled down and a girl band is playing on the radio; a designer handbag and some personal items are displayed on the passenger seat. “Fleury appropriates a male-dominated domain to affirm and empower the feminine,” Jetzer says. Around the time she made the work she also founded the She-Devils On Wheels club, an association of girls riding American cars.

In “Drastic Makeup”, another influential video installation by Fleury, blusher, lipstick and foundation are crushed beneath the wheels of her vehicle. Shown in 2007 at the SculptureCenter in Long Island City, it offers a wry comment on perceptions of masculinity and femininity.

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Otto Piene, 'Blue Star Linz' (1980)

Sprüth Magers gallery

“Blue Star Linz”, a gargantuan inflatable sculpture (priced at \$295,000) with blue tentacles wafting in the wind, is an example of Piene’s quest to “dematerialise” sculpture, redefining the medium by using unusual materials.

Piene, who co-founded the influential Zero artists’ group in 1957, also experimented with light and fire; he is perhaps best known for lighting up the Munich sky at the end of the 1972 Olympics with a giant rainbow.

Turner Prize nominee Dexter Dalwood says of more ephemeral art such as this: “The acquisition policy of some museums is focusing on how to acquire works that don’t, or didn’t, materially exist, encompassing time-based event phenomena that were particularly influential at the time like Piene’s ‘Blue Star Linz.’”

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