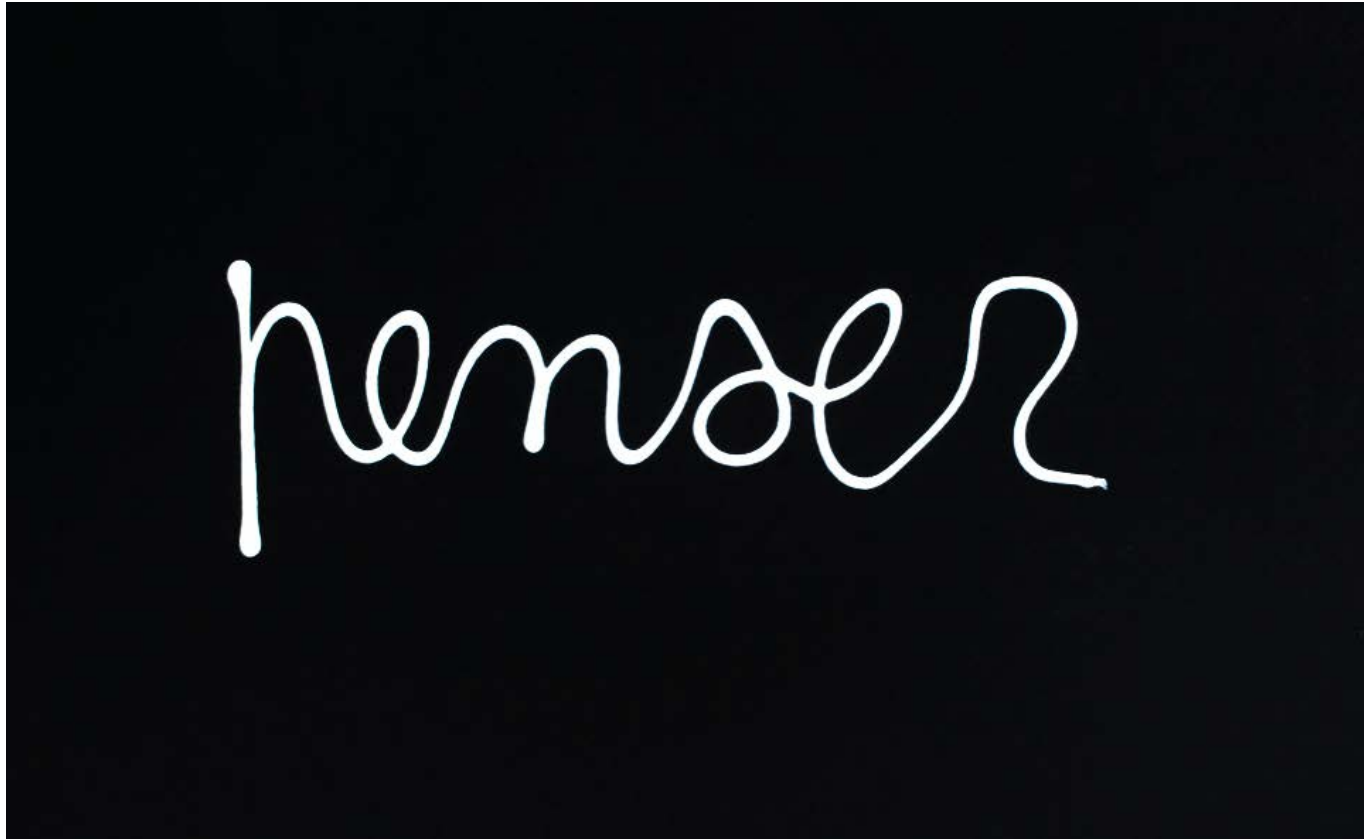


CARDI GALLERY



Ben Vautier, PENSER, 2014, Acrylic on canvas 80 x 80 cm (31 1/2 x 31 1/2 in)

BEN VAUTIER

Sehnsucht

February 1 - March 19, 2022
22 Grafton Street London W1S 4EX

Cardi Gallery is proud to present, *Sehnsucht*, the first ever solo show in Britain dedicated to French artist Ben Vautier (b. Naples, 1935; lives and works in Nice). Displayed on the ground floor of the Grafton Street townhouse is a selection of paintings he created between 1975 and 2016.

The show marks Ben's return to Mayfair after sixty years of absence. In October 1962, invited by Daniel Spoerri to partake in the Festival of Misfits, for two weeks Ben took residence in a cage behind Gallery One's shop window in North Audley Street, a living sculpture on display around the clock, surrounded by a maze of boldly painted texts on panels. London proved pivotal for the development of his practice: it was here that he first met George Maciunas, the father of newly formed Fluxus, and he soon became the

"100% Fluxus man", completely blurring the boundaries between art and life through irreverent performances gigs, and bringing theatre into the streets.

Ben has been conceptually distilling his total art, total theatre and the performing of mundane actions into an art form that brings together art, life, and philosophy, through his tableaux- critique. The thickly poured paint forming the letters in the artist's distinctive cursive handwriting, is set on often glossy, colourful monochrome backgrounds. These handwritten word slogans on a variety of supports which he still produces to this day are iconic bearers of often controversial messages laden with wit and irony. They are linguistic images that deal with a broad spectrum of issues that he centers back to the motor of the world, ego: from self-reflection as an artist, through postmodernism, to ethnology and religion.

Reminiscent of the Japanese haiku, for their startling brevity and the deep feeling of wonder about the word they convey, Ben's words are at once pungent and playful moments of enlightenment that set the viewer on a humorous journey of introspection.

BIO

Ben, pseudonym of Benjamin Vautier, is one of the principal founders of the Fluxus group. Born in 1935 in Naples, Italy, Vautier moved to Nice in 1949, where he lives and works to this day. After many years working at a bookshop, he decided to open a small record store, which soon became an exhibition and hangout place popular amongst the School of Nice artists: Cesar, Arman, Martial Raysse, etc. Convinced that "art must be new and bring a shock", he produced his first drawings based on simplified banana motif variations. This series marked the beginning of his graphic research.

In 1962, Ben became involved with the nascent Fluxus movement. His Fluxus works aimed at defining art as a practice that unifies life, objects and philosophy, developing alongside the notion of appropriation based on the idea that, in art, everything is possible. He, therefore, started to sign everything that had no artistic paternity: people, paintings, photographs, etc. Working on the notions of self, ego, and artist identity, he developed the concept that if art is only a matter of signature, the more visible it is, the more the public will desire it.

His work gained popularity in the 1960s thanks to his writings in various media and forms, notorious for combining impertinence and accuracy of purpose. Relating his everyday joys and misfortunes with an innate sense of humour, he articulated many themes, expressing his feelings, passions and obsessions through his concise catchphrases.

Initially, Ben traced his words with a brush, generally in oil on wood, and then resorted to a technique consisting of "writing" on canvas with acrylic paint poured straight out of the tube. Due to their format, the significantly reduced colours and the signalling effect of writing, his early works sit closer to message signboards than conventional painting. The exhibition "About Nice" inaugurated in 1977 at the Centre Georges Pompidou was the Parisian recognition of the research carried out by Vautier and the School of Nice.

Ben's works are included in the world's largest private and public collections, including MoMA in New York, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney, the Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig in Vienna, the MUHKA in Antwerp, Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, Solothurn Museum in Switzerland, Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris, Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain in Nice, M. A.C. Marseille, M.A.C. Lyon.

#BenVautier

MARKETING & COMMUNICATION

Giacomo Nicolodi

Chief Marketing Officer

giacomo.nicolodi@cardigallery.com

M. +39 3493528046

Ufficio +39 0245478189

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