

Bernar VENET

Financial Time,

Bernar Venet

August 2022



Left: Bernar Venet at his summer house in Le Muy with (left) a detail of his 79.5" Arc x 19, 2004, and (right) *Sitting Tattoo XII*, 2009, by Jaume Plensa. Above: the house's garden. Bottom left: the hall of the Moulin (the old mill), his winter house in Le Muy, with (far left) a compression sculpture by Arman

Donald Judd's foundation in Marfa I kept thinking that I should create a similar, appropriate setting for my work. So I did it... Something less serious was my dream to have a "cabanon" [hut] where I could isolate myself away from visitors and assistants. I found it last year – it's tiny, only 6ft by 7ft, but I built a bed in concrete with just a mattress, and I sleep there some nights during the summer. On the wall is written a quote from Voltaire: "*Tout vouloir est le désir du fou, la modération est le trésor du sage.*" ("Wanting everything is crazy. Moderation is the treasure of the wise.")

I NEVER LISTEN TO podcasts, I never listen to the radio. I did do a podcast recently in Berlin with König [Galerie], but I won't listen back to it. I have to create, remain active, not look back. There is too little time for it. I am now 81 and so much remains to be done...

I DON'T WANT PEOPLE TO RECOGNISE ME AS AN ARTIST. SO I DON'T HAVE A STYLE

MY STYLE ICON, and I'm going to be criticised for this in the art world, is George Clooney. First of all, he's a very good actor and director, but also who doesn't want to look like him? And on top of that, he bought a property 20km away from me so he clearly has good taste. Brad Pitt also lives close by and he has bought my work.

IN MY FRIDGE YOU'LL ALWAYS FIND champagne or rosé for my guests, but what will never be missing is a box of sardines to satisfy my appetite when I am alone. It's such a pleasure to eat them straight out of the tin, without having to behave.

THE LAST MUSIC I LISTENED TO was by David Tudor, an artist from the '60s who we are exhibiting at the Venet Foundation in Le Muy this summer. Normally, I don't listen to music. It really disturbs me. I have to have silence all the time. In my family, when I was growing up, there was no music – and no art. I was born in Château-Arnoux-Saint-Auban in the south of France where there was nothing cultural. But, of course, I had to listen to some David Tudor. It's crazy stuff. venetfoundation.org

I HAVE A COLLECTION OF contemporary art. It started with exchanges with friends in the early '60s, when I was in Nice – artists like Arman and Ben [Vautier]. Then I went to Paris and started to exchange with the

MY PERSONAL STYLE SIGNIFIER is simple: I avoid having one. I look at artists like Pierre Soulages, always dressed entirely in black, or those who wear white in summer and black in winter, like Daniel Buren or Joseph Kosuth – maybe they think they need to look like an artist. I don't want people to recognise me as an artist. So I don't have a style at all. You might see me dressed in black, yes, but then the next day you'll see me in yellow and red, like David Hockney. I change all the time.

THE LAST THING I BOUGHT AND LOVED was a little ink drawing by Matisse from 1904. I saw it on Gagosian's stand at the FIAC [art fair] in Paris and I could not resist. It's a nude on two pieces of paper. He often started drawing on one piece of paper and finished on another. It's a real beauty; in fact, the Musée Matisse in Nice exhibited it.

A PLACE THAT MEANS A LOT TO ME is my home in Le Muy, Provence. After visiting

Bernar Venet

The French artist and collector on sardines, silence and his secret ambition to become a saint

INTERVIEW BY VICTORIA WOODCOCK
PHOTOGRAPHY BY VIVIEN AYROLES

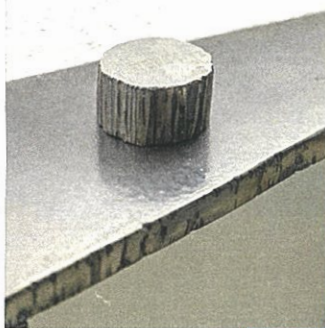


"IT'S SUCH A PLEASURE TO EAT THEM STRAIGHT OUT OF THE TIN"

THE AESTHETE



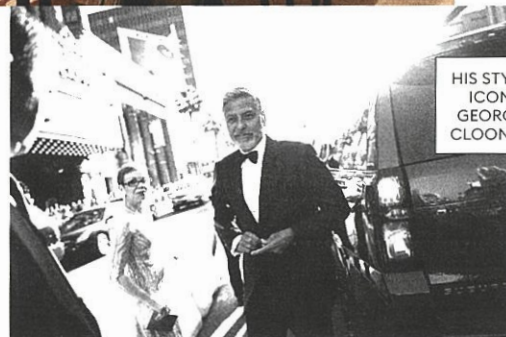
Above: Venet at his office table in the Usine. Right: *Intersection*, 2012, by Anish Kapoor in front of Venet's *Points*, 2013, and (at rear) *Elliptic Elliptic*, 1999, by James Turrell. Below: *Point*, 1984, by Venet



Right: *Round Pearl Saturation*, 2014, by Venet and Tenenku sculptures in the living room of the Usine. Bottom far right: a *Nok* sculpture and *Girl with Hair Ribbon*, 1992, by Roy Lichtenstein in a guest room



Above: *Asymmetrical Pyramid Drawing* #428, 1985, and table, 1991, both by Sol LeWitt, and *Untitled Wall Painting for Bernar*, 2004, by Robert Barry in the mill's dining room. Below: a drawing by Sol LeWitt on the night table in Venet's bedroom



HIS STYLE
ICON
GEORGE
CLOONEY



THAT'S THE IDEA OF THE FOUNDATION: EVERYTHING I HAVE, I WANT TO GIVE AWAY

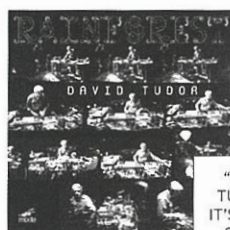
new realists: Jacques Villeglé, Gérard Deschamps, Mimmo Rotella, Daniel Spoerri. But it was when I went to New York that my collection became more important, with work by Donald Judd and Sol LeWitt. And so now we have a substantial collection that we exhibit in the south of France. I also have sculptures by British artists: Anthony Caro, Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon. I have a major Anish Kapoor. And Richard Long, two big pieces – one inside, one outside.

THE THING I COULD NOT DO WITHOUT is difficult to pick, because if I lost everything tomorrow, I'd be OK. I enjoy having beautiful things around but

I'm not attached to them. That's the idea of the foundation: everything I have, I am giving away. It doesn't belong to me, to my kids, to my wife – it's going to be for society.

ALTHOUGH ONE OBJECT I WOULD NEVER PART WITH is a little African Senufo sculpture in steel. It's old and rusted, but I've had it on my night table since 1972. Sometimes I think that when I die – if one day it happens; it could happen – I would like to have it with me. But I know that's not a nice thing to do; it has to belong to everybody.

AN INDULGENCE I WOULD NEVER FORGO is my afternoon nap. When I wake up in the morning, I'm so speedy. It's like I've taken cocaine all night – something I've never done in my life. There's no time to have coffee, and I don't need it anyway. So I work until noon or 1pm, and then if I take a nap, the afternoon is the same: full of energy.



"DAVID TUDOR - IT'S CRAZY STUFF"



I RECENTLY REDISCOVERED pictures of Sol LeWitt and me together. I found them when I was looking for photography for my new biography. My friend Alain Bizo took them. Nobody has pictures of Sol LeWitt; it's impossible. He never wanted to be photographed. They remind me of spending time together in the south of France, and how I introduced him to a very beautiful girlfriend. They travelled to Italy together and when they came back, she said to me, "Oh, you know, he's very nice, but he's very stingy. We went to the worst hotel and the worst restaurant."

AN ITEM OF CLOTHING I RECENTLY ADDED TO MY WARDROBE was a pair of Brunello Cucinelli trousers. I saw them in a window when I was in London, and they're just the right fit.

MY FAVOURITE ROOM IN MY HOUSE is my bedroom because I'm surrounded by artworks, one on top of the other. The bed itself is by Donald Judd, and I have the little Matisse and four Picasso drawings – studies for his famous painting *Still Life with Skull on an Armchair*. Then there's a de Kooning, a Ryman, a Tinguely, a Sol LeWitt and an Indiana – a big painting. It's like my own museum. My dream would be to spend the night at MoMA in New York, in the room of paintings by the abstract expressionists – a huge Pollock, a huge Barnett Newman, a huge de Kooning. Each time I'm there, I think, "I should come and put my bed in here."

MY GROOMING GURU is my hairdresser, a woman called Jennyfer who lives around the corner and comes to my house to cut my hair. When I was 10 years old, I read in a magazine that Picasso's hairdresser came to his home, and I thought, "My God, if one day I am famous, I will have my hairdresser come to my home to cut my hair." And that is what I've done for the past 20 years.

IN ANOTHER LIFE, I WOULD BE a saint. When I was a kid I wanted to be the Pope. My family was very religious, but, very quickly, I understood that you have to study a lot to become the Pope, so I wanted to be a missionary. There was a missionary called Charles de Foucauld, who I had a book about. I would wear my nightshirt, put a rope around my waist and pretend to be a saint. But honestly, I would like to give myself to people to do good things.

I GET MY BEST IDEAS FROM accidents. Like when I was making my black tar paintings in the '60s, and happened to see a pile of gravel mixed with tar on the streets of Nice; the day after I did the *Tas de Charbon* [Pile of Coal] – a radical work. Another time I was making a small edition of my indeterminate line sculptures, and my assistant had just piled them up in a box, and this was the beginning of disorder in my work. But I have a new idea every five minutes or so. Of course, not all of them go into production. But I like Gaston Bachelard's philosophy, *la théorie de pourquoi pas*, which is a way of saying, "Why not?" ■ HTS

Hypotheses by Bernar Venet is at Waddington Custot gallery, London W1, 28 September to 12 November

FINANCIAL TIMES

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6 AUGUST
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BUSINESS
of BEAUTY

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SUSANNE KAPOOR'S
ITALIAN IDYLL

LANSERHOF LANDS IN SYLT

THE WORLD'S BEST
SPARKLING WATERS

HAVE WE REACHED
PEAK STEEL WATCH?