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## WELSH WONDER

# Cracked glass and erotic machines: Cerith Wyn Evans unveils his new show at White Cube



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Text Finn Blythe.

Above: Cerith Wyn Evans 'No realm of thought... No field of vision', White Cube Bermondsey © Cerith Wyn Evans. Photo © White Cube (Ollie Hammick)

Every March, Welsh artist Cerith Wyn Evans travels to Japan to celebrate the month of his birth. Evidence of these trips and his intimacy with the country's culture, particularly his fascination with Noh, the 14th century classical form of theatre that combines music and dance with masks and exquisite costumes, pervades much of his work and is particularly resonant in his current, and largest yet, exhibition at White Cube Bermondsey.

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It begins in the first room where new paintings – a medium not usually associated with Evans – display dark brush strokes which appear to echo the movement patterns of Noh performers. Executed with traditional Japanese brushes as well as less orthodox household mops, the paintings embody the kinetic energy and precise forms that so beguile Evans.

His brilliant 2017 Duveen commission at Tate Britain saw the space activated with a monumental horizontally suspended neon sculpture whose dynamic lines, loops and circles were (in part) also inspired by Kata movement diagrams of Noh theatre.

High drama awaits spectators in the 9x9x9 space, an enormous cube dedicated to new site-specific commissions, where a large-scale neon sculpture, made of the delicate glass tubing that has become Evan's signature, cascades vertically from the ceiling. Upon closer inspection, what initially appears as a mass of tangled filaments emerge as diagrams of two helicopters, blades whirling, locked in an erotic embrace and inevitable plummet to earth. These are references to the designs of French engineer and early aviation expert Paul Cornu, credited with the world's first successfully manned rotary wing aircraft in 1907 (he achieved a height of 30cm for around 20 seconds).

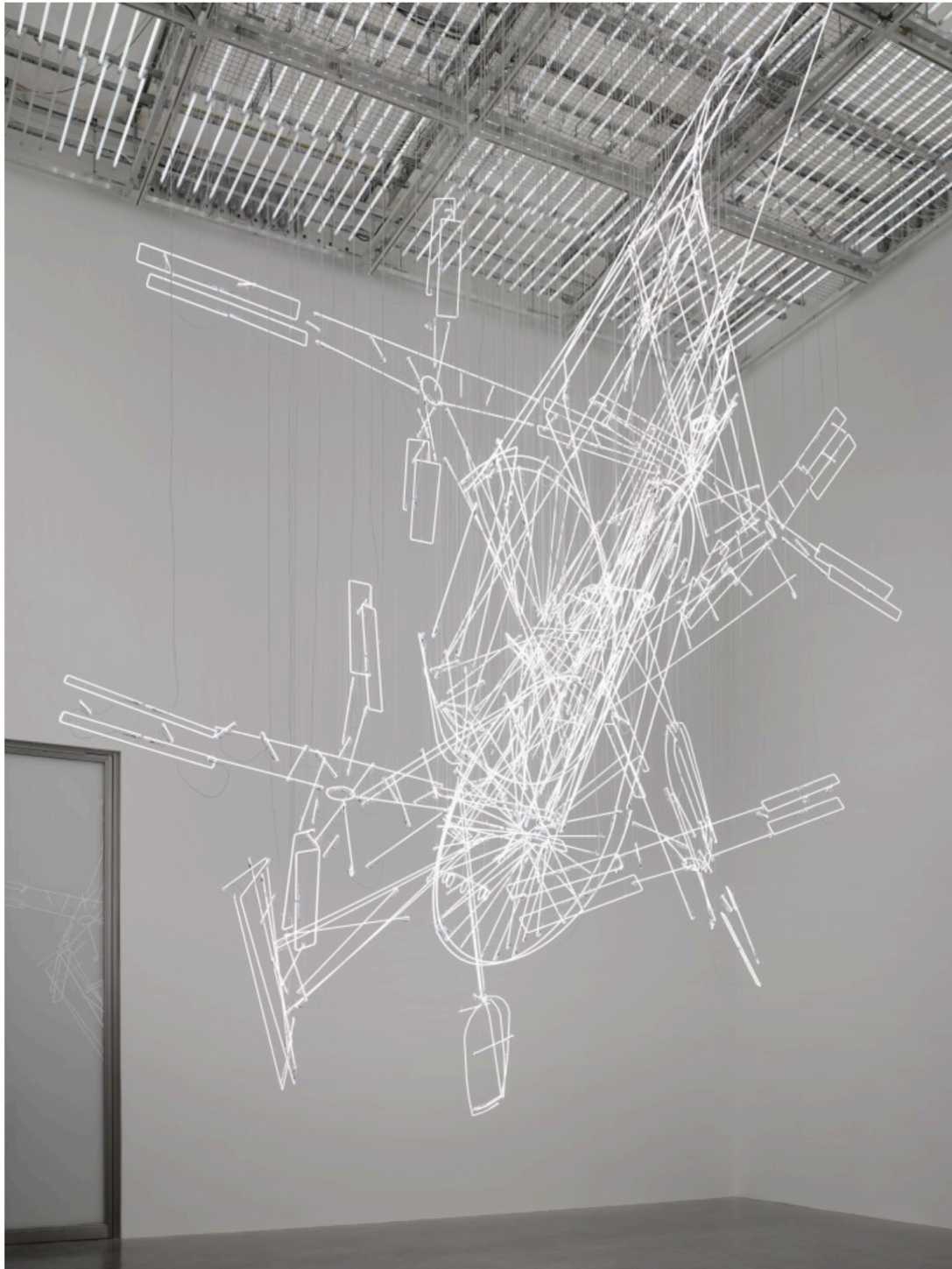


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Evans' work is anchored in the transcendent and temporal, the ethereal and ephemeral – glass, gas, fireworks are all recurring elements of his almost spectral material vocabulary. The North Gallery is testament to this: the entire room is a play on the diaphanous. Large Calderesque mobiles made of curved car windshields, spider-webbed with cracks, hang from the ceiling, while folding glass screens are placed on the floor. Modelled on the Japanese Byōbu or 'wind wall', they bear similar destructive marks, courtesy of the artist's own hand. The close proximity of fragility and violence (the cracked glass, the crashing helicopters) are a constant throughout this exhibition.

The screens are a deliberate evocation of Duchamp's cryptic sculpture *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1915-23) – a key work for Evans (and all conceptual artists) whose glass panels were, to the delight of its maker, broken in transit – Duchamp claimed the accident gave the work something he never could have. With its top rectangle of glass known as the Bride's Domain and the bottom, earthbound piece, filled with her hopeful Bachelors, the work is a timeless and mysterious allegory on the hopeless nature of love, with all its suffering and rejection.



Cerith Wyn Evans 'No realm of thought... No field of vision', White Cube Bermondsey © Cerith Wyn Evans. Photo © White Cube (Ollie Hammick)



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The multidisciplinary strength of Evans' work is at its strongest in the vast South Galleries. Containing no fewer than 11 different works, glass, gas, sound, light and even organic matter in the form of palm trees converge in a synthesis of sensory exploration. Most theatrically, the visitor is faced with a giant glowing wall of neon kanji characters, spelling out a translated extract of Proust's multi-volume novel, *In Search of Lost Time* (in which he gives a particularly racy description of a flowing waterfall).

We are invited to pass through an opening in the neon wall, only to encounter a large, virtually transparent mobile hanging from the ceiling, with 17 directional glass-panel speakers emitting otherworldly sounds. The hum that is at first difficult to make out (and like so much of Evans' work balances on the border of non-existence), is in fact a self-generating piano improvisation performed by the artist over two recording sessions ten years apart.

Evans' exhibition is as entrancing as it is perplexing. His references to the three Marcells (Duchamp, Proust, Broodthaers) hints at special connoisseurship, but the sheer exuberance and spectacle of this major new show should sweep any visitor away.

*Cerith Wyn Evans No realm of thought... No field of vision is on at White Cube Bermondsey until 19 April 2020.*