

OCT 29, 2017 — MAR 25, 2018

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For nearly thirty years, Ugo Rondinone has developed a practice centered on the exploration of time, space and the human condition, using a variety of media. Throughout his practice Rondinone has often taken inspiration from nineteenth century German Romanticism. Specifically, tenets of subjectivity, mysticism and emotionally charged aesthetics that were embraced by the writers, composers and artists of the period are incorporated into Rondinone's work today.¹ Blending popular references and elements of the everyday — illustrated by clowns, windows, newsprint and rainbows — along with introspective Romanticism, Rondinone examines measures of time and elements of



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Rondinone's work is often characterized by duality—whether expressing contrasting ideas at once, or methodically utilizing opposites in the development of new work. Formally, he alternates between monochromatic and colorful palettes, characterized as night and day. This duality continues thematically through poetic, large-scale installations, simultaneously embodying disparate constructs such as: timelessness and the timely, melancholy and euphoria, intimacy and isolation.

At the final venue of a multi-institution retrospective, *good evening beautiful blue* forms a survey across three decades of Rondinone's color and spectrum works, dating from the late 1990s to the present. Conceived to elicit self-inspection and discovery from visitors, the artist's itinerary for the exhibition facilitates a meditation of the self as one progresses

through each room-sized installation. The presentation begins with *clockwork for oracles II* (2008), comprised of fifty-two colored, mirrored windows, hung on a backdrop of recent newsprint. The quantity of windows is not arbitrary and makes a direct suggestion to the number of weeks within a year. The use of mirrors framed to look like windows negates a window's true function, to facilitate outward sight, by turning it inward and causing literal self-reflection for whomever passes by. The presentness of each viewer's reflection is placed directly in contrast with the dated newspaper pages from the *Miami Herald* – a gap in time that grows more distant throughout the duration of the exhibition. This reference to time is also seen in the title of the work, a phrase appropriated from a poem by French writer Edmond Jabès, who similarly pondered the relationship between human actions,

time and nature. Rondinone likens the experience of reading a poem to that of looking at art, encouraging a personal and emotional response rather than a rigid understanding of what the artist has put forth.²

The exhibition continues with *vocabulary of solitude* (2014-2016), here presented with forty-five sculptures that personify the various actions a human may perform throughout the span of a day:³

be. breathe. sleep. dream. wake.
rise. sit. hear. look. think. stand.
walk. pee. shower. dress. drink.
fart. shit. read. laugh. cook. smell.
taste. eat. clean. write. daydream.
remember. cry. nap. touch. feel.
moan. enjoy. float. love. hope.
wish. sing. dance. fall. curse.
yawn. undress. lie.

The various actions are represented by brightly-dressed clown figures, each with a different expression and pose. The work takes inspiration from the artist's reflection on his daily actions, although the figures themselves are cast from twenty-two men and twenty-three women of various ages and ethnicities. The magnitude of the installation and the space that contains it continues Rondinone's use of contradictive elements, giving immense presence and recognition to the mundane, quotidian rituals of our human existence.

Despite contemporary associations with the macabre, the clown has been a recurrent figure for Rondinone since 2005. Through a universally-known symbol, he often likens

the role of the artist to a clown, as a performer who entertains through a masked persona. Rather than fulfilling a role of entertainment, the clowns in *vocabulary of solitude* are consumed by personal and intimate actions not intended for an audience. Perhaps, the work can be viewed as a self-portrait of sorts, negating public expectations of performance and showmanship by highlighting Rondinone's personal and private, human gestures.

Accentuating the element of time, *vocabulary of solitude* is augmented by an installation of surrounding works, including a site-specific gradient treatment titled, *sunrise-sunset* (2014), and *the eighth hour of the poem* (2006), a larger-than-life depiction of a lightbulb. Both works continue allusions to the passing of time through the framework of day and night, light and darkness.

From the start of the exhibition, Rondinone has presented a series of installations that explore a temporal transition from weeks in a year, to hours in day, to brief and ephemeral moments. Marking its first appearance in the U.S. in nearly two decades, the final space presents an immersive, six-channel video installation titled:

It's late and the wind carries a faint sound as it moves through the trees. It could be anything. The jingling of little bells perhaps, or the tiny flickering out of tiny lives. I stroll down the sidewalk and close my eyes and open them and wait for my, mind to go perfectly blank.



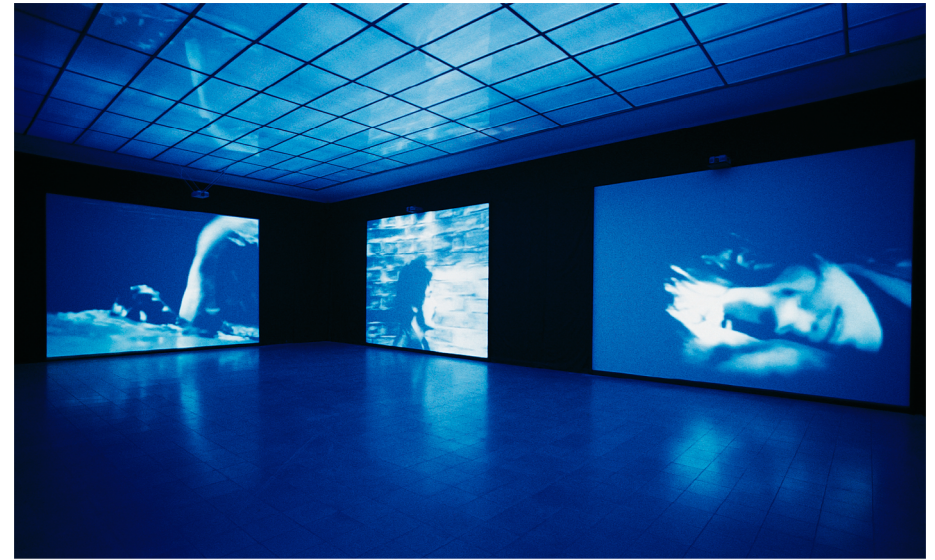
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Like a room no one has ever entered, a room without any doors or windows. A place where nothing happens. (1998).

soundtrack coupled with the repeated lyrics, "everyday sunshine," fills the room. The resulting atmosphere evokes the feeling of being suspended in a moment, unresolved without a clear beginning or end, creating a literal space where nothing happens. Leaving the exhibition, one must retrace their steps through the previous galleries – zooming-out from an instant, into a day, to a year – exiting the museum to continue their own mortal existence.

Ugo Rondinone (b. 1964, Switzerland) is a renowned mixed-media artist who lives and works in New York. Recent solo exhibitions include: *the world just makes me laugh* at Berkeley Art Museum, *let's start this day again* at Contemporary Art Center (Cincinnati), *giorni d'oro + notti d'argento* at Museo d'Arte Contemporanea di Roma, *Seven Magic Mountains* organized by Art Production Fund and the Nevada Museum of Art (Nevada), *vocabulary of solitude* at Museum Boijmans van Beuningen (Rotterdam), *i love john giorno* at Palais de Tokyo (Paris), *artists and poets* at Vienna Secession (Vienna), *breathe walk die* at Rockbund Art Museum (Shanghai), *human nature* organized by Public Art Fund in Rockefeller Plaza, (New York), *we run through a desert on burning feet, all of us are glowing our faces look twisted* at Art Institute of Chicago, *thank you silence* at M-Museum Leuven (Belgium). His work is in the collections of MoMA (New York), ICA (Boston), SFMOMA, Walker Art Center (Minneapolis), The Bass (Miami Beach) and Dallas Museum of Art, among others.

The poetically constructed title, along with six screens displaying men and women performing solitary, unresolved and cyclical actions, suggest a fleeting moment in time. A man slowly opens a door to a dark room. A resting woman abruptly lifts her head from the pillow as if sensing an intruder. A man floats (or sinks), eyes closed, through a body of water. A nude woman jumps to pull down an endless stream of paper. Similar to the clowns, the repetitive movements of each subject are isolated and are disengaged from any audience, perhaps causing a personal self-awareness on the part of the viewer. Blue lights on the ceiling cast a melancholic glow on the screens, while an instrumental



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Notes

- 1 "This aesthetic, inspired by the Middle Ages, regarded art as a product of emotion akin to religious devotion, and valued states of solitude and introspection, together with qualities of mystery, intangibility, and the unattainable." Morton, Marsha. "German Romanticism: The Search for 'A Quiet Place'." *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 28, no. 1 (2002): 9-107. doi:10.2307/4113048.
- 2 Ugo Rondinone relays that he believes art should be "felt rather than understood" in a phone conversation with Leilani Lynch, Assistant Curator of The Bass, on August 10, 2017.
- 3 When this work was first introduced in 2014 at the Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai for the exhibition *breathe walk die*, Rondinone experimented with the use of performers, staging all 45 clowns as real people, rather than inanimate sculptures.

Images

- 1 *clockwork for oracles II*, 2008. Mirror, color plastic gel, wood, paint, newspaper. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of Almine Rech Gallery.
- 2 *remember*, detail: *vocabulary of solitude*, 2014-2016. Polystyrene foam, epoxy resin, fabric. Dimensions variable. Edition 2 of 3 + 1 AP. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zürich; Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels; Sadie Coles HQ, London.
- 3 *It's late and the wind carries a faint sound as it moves through the trees. It could be anything. The jingling of little bells perhaps, or the tiny flickering out of tiny lives. I stroll down the sidewalk and close my eyes and open them and wait for my, mind to go perfectly blank. Like a room no one has ever entered, a room without any doors or windows. A place where nothing happens.*, 1998 (detail). Six-channel video projection, sound, blue filters. Courtesy The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Maja Hoffman and of Franz Wassmer, 2009.

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