

# **Homage to New York : a self-constructing and self-destroying work of art**

**Conceived and built by Jean Tinguely, the Museum  
of Modern Art Sculpture Garden, March 17, 1960,  
6:30-7:00 P.M**

Author

Tinguely, Jean, 1925-1991

Date

1960

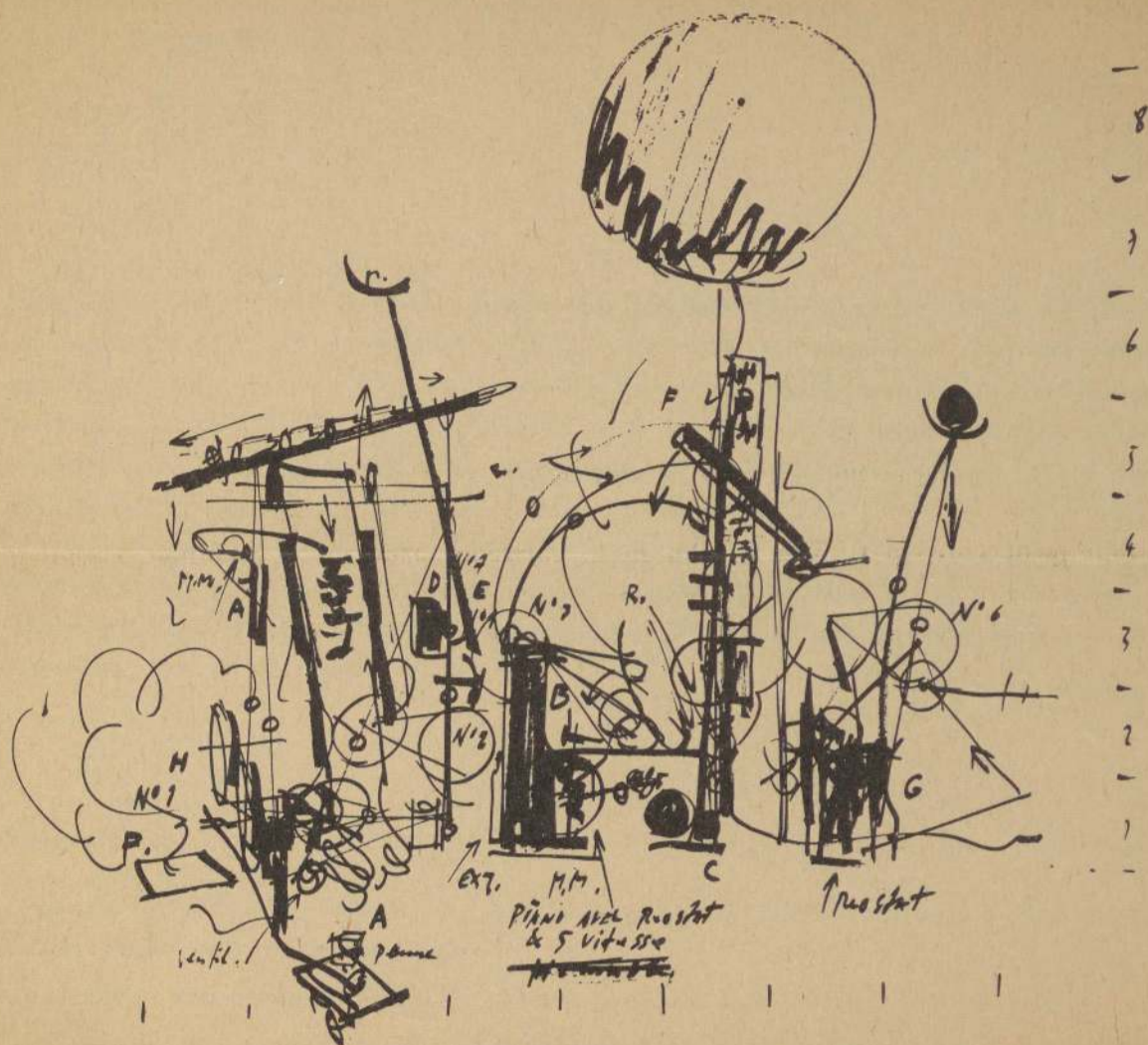
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## HOMAGE TO NEW YORK

*A self-constructing and self-destroying work of art conceived and built by Jean Tinguely*

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART SCULPTURE GARDEN  
MARCH 17, 1960  
6:30-7:00 P.M.

### *Homage to New York*

We know that emotion cannot be petrified, that love cannot be bound, that life cannot be conserved and time cannot be held. Jean Tinguely's experiments are works of art in which time, movement and gesture are demonstrated—not merely evoked. Tinguely accepts the Heraclitan change inherent in life. His is a world in flux and constant self-transformation.

Being very much part of his time, Tinguely uses machines to show movement, but he is fully aware that machines are no more permanent than life itself. Their time runs out, they destroy themselves. This he demonstrates dramatically in *Homage to New York*. Here he brings the motor into an ironic situation which controverts its function. Rendered helpless, it no longer operates in its normal way. It destroys itself more quickly because it performs more intensely.

In New York Tinguely finds a maximum concentration of human life and energy, a virility which accelerates its own dissolution. He believes that the idea of a self-constructing and self-destroying mechanized sculpture would never have occurred to him in the ancient ambience of the Mediterranean coast. Its dynamic energy as well as its final self-destruction—are they not artistic equivalents for our own culture?

He has conceived and built this sculpture and is eager to witness its loss so that we may witness its choreography.

PETER SELZ

### *Tinguely ex machina*

Forty years ago Tinguely's granddads thumbed their noses at Mona Lisa and Cézanne. Recently Tinguely himself has devised machines which shatter the placid shells of Arp's immaculate eggs, machines which at the drop of a coin scribble a moustache on the automatistic Muse of abstract expressionism, and (wipe that smile off your face) an

apocalyptic far-out breakthrough which, it is said, clinks and clanks, tingles and tangles, whirrs and buzzes, grinds and creaks, whistles and pops itself into a katabolic Götterdämmerung of junk and scrap. Oh great brotherhood of Jules Verne, Paul Klee, Sandy Calder, Leonardo da Vinci, Rube Goldberg, Marcel Duchamp, Piranesi, Man Ray, Picabia, Filippo Morghen, are you with it?

TINGVELY EX MACHINA  
MORITVRI TE SALVTAMVS

ALFRED H. BARR, JR.

Tinguely's things are so good that maybe they are not modern art any more. In place of regularity he puts irregularity. His machines are not machines, they are anti-machines. They are mechanic and meta-mechanic. They make anarchy. These things are more free than a human being can ever hope to be. They represent a freedom that without them would not exist. They are pieces of life that have jumped out of the systems: out of good and bad, beauty and ugliness, right and wrong. To try to conserve the situation that exists will make a man unhappy, because it is hopeless. This kind of art accepts changes, destruction, construction and chance, that rules anyway. These machines are pure rhythm, jazz-machines. But look out, because it is not an innocent game.

K. G. HULTEN

*Tinguely's art is:*

- An art of spectacle—without the boggling crowd these machines would no more exist than Hegel's orchid in the jungle.
- An art of artlessness and imperfections—more human than machine.
- An art of destructions enacted—not concealed and held captive as they are in "ordinary" painting.
- An art of movement that at its very limits touches fixity—*les extrêmes se touchent*.

DORE ASHTON

There are times in human history when the things men have been accustomed to doing and have long accepted as a part of the established order erupt in their faces. This is the situation right now—the universal crisis is forcing us to redefine our cultural values. We are like the man who is astonished to discover that the suit he has on does not fit him any longer. Religion, ethics, and art have all transcended themselves, especially art, which, instead of being art as we know it, has come to demonstrate man's attitude toward his basic problems. So it is senseless to ask whether or not Tinguely's machines are art. What they show in a very significant way is man's struggle for survival in a scientific world. There are two kinds of art, if we may still use the word: "classicistic" art that relies on tradition and Dada art that relies on shock for its effects. I would call Tinguely a Meta-Dadaist because his machines not only turn traditional concepts upside down but also realize the old Dada love of movement. Tinguely is the inventor of the perpetuum mobile. I think his work is one of the great breakthroughs in modern art. It is a giant step toward *la réalité nouvelle*.

RICHARD HUELSENBECK

si la scie scie la scie  
et si la scie qui scie la scie  
est la scie que scie la scie  
il y a Suisscide métallique.

Marcel Duchamp  
1960