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Cerith Wyn Evans: 'I love nothing more than neon in direct sunlight. It's heartbreakingly beautiful'

Cerith Wyn Evans reflects on his largest show in the UK to date, at Mostyn, Wales – a multisensory, neon-charged fantasia of mind, body and language



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Installation view of Cerith Wyn Evans, '.....' at Mostyn, Wales
(Image credit: © Rob Battersby)

BY HARRIET LLOYD-SMITH PUBLISHED DECEMBER 20, 2022 IN [FEATURES](#)

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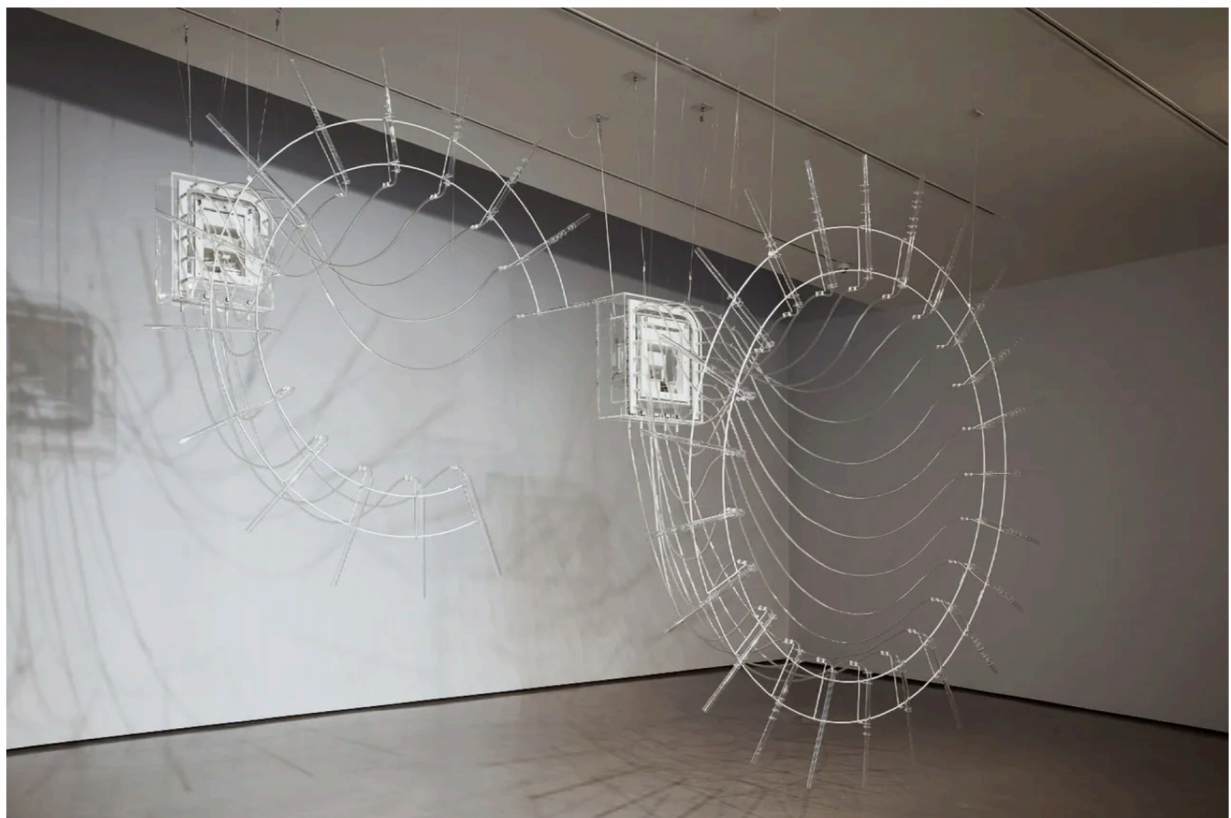
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Cerith Wyn Evans, and his work, are not easy to forget. I first encountered the former at [Tate Britain in 2017](#), when he doused the Duveen Galleries in a carnival of white neon light. It burned traces on the mind and retina that lingered for hours to come.

The second, and even more memorable experience, was in 2018 at the award ceremony for the prestigious [Hepworth Prize for Sculpture](#). The experimental filmmaker turned global force of sculpture had won the prize with a levitating, site-specific work titled *Composition for 37 Flutes (in two parts)*, in which two intersecting glass arcs held pipes that inhaled and exhaled music that wavered between harmony and dissonance, through a programmed algorithm. It produced an unnerving, biological timbre that evoked the rasp and rhythm of the human respiratory system. When Wyn Evans accepted the award, he said, 'It [the prize] means nothing, but I'm a Buddhist you see.'



Cerith Wyn Evans, *Composition for 37 Flutes (in two parts)*, the winning artwork for the 2018 Hepworth Prize for Sculpture, installed at the Hepworth Wakefield

(Image credit: Stuart Whipps)

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At Mostyn gallery in the picturesque seaside town of Llandudno, Wales, Wyn Evans is currently showing his largest exhibition in his home country, and the UK, to date. But does it feel like a homecoming? 'It's certainly not a coincidence,' says the artist, who represented Wales at the country's inaugural pavilion at the 50th Venice Biennale in 2003. '[But] since I'm not making work about nationalism and identity politics, it somehow carries less weight because it isn't, for want of a better term, the "subject" of the work.'

Mostyn, which has a century-long history of championing local and globally renowned contemporary art, fuses Edwardian architecture with a RIBA award-winning concrete modern expansion by Ellis Williams Architects. Enigmatically titled '....)'('), Wyn Evans' show isn't just at Mostyn, but for Mostyn.



Installation view of Cerith Wyn Evans, '....)'(') at Mostyn, Wales

(Image credit: © Rob Battersby)

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Installation view of Cerith Wyn Evans, '.....' at Mostyn, Wales
(Image credit: © Rob Battersby)

Wyn Evans' show, curated by the gallery's director, Alfredo Cramerotti, is borderless –infused with film, music, poetry, literature and Eastern philosophy, and how energy can flow freely through sculpture, video and found objects. The artist has turned Mostyn's Edwardian galleries into a neon-charged fantasia, with works that dance through the spaces like illuminated drawings. Wyn Evans was keen to embrace the plentiful natural light in the 1901 building, and explore how light patterns will shift through the winter months. 'I love nothing more than neon in direct sunlight. it's absolutely heartbreakingly beautiful.'

StarStarStar/Steer (Transphoton) (2019) (Oriel 3) is a three-column LED structure suspended a few centimetres above the ground. Shifting from translucency to a piercing brightness, the piece draws on the codes of Doric architecture but seems to inhale and expire like something very much alive. 'There's this sort of tidal relation to the sea being here, but also a slow oscillating of filling and breathing and looking and being in the space.'

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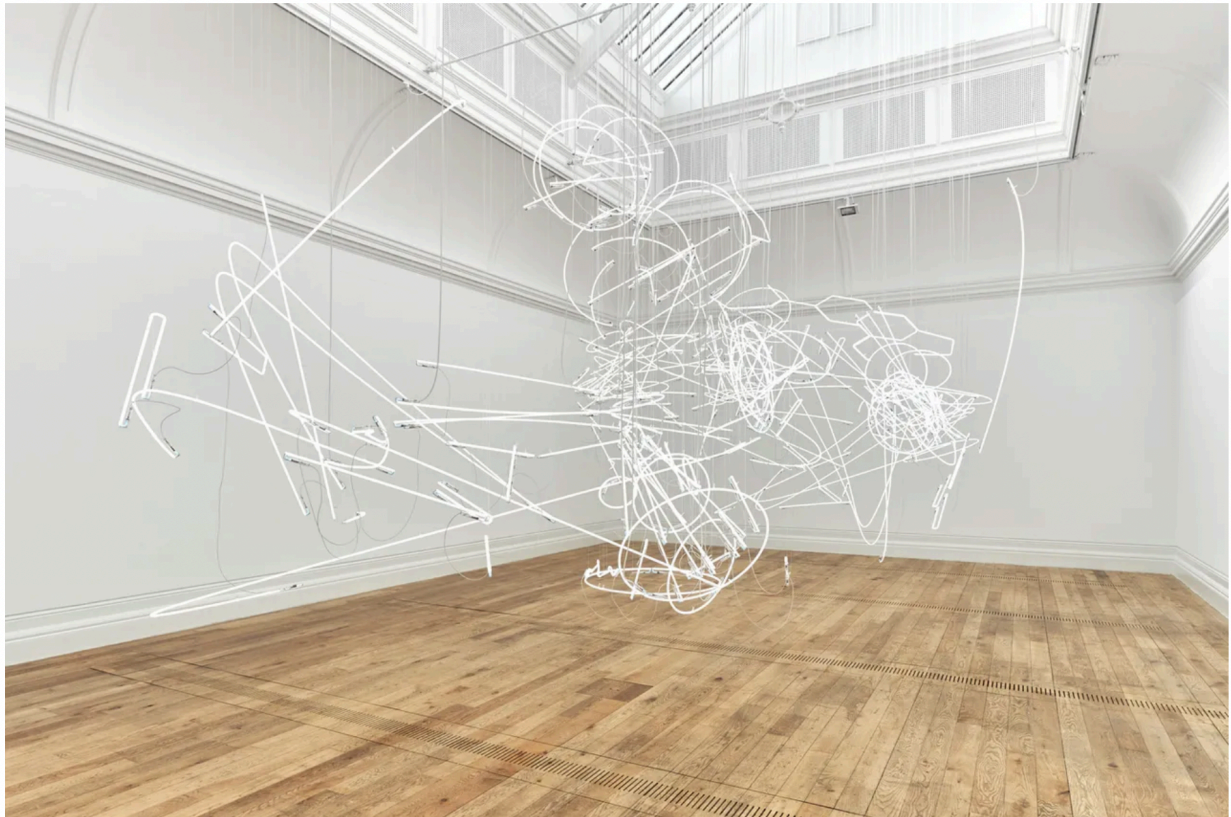
Another highlight is *Pli S=E=L=O=N Pli*, a 17-glass panel maze of four chambers that emits an eerie, improvised piano soundtrack of alternating time signatures composed and performed by Wyn Evans. *Phase shifts (after David Tudor)* (2020) sees vehicle windscreens and visor-shaped pieces of fractured glass engage in a game of reflections with surrounding works. They appear like ghosts of Calder's mobiles, and an ode to the history of Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, (1915-1923). The work shattered in transit after its first exhibition, an event Duchamp embraced as the work's resolution. In another deviation from neon, Wyn Evans is also presenting *Decor Relics*, a series of smashed-up bits of temporary gallery walls salvaged from previous blue-chip exhibitions. Here, they are present as 'wall on wall', recontextualised and elevated from functional (then discarded) infrastructure to art in their own right. 'They make a critique of the gallery as a model', he says. 'It's cannibalism; the gallery kind of eating itself.'

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Installation view of Cerith Wyn Evans, '.....' () at Mostyn, Wales
(Image credit: © Rob Battersby)

The centrepiece of the show is *Mostyn Drift*. The neon installation was originally titled *Aspen Drift* and displayed in 2021 at the Aspen Art Museum in Colorado, but owing to lockdown restrictions in the US, this is the first time Wyn Evans has seen the piece assembled. It's a 3D incarnation of Japanese Noh theatre, capturing time signatures, stutters, and the foot patterns of movement, but devoid of bodies. This is just one example of Wyn Evans' ability to disrupt, and rupture existing modes of communication, translating movement into notational codes, then a ghostly visual embodiment of the controlled randomness of the world around us.

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Installation view of Cerith Wyn Evans, '....)' at Mostyn, Wales
(Image credit: © Rob Battersby)

'....)', by Cerith Wyn Evans, is at Mostyn, Llandudno, North Wales until 5 February 2023. [mostyn.org](https://www.mostyn.org)

In June 2023, Phaidon will publish the first comprehensive monograph dedicated to Cerith Wyn Evans' work, featuring new text by the artists, and contributions from Nancy Spector and Daniel Birnbaum. [phaidon.com](https://www.phaidon.com) ✱

Harriet Lloyd-Smith

Harriet Lloyd-Smith was the Arts Editor of Wallpaper*, responsible for the art pages across digital and print, including profiles, exhibition reviews, and contemporary art collaborations. She started at Wallpaper* in 2017 and has written for leading contemporary art publications, auction houses and arts charities, and lectured on review writing and art journalism. When she's not writing about art, she's making her own.