

# GEORGE BRECHT

## *PARTITIONS, GLASSES AND CHAIR EVENTS... 1959-2012*



**PRESS  
RELEASE**



**George BRECHT, Chair Event, 1960**

From *The Book of the Tumbler on Fire* series  
Wooden chair painted white and orange, painted stick, 2 black strips  
82 x 45 x 42 cm  
© Adagp, Paris, 2012  
© photo Blaise Adilon

# 28.09 > 30.12.2012

### Press visit

Wednesday, September 26 2012 (afternoon)

### Preview

Thursday, September 27 2012 at 6.30 pm

### Opening Hours

Wednesday - Sunday, from 11 am to 6 pm

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High resolution pictures (300 dpi) are available on request.

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**mac** musée  
d'art contemporain  
de Lyon

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# THE EXHIBITION

IN 1986, MAC<sup>LYON</sup> ORGANIZED THE FIRST **GEORGE BRECHT** RETROSPECTIVE, THE ONLY IN HIS LIFETIME, DEDICATED TO **EVENTS**. TRUE TO HIS NATURE, **BRECHT** DID NOT COME TO HIS OWN EXHIBITION. ALTHOUGH HE CONSIDERED THE "ACTIVITY" OF EXHIBITING TO BE IMPORTANT, HE WAS INDIFFERENT TO WHETHER WHAT WAS DISPLAYED WAS ART OR NOT: "I NEVER THINK OF WHAT I DO AS BEING ART OR NOT. IT'S AN ACTIVITY. THAT'S ALL". THE ARTWORKS ON DISPLAY WERE THEREFORE BORROWED FROM COLLECTORS OR REBUILT. RECONSTRUCTED ARTWORKS WERE APPROVED OF BY THE ARTIST, THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHS AND TELEPHONE CONFIRMATION. A LETTER BEARS TESTIMONY TO THIS EXCHANGE.

26 *Chair Events*, reconstructed and approved (plus "stool", "table and chair" and "stools", 29 pieces in total) entered the museum's collection after the exhibition, as well as 9 *Event Glasses* and *Vide*. For the latter, Brecht chose a stone on the banks of the Rhône from photographs and the stone was subsequently engraved according to the artist's instructions. Following this retrospective, the *Chair & Glass Events* were exhibited in their entirety in the 1993 (*And Together They Changed the World*) and 2009 (*The Spectacle of the Everyday*) Biennales de Lyon.

A SELECTION FROM **BRECHT'S GLASS & CHAIR EVENTS** AND **SCORES** WILL BE DISPLAYED TO COINCIDE WITH THE 2012 **CAGE'S SATIE: COMPOSITION FOR MUSEUM** (CURATED BY LAURA KUHN, AT MAC<sup>LYON</sup>).

*Event Glasses* are glass rectangles, of different sizes, whose dimensions are randomly chosen. They are mounted on metallic supports and the word "Event" is engraved on each piece of glass. Therefore, everything that happens behind the glass, according to the observer's point of view, is an "Event": "Everything belongs to the same whole, this is the event". The position of each *Event Glass* is drawn by lot using a table with random numbers: the *Event* can therefore be indifferently positioned in the centre of an empty space, in front of another artwork or at the end of a corridor.



**George BRECHT, *Nine Event Glasses*, 1986**  
9 glass rectangles mounted on 9 iron supports ; positions in the exhibition place are drawn by lot using a table with random numbers ; the word "Event" was engraved on each piece of glass using hydrofluoric acid.  
*Comment va ta vache?*, (6 November 2000 – 21 January 2001), Lyon Museum of Contemporary Art  
© Adagp, Paris, 2012  
© photo Blaise Adilon

The *Chair Events* are a poetic association of ideas and actions which a priori, have no direct relationship or connection. Chairs and objects are sometimes accompanied by stories or information, much of which has been taken from the *Guinness Book of Records*. The *Chair Events* are all detailed or listed in the book devoted to George Brecht, entitled *An Introduction to George Brecht's Book of the Tumbler on Fire* (H. Martin, Milan, Multipla Editions, 1978).



**George BRECHT, *Glove*, 1966**  
From *The Book of the Tumbler on Fire* series  
Wooden chair, white glove  
82 x 41 x 83 cm  
© Adagp, Paris, 2012  
© photo Blaise Adilon

/ "I WAS INCREASINGLY DISSATISFIED WITH AN EMPHASIS ON THE PURELY AURAL QUALITIES OF A SITUATION, SO THAT BY THE FALL OF 1959 I HAD DECIDED TO CALL MY SHOW—AT THE REUBEN GALLERY IN NEW YORK—OF MY MORE OBJECT-ORIENTED WORK "TOWARDS EVENTS". THE WORD "EVENT" SEEMED CLOSER TO DESCRIBING THE TOTAL, MULTI-SENSORY EXPERIENCE I WAS INTERESTED IN THAN ANY OTHER." /

—GEORGE BRECHT

All quotations by George Brecht have been taken from *Fluxus Dixit. Une anthologie vol.1* (texts compiled and presented by Nicolas Feuillie). Les presses du réel, Dijon, 2002. Quotation, p. 65.

# THE EXHIBITION

## GEORGE BRECHT

### EVENTS

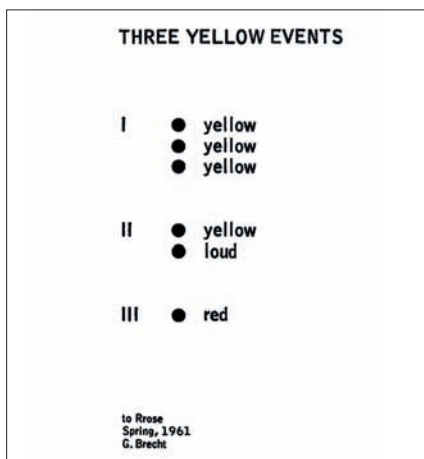


George BRECHT, *Vide*, 1986  
Dimensions : 72 x Ø 90 cm  
Gift of the artist, 1987  
© Adagp Paris 2012

*Vide* is a relatively large pebble that has been shaped over time by the river Rhône. It was chosen by Brecht along the banks of the river and was then engraved with the word "Vide".

*Notice Green-Notice Red* refers to two paintings and one single work. One is red, entitled "Notice Green"; the other is green, entitled "Notice Red". In 1986, as part of the retrospective organized by the macLYON, George Brecht asked the museum to repaint the two paintings "Notice Green" and "Notice Red". They were exhibited as originals throughout the duration of the exhibition. Once the retrospective finished, the two paintings were returned to their 'creator', the anonymous painter, but were not destroyed. What had been an "artwork" for two months was now relegated to the status of "imitation". These two paintings, even more so than *Events*, question the status or nature of the artwork. For this reason, the museum was desirous to exhibiting them as part of the retrospective: these two "fakes" temporarily certified as "real" by the artist, constitute perhaps the most "original" artwork by George Brecht.

*Event Scores*: George Brecht wanted his compositions to be performed with the utmost seriousness because these were indeed "works of art", even if the author himself chose not to use this term, as he feared it would immediately "categorize" his work. His compositions can be performed by everyone, based on what the performer understands, feels and imagines from these oftentimes rather enigmatic musical scores (for example: "Three Yellow Events").



George BRECHT, *Score from Water Yam*, 1963  
© Adagp Paris 2012

Of all the *Scores* in *Water Yam* (a book or anthology of Brecht's *Events* in the form of a small box published in 1963 containing printed cards), the museum has chosen to put the spotlight on a small selection of these. They are placed on the wall, like paintings (we hope that Brecht wouldn't reproach us such an interpretation; indeed, for Brecht 'interpretation' by its very nature would allow such a proposition).

Furthermore, we invite the public to discover Brecht's *Scores* and encourage internet users to suggest an interpretation, which in turn will be realized by the museum. (See conditions on our website [www.mac-lyon.com](http://www.mac-lyon.com) in September).



George BRECHT, *Water Yam*, 1963  
© Adagp Paris 2012  
© photo Blaise Adilon

**/ "MOST CONCRETE IS THE READYMADE. NOW, DUCHAMP THOUGHT MAINLY ABOUT READYMADE OBJECTS. JOHN CAGE EXTENDED IT TO READYMADE SOUND. GEORGE BRECHT EXTENDED IT FURTHERMORE INTO READYMADE ACTIONS, EVERYDAY ACTIONS, SO FOR INSTANCE A PIECE OF GEORGE BRECHT WHERE HE TURNED A LIGHT ON AND OFF, O.K.? THAT'S THE PIECE. TURN THE LIGHT ON AND THEN OFF. NOW YOU DO THAT EVERY DAY, RIGHT? [...] WITHOUT EVEN KNOWING YOU'RE PERFORMING GEORGE BRECHT." /**

**—GEORGE MACIUNAS**

ibid. « *Discussion with L. Miller* », 1978, p.65.



# BIOGRAPHIE

**George Brecht** was born in 1926 in New York and died in Cologne (Germany) in 2008.

**Various biographies dispute Brecht's birth date and birth place: some suggest he was born in Minnesota in 1924, others suggest Halfway, Oregon in 1925 or others mention New York in 1926.**

**1957** George Brecht drafts *Chance Imagery*, a founding text for the future Fluxus movement, based on the importance of coincidence or chance.

**1957-1958** In collaboration with Allan Kaprow and Robert Watts, Brecht publishes *Project in multiple dimensions*, an essay in which he writes that it is time to open up "new fields of exploration to the artist", including "the production of sound, the conversion of the sound spectrum into the light spectrum, the formulation of a Movement-Space-Time spectrum, of an olfactory and tactile spectrum, the examination of all pyrotechnical and explosive fields", etc.

**1958** While he was still working as a chemist in Metuchen, New Jersey, George Brecht joined an experimental composition class given by John Cage in the New School for Social Research (at the class, he was reunited with his friend, Allan Kaprow).

**1959** In a notebook entry dated 25 June, we can see an outline for *Television Piece*, an assembly of 9 televisions, turned on; forming what one would today call a wall of images. The same year, George Brecht created *Drip-Music*, then *Time Table Music*. This piece takes place spontaneously in a train station. The performers use a time table to time their own sound. All trains going and staying are part of the performance. All of the various other station sounds (voices, conflicts, announcements) are also part of the event, as are the various events taking place at the station<sup>1</sup>. George Brecht developed his works in terms of sound events: "I think I'm more a musician than a visual artist. Time is what interests me".

**Spring 1960** The artist creates his first "Event". "I was standing in the East Brunswick forest, in New Jersey where I lived, I was waiting for my wife to return home, standing behind my old estate car, the motor was running and the left indicator was flashing on and off and it came to me that this situation could be the starting point for a veritable 'Event'". This observation resulted in *Motor Vehicle Sundown (Event)*.

**1963** George Brecht compiles a complete anthology of his "Events" in *Water Yam Box*. This is a first collection all of his events, printed on cards and contained in a box. Similar to a score, an *Event* is performed. It can be performed in private or in public, alone or in a group. Sometimes, the instructions are enigmatic, for example: "between two sounds" or "two durations, red, green", sometimes they occur in the category that George Brecht himself defines as "limit-art", they are "barely audible sounds or barely visible shows", such as "Turn on the radio, at the first sound, turn it off" or "Three Aqueous Events; ice, water, steam"<sup>2</sup>. **In May, George Brecht organized the Yam Festival with Robert Watts: numerous Events were staged outside of the traditional circuit of art galleries with the participation of John Cage and La Monte Young.**

**1965** Brecht leaves the United States for a three-year collaboration with Robert Filliou. They open *La Cédille qui sourit* at Villefranche-sur-Mer, France<sup>3</sup> (research centre/store selling postcards, jewellery, games, puzzles, Fluxus boxes, and distribution point for MAT, MAT-MOT, Something Else Press and Mouna Frères publications).

**1967** Brecht and Filliou publish *Games at the Cedilla, or the Cedilla Takes off*<sup>4</sup>. Brecht collaborates with Beuys, Cage and Kaprow on Filliou's book: *Teaching and Learning as Performance Arts*. He then moves to London, and finally to Germany in 1970 where he continues his artwork while choosing to break away from the chaos and frenetic pace of the artistic sphere.

**1986** First and only retrospective during his lifetime at mac<sup>LYON</sup>.

**1993** Second Biennale de Lyon, *And Together They Changed the World*: exhibition of the entirety of the *Chair* and *Glass Events* from the museum's Collection.

**2009** Tenth Biennale de Lyon, *The Spectacle of the Everyday*, *Chair Events* exhibited.

1. Time table music, summer 1959. There are two versions of the action. In the first version, each "performer" interprets the timetable to the very minute or second and this is precisely adhered to. In the second version dating from 1961, all instructions about producing sounds are omitted. The "performer" has the freedom to determine and discover what may happen.

2. On the subject of this piece, Allan Kaprow wrote: "I once made a delicious iced-tea, inspired by the piece. While I drank my tea, I thought about it", in *Nontheatrical Performance*, 1976.

3. Robert Filliou, 1926-1987. *La Cédille qui sourit* opened in the summer of 1965 and closed in March 1968.

4. New York, Something Else Press, 1967

# VISITOR INFORMATION

## Exhibition

Curator: Thierry Raspail, Director of mac<sup>LYON</sup>  
Head of project: Hervé Percebois  
Exhibition assistant: Olivia Gaultier  
Registrar: Gaëlle Philippe

## Press contacts

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## Opening hours

Wednesday - Sunday, from 11 am to 6pm

## Access

### By car:

- along "Quai Charles de Gaulle", follow "Cité Internationale", carparks

### By bus, stop Musée d'art contemporain:

- Line C1, Gare Part-Dieu/Cuire  
- Line C4 Jean Macé/Cité internationale  
change with metro Foch line A or metro  
Saxe-Gambetta lines B et D  
- Line C5, Bellecour -Terreaux/Rillieux-Vancia

### By bike:

- Several Velo'V stations are located around the Museum.

## Admission

Full rate: 6 euros\*

Concessions: 4 euros\*

**Free for visitors under 18**

\* subject to modification

**+ COMPLETE PROGRAM OF GUIDED  
TOURS: FOR ADULTS, IN FAMILY, IN ONE  
HOUR...**

/I NEVER THINK OF  
WHAT I DO AS BEING  
ART OR NOT. IT'S AN  
ACTIVITY. THAT'S ALL./

—GEORGE BRECHT

Ibid. Citation extraite p. 167.

## Simultaneously

CAGE'S SATIE:  
COMPOSITION FOR  
MUSEUM

LA MONTE YOUNG &  
MARIAN ZAZEELA  
RICHARD BUCKMINSTER  
FULLER

mac

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