

TAKIS

Exhibition from 22 November 2019 to 19 April 2020



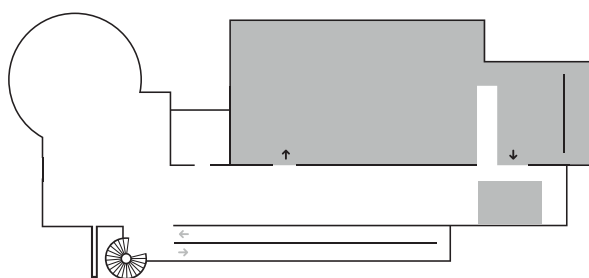
Takis, *Magnetic Fields* (detail), 1969. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Partial gift, Robert Spitzer, by exchange, 1970. © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2019. Photo: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

“Electromagnetism is an infinite, invisible thing, [...] I would like to render it visible so as to communicate its existence and make its importance known; I would like to make visible this invisible, colourless, non-sensual, naked world which cannot irritate our eye, taste or sex. Which is simply pure thought.”

Takis

Meier Building

Level 0



PANAYIOTIS VASSILAKIS, KNOWN AS TAKIS, was born in Athens in 1925 and died in August 2019. He was a member of the Resistance during the German occupation of Greece, and he was imprisoned during the Greek Civil War, which broke out in 1946. He was a self-taught artist who began by studying classic ancient sculpture. He went to Paris in 1954 and lived there for long periods of time. It was the city where he also started exploring the sculptural possibilities of electromagnetism. For Takis, the visual qualities of an artwork were not the most important ones: "What I was obsessed with was the concept of energy."

This exhibition is not chronological. Instead, it is arranged by some of the most outstanding aspects of Takis's work. In the mid-1950s, Takis began experimenting with the use of energy and movement in sculpture. "What I was interested in was the idea of bringing a new, uninterrupted and living force to iron sculpture. The result was in no way a graphic representation of a force. Rather, it was the force itself." One of the first artworks we find is *Magnetic Fields* (1969), a field of small iron sculptures activated by magnets swinging above them. The use of magnetic energy works by suspending magnets, giving a sensation of lightness and movement that defies the forces of gravity. Fascinated by the forces of invisible energy, the artist saw the result as a communication between materials. The art critic Alain Jouffroy described these artworks as 'télé magnétiques'.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Takis incorporated radars, dials, antennas and electrical panels into his artworks as a way of exploring materials and their behaviours, an activity highly linked to science. It was also a way of exploring the cosmos and mythological thought: “My desire as a sculptor was to learn to use this energy, and through it, to attempt to penetrate cosmic mysteries.” Despite being invisible, the fields of electromagnetic forces become visible in his work and develop into a form of thinking.

An important ensemble of these artworks was exhibited at the Alexander Iolas Gallery in New York in 1960. It took the form of an electromagnetic installation in which the conventions of sculpture were questioned. This ensemble is reproduced in the exhibition. In the very same year, Takis staged a performance entitled *The Impossible: A Man in Space* with the poet Sinclair Beiles. While suspended in mid-air through a system of magnets, Beiles recited his *Magnetic Manifesto*: “I am a sculpture [...]. I would like to see all nuclear bombs on Earth turned into sculptures.”

Takis also explored sound through pieces that randomly responded to air currents, and by using electromagnetism to deliberately create sound. Throughout the exhibition we find pieces that clearly have a life of their own since the sound cannot be fully controlled. Friction, wear and tear, and movement transform the sound they produce.

In the early 1960s, a long stop at a station while travelling by train from London to Paris made him perceive the signal lights controlling the railway traffic. Based on that experience, he incorporated light into his artworks in order to carry on exploring communication and energy, as well as the potential and dangers of technology. His *Télé lumières* are assemblies of electronic components containing mercury, allowing the type of current to be manipulated and flux to be created. Some of his *Signals* incorporate light dials and the flashing component of signal transmission. These pieces actually led Takis to address certain issues related to artwork production and distribution. The unique pieces he produced were only available to a small group of purchasers because of the prices the market imposed. So, he decided to do an important production of multiples produced, which brought production costs down and made the artworks more affordable – a kind of democratisation of art. Also interesting are his street actions like *Signaux feux d'artifice*, performed in Paris in 1957 using fireworks in the sculpture.

The presentation of the exhibition at MACBA includes a documentary section that offers a more comprehensive approach to Takis and his work. This is achieved by drawing on a variety of documentaries, interviews or excerpts from exhibition reports. The exhibition also includes sections dedicated to the three outstanding moments or aspects of his career, as well as materials connected with his work.

The first thing that should be mentioned is his link to the Signals London gallery and the *Signals* newsbulletin (1964-1966), both named in tribute to Takis's artworks. The driving force behind the project was Paul Keeler, and collaborating with him were David Medalla and Guy Brett. The October/November 1964 issue of the *Signals* newsbulletin was entirely given over to Takis and, in the same year, the "Takis Magnetic Exhibition" was held at the Signals gallery..

Between 1968 and 1969, Takis was a visiting fellow at the then recently created Center for Advanced Visual Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, United States. While there, he was able to work closely with scientists and engineers that he saw as 'poets' and 'creators'. The artworks produced during his fellowship formed the basis of an exhibition at that centre.

And the last thing to highlight is his activism with regard to the status of artists, which he expressed to the fullest extent through the Art Workers' Coalition (AWC). In January 1969, in the exhibition "The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age" shown at MoMA, Takis, in disagreement with the decision of the show's curator, decided to remove his presented work, which formed part of the museum's collection. That action led to the foundation of the AWC. It included artists, theorists, critics, filmmakers, writers and museum staff members. The AWC advocated for museum reform and for the transformation of the role of the artist.

Takis's work was shown at MACBA in 2000 as part of the exhibition "Force Fields. Phases of the Kinetic" curated by Guy Brett. It was a project that reflected on the possible models of the universe within parameters of non-abstraction or non-representation, a speculation of flux, voids or bodies and matter based on a reappraisal of certain aspects of kinetic art and the language of movement. Takis's artworks were fundamental to the project, which, in Brett's words, posed "the problem of the dichotomy force of nature/aesthetic choice".

Takis's work represents a form of literal and aesthetic break, a kind of productive confrontation between art, science and the contemporary world. Takis investigated materials, their properties and their behaviours; their 'spontaneity'. As Guy Brett said, "by condensing pure energy, without revealing anything to see or touch, magnetism fills a gap, a void in space and exposes the presence of matter by its very absence, while demonstrating that matter is energy". By challenging gravity, magnetism enables us to go beyond the view of gravity as a simple terrestrial force - which is always implicit in the tradition of monumental sculpture - and to see it as universal and multidirectional.

Exhibition organised by Tate Modern in collaboration with the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) and the Museum of Cycladic Art, Athens.

Curated by Guy Brett (Critic and Independent Curator), Michael Wellen (Curator, International Art, Tate Modern) and Teresa Grandas (Curator, MACBA).

Publication

Takis: The publication presents the Greek artist Takis (Panayiotis Vassilakis) and the use he makes of magnetism, light and sound to create new art forms. With texts by Guy Brett, Michael Wellen, Melissa Warak and Maiten Bouisset (conversation with Takis). A joint publication by the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) and Tate Enterprises Ltd, London, 2019. Editions in Spanish and English.

MACBA App

Enjoy the explanatory pages and audio guide descriptions of a selection of works from the exhibition, as well as detailed information about exhibitions and activities, videos, interesting facts, and practical information for getting to the museum.

Guided Tours

By Antonio Gagliano and Albert Tarrats, artists
Friday, 6 pm

Accessibility

Guided tours for people with hearing and visual impairment, and accessibility supports for "Let's talk about..." (sign language interpretation, magnetic loop, and accompaniment for people with visual disabilities) are available upon request. Please contact educacio@macba.cat.

Family Programme

+ - / + + Magnetisms
Experimentem amb l'ART workshop. For families with children aged 2 to 5
Saturday 23 and 30 November, 7, 14 and 21 December 2019, and 11, 18 and 25 January, 1, 8 and 15 February 2020, from 11 am to 12.30 pm

Let's talk about...

Let's talk about *Takis* with Teresa Grandas, Curator, MACBA
Thursday 12 December, 6.30 pm
Let's talk about *Takis* with Lolo & Sosaku, artists
Thursday 19 December, 6.30 pm

More information at macba.cat

Opening times

Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, 11 am to 7.30 pm
Tuesday closed (except for public holidays)
Saturday, 10 am to 8 pm
Sunday and public holidays, 10 am to 3 pm

Every Saturday, from 4 to 8 pm, entrance to the Museum is free.

The Museum entry ticket is valid for a month. Activate it at the ticket desk and visit us as often as you like.

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Plaça dels Àngels, 1
08001 Barcelona
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