



PRESS RELEASE KUNSTFORUM DER TU DARMSTADT

Status May 16, 2022

Matthias Berthold BREATHE
May 7 to October 30, 2022
Art happenings in public space



Art happening by Matthias Berthold Matthias Berthold, 2022 © Künstler/Kunstforum der TU Darmstadt

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues of the press,

on **Saturday, May 7, 2022 3:30 P.M.** the next vernissage of the Kunstforum der TU Darmstadt take place in the presence of the artist Matthias Berthold, mayor Jochen Partsch, Dr. Manfred Efinger (Vice President, Administration and Financial Affairs of the TU Darmstadt), and Julia Reichelt, M.A. (Director of the Kunstforum der TU Darmstadt) at the Buxbaum Kiosk, Kantplatz Darmstadt.

We cordially invite you to the press tour on Thursday, May 5, 2022, 11:00 A.M. in the presence of the artist. The meeting point is at the Buxbaum Kiosk, Kantplatz Darmstadt.

Below you will find our detailed press information. Image material can be found at:
<https://hessenbox.tu-darmstadt.de/getlink/fiMfbJ7gUYMSMbL9T66EyRhE/>

With further inquiries and interview desires with Matthias Berthold you turn gladly to the Director of the Kunstforum der TU Darmstadt Julia Reichelt by e-mail julia.reichelt@tu-darmstadt.de or phone +49 (0)6151 16-20528).

Best regards from the Kunstforum der TU Darmstadt

Louise Bullock



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*With Matthias Berthold BREATHE, the Kunstforum der TU Darmstadt is once again artistically active in public urban space. The title BREATHE refers to one of his approximately forty »instructions for action« that can be found in the urban area within the action period. Matthias Berthold (*1964 in Lübeck, lives and works in Hamburg) has devoted himself to art in public space in numerous projects since 2005. Fundamental to his actions is the intensive preoccupation with the effect of language and the written word.*

»Self-exploration is my drive« (Matthias Berthold)

The title BREATHE is paradoxical: to ask someone to do something that he does anyway. Thus, a sign decrees to concentrate once purely on the essential — to »breathe«. More than forty such »instructions« will be discovered in the city area. They are part of the art happenings of the Hamburg artist Matthias Berthold (*1964 in Lübeck, lives and works in Hamburg). They invite to experiment and gain experience, to discover free spaces.

Signs are omnipresent in public space with their requests or prohibitions. Berthold counters this in his instructions, which look like conventional street signs and which he has been developing for twenty years. They encourage self-experimentation and seemingly nonsensical action.

In the beginning there was the personal experience: Turning right three times for no reason, leaving everyday life, where do I get to? Standing still in a busy square for an hour or throwing a cooked spaghetti onto a city map and walking the route. It's reminiscent of Fluxus and the happenings of the '60s, which sought to combine art and everyday life more vehemently than ever before. »Lift is art«, says German sculptor and painter Wolf Vostell (*1932–†1998). Yoko Ono (*1933) created the first instruction in 1955 with her »Lightning piece«: »Light a match and wait for it to go out«.

Matthias Berthold goes further by taking his instructions into the public sphere, after first applying his instructions »on prescription« in a hospital in Hamburg in 1998, where he offers a trade. To receive the instruction, one must sign to actually carry it out.

»Throw the bunch of keys off a bridge into the water«, for example, or »Take down your house piece by piece and return each material to its place of origin«. Printed on hospital paraphernalia, these sound like the arbitrary imperatives of a Monopoly game Community Chest card (»Go to jail. Go directly to jail. Do not pass go. Do not collect \$200«). Already here we find in Berthold's work the idea of letting go, of separating



oneself from a purposeful action. Almost all of the 21 actions on prescription were signed.

Since 2005, the city and everyday life have served as his playground. Like the Situationists, the most radical avant-garde groups of the 20th century, who wanted to leave the desk, the studio, the museum and have a direct impact on society. »Ne travaillez jamais« (never work) was sprayed on a Parisian house wall in 1953 by the then 22-year-old writer and philosopher Guy Debord (*1931–†1994). The slogan became a core phrase of the Situationists. Provocative and inflammatory.

The one-line political messages (»Truisms«) that the American conceptual artist Jenny Holzer (*1950) has been spreading in public space since the 1970s also concern social themes and problems, above all the nature of power. On posters or »give-aways«, projected onto buildings, or continuously on commercial display boards, as in her famous action on Times Square in New York in 1982, like harmless advertising slogans. »Protect Me from what I want« can be read, »abuse of power comes as no surprise« or »Romantic love was invented to manipulate women«.

»Words are effective«, says Matthias Berthold, »so I'm careful, it doesn't come down to drastic means«. He makes it sound like »starting something without knowing what it is« or »asking questions to which there are no answers«. Triggering something liberating that is unpredictable and situational is what it's all about. Art is created in the mind of the viewer, says American conceptual artist Lawrence Weiner (*1942–†2021) in his 1968 »Declaration of Intend«. It exists independently of its realization, solely as a creative idea. It takes place primarily in the imagination or in concrete action, in self-experimentation. Weiner writes words and sentences on walls in public spaces as enigmatic messages. They make us look differently at our surroundings and show how language transforms the visible.

»For me, a work of art is something immaterial« (Matthias Berthold). Language has a key role to play here. It can be inviting and open up free spaces. »It can explode notions and turn the screws to loosen things up«. This happens through his instructions, which encourage deeper connection with nature and all organisms, deceleration with all the senses. »Expect nothing« reads one of the signs, for example, or »Let the wind guide you through the landscape, always walk towards the wind«, »Watch a tree grow«, »Walk with the clouds«, or »Focus on the vastness«. Every organism is important »To compliment a mushroom«, »To recite a poem to an ant«. They give breadth and do not constrict, as instructions commonly trend to do. They turn our thinking upside down. They are not logical and set inner processes in motion. »Remember what you wanted when you were sixteen«, »Follow a sudden inspiration«.

The imperatives and negations have disappeared from Matthias Berthold's instructions — expect for one: »Don't talk about the weather«.



The effectiveness and possibilities of words can also be found in his approximately ten-meter-high façade artwork for the new energy center on the Lichtwiese in Darmstadt (»Wortfeld«, 2019). It consists of 39 relational words that trigger associations when viewed without being able to make them tangible. They float on the surface, light, and airy, freed from their syntax »because«, »if«, »rather«, or »partly«. »They are beginnings of meanings, which ultimately, however, remain open.« (Matthias Berthold). A game of searching for meaning and finding meaning emerges. A second »world field«, or better »letter field« can be found on one of the flags on the Old Main of the Tu Darmstadt. A word has become a picture. The white background takes up more space than the letters. The surface seems weightless and lets the letters breathe. They have been freed from their order and linear arrangement and stand out more strongly as a graphic form. A flag for freedom.

The viewer must become active in order to decipher the word, just as freedom is actively worked out, demanded, and fought for. Freedom is fragile, like the loose arrangement of the individual letters.

Language as a key to imaginary worlds

Berthold's texts become concretely »manageable« through the fortune cookies that are part of the art actions and are produced specially. They are »artwork« and advertisement at the same time. Inside these small crispy pastries, familiar from Asian restaurants, a small note is hidden, like a promise. Unlike signs in public spaces, which are visible from afar and have a fixed location and supposed authority, fortune cookies are small, personal surprises. Luck and chance play a role in which text is probably drawn — and which instruction is to be followed.

Vita Matthias Berthold

Matthias Berthold was born in 1964 in Lübeck, he lives and works in Hamburg. He studied ethnology and visual communication for a few semesters, then illustration at the University of Applied Sciences in Hamburg and experimented with his own currency. He makes inventions such as the daytime house, the dark bulb, or the universal device, which earns him a sponsorship award from Robert Bosch GmbH. Everything that happens outside the »white cube«, that does not have to be declared and guarded as art, interests him. Guest residencies in Ireland and Iceland follow. Since 2005, the focus has been on art in public space.

A chronological vita is available at: www.matthiasberthold.de

An extensive supporting program is part of Matthias Berthold's art happenings, for example on May 8 and October 30, 2022 his experimental »Windwanderungen« or on June 23, 2022 the participatory performance of the concert »In C« by Terry Riley, a



classic of minimal music based on a field of notes, a cooperation with the Symphony Orchestra of the TU Darmstadt.

The exhibition »Matthias Berthold BREATHE« is the third artistic intervention of the Kunstforum der TU Darmstadt in public space. For the first time, the Botanical Garden of TU Darmstadt will be integrated alongside the city's parks and green spaces. Further information. At tu-darmstadt.de/kunstforum.

The exhibition is supported by:
Wissenschaftsstadt Darmstadt
Technical University of Darmstadt
Vereinigung von Freunden der Technischen Universität zu Darmstadt e. V.
Sammlung Reinking
Hamburger Zukunftsstipendium

»I believe that people have an innate artistic power within them. And I want to bring that to light.« Yoko Ono