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Ingeborg Lüscher on her Fiery Exhibition at White Rainbow

BY NICHOLAS FORREST | DECEMBER 19, 2016



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“It’s 1 o’clock and the bell tolls 8 times” at White Rainbow in London is the first UK solo show by 80-year-old Swiss artist Ingeborg Lüscher. Since rising to prominence in 1972 with her installation at Documenta V, Lüscher has developed a conceptually informed multidisciplinary practice spanning the mediums of painting photography sculpture, installation, and video.

Lüscher’s oeuvre is characterized by the recurrence of serial work as well as her engagement with everyday objects and experiences and impressions from her immediate environment. Throughout her career she has drawn inspiration from a range of areas including politics, nature, human and social systems, the dichotomies of the human condition, phenomena of humanity, and diversity and equality.

“It’s 1 o’clock and the bell tolls 8 times” showcases a range of sculptures and paintings created using sulphur and ash, which were the primary materials used by Lüscher during her work of the late 80s and early 90s. The exhibition includes seven geometric paintings presented in dialogue with a series of smaller organic sculptures.

To find out more about “It’s 1 o’clock and the bell tolls 8 times,” BLOUIN ARTINFO got in touch with the artist and asked her a few questions.

What was the inspiration behind the title of your exhibition “It’s 1 o’clock and the bell tolls 8 times” at White Rainbow and what does the title reveal about the works in the exhibition?

It’s 1 o’clock, the beginning of the first hour – my beginning of work with the White Rainbow Gallery – and the bell tolls 8 times. Horizontally written the number 8 is a mathematical symbol and at the same time it is a metaphor for infinity, boundlessness, and continuous unending. One and eight as a symbol for the new work we will do together, the gallery and me. Unlimited confidence on both sides. You can read this attitude, this kind of confidence in the paintings and also in the large sculpture in the show: a confidence between two entities, sulphur and black. A non-hierarchical discourse, visible in the energetic fields of the work.

The exhibition features a range of paintings and sculptures made with sulphur and ash. What is your history with these materials and how did your use of them originate?

I discovered sulphur in an old-fashioned drug store in Locarno. On dark wooden shelves with transparent glass bottles I saw one of them filled with flowers of sulphur. I bought it all, brought it to my studio and poured it into an open container. I was fascinated by the enormous light of this yellow material. It was not a pigment, but an element. And one day I began to ask myself: why not use this material for my work? I travelled to the Vesuvius at Naples, one of the places of origin of sulphur. My luggage included stones from the river at the place of my life. The idea was to bring them into the dust of the Solfatara, the zone surrounding the volcano, and to observe how they would be powdered by the yellow sulphur. Later I used the element like a pigment and started to paint with it. Paintings showing and expressing the wild energies that a volcano presses out of the deep inner earth. Birth and death, fire and ash.

What are the processes and actions that you use when creating the sulphur and ash works and what is the significance and meaning of these processes and actions?

It was a long process to reach the kind of statement that is represented by the paintings you see here in London. I knew immediately that I had to combine the sulphur with black. To give form to the twosome of light and darkness. An ideal couple consists of two equal beings. At first the sulphur was always the stronger one. I experimented with all black colours on the market, I began to study black in art history. No chance. The solution was finally to support the flat surface of the black colour with a body of bones and muscles. The body consisted of ash. The substance that survived the fire. What an enormous power! Now the black started to gain a life of its own. The new structure reflected the light and so they became equal. The pair was never a juxtaposition of heaven and hell, positive and negative, joy and catastrophe. They were a unit, not to be divided, far away from any valuation. It is easy to react spontaneously on the fabulous light of the sulphur. The black leads you into a more peaceful and deep inner zone, demanding more time for this reaction.

I still love this series of paintings. The process of doing them was always combined with a good feeling of concentration and harmony. I have the same feelings when I see them now.

The word “painting” is not correct for these works, because nothing is painted. What seems to be painted is the presence of what happened before. It shows the black body, while the sulphur offers it a chance to show its existence. So the past becomes the present. Past and present are one and the same.

How do the works in “It’s 1 o’clock and the bell tolls 8 times” reflect and express the main themes, preoccupations and sources of inspiration and motivation that form the basis of your practice?

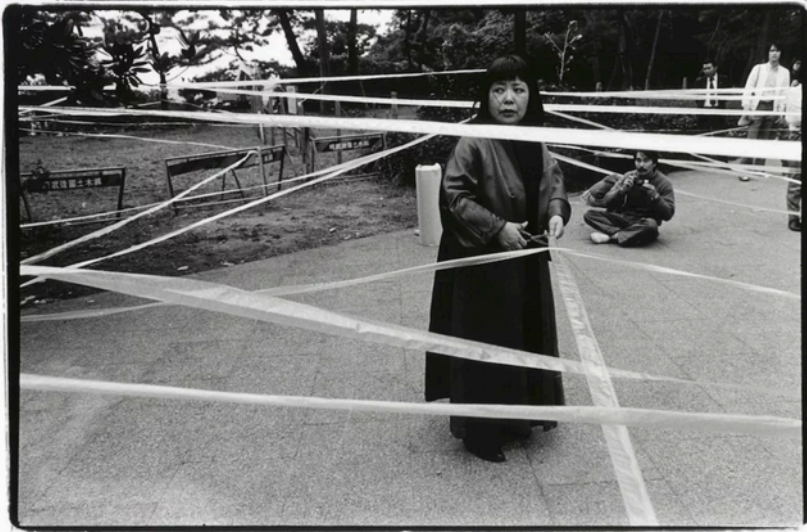
When I started as a young artist I realized objects expressed the diversity of men and women and the impossibility of an equal view to the world. It was my way of thinking, my experience of life. A biographical change gave me the chance to find another glance. Since my art was always related on my personal life, I had to discover another language for this new form and that was not easy. But thanks to the new won courage and strength I was able to find the appropriate “words.” I started to work with phenomena like love, eros, death and birth, prophecy, dreams, spirituality, also a new sight on politics became important for me. At that time my themes seemed to exclude success in the art scene but for me they have been important and true and I was not interested in strategies. In the last years the field of neuroscience has provoked new questions. How to bend all that together? So far about the sources.

What do you want to express and convey with the works in the exhibition?

I do not want to express or convey anything with my work. I react to the inner pressure to give form to a clear demanding creative obsession. And thus my work needs to exist for myself, not for the public. If anything touches me so profoundly, heartfilling or heartfelt that all my senses revolve around this discovery or experience or thoughts, it has to turn into a work. What touches me can be a human being, a constellation in my life, a political situation, a material, a new understanding for anything, whatever ...

When the work is done, normally it develops a series of works and it has to go its own way. C’est à prendre ou laisser ... you can take it or leave it





2/15. Yayoi Kusama Yokohama Oct 1986. Azei

Yayoi Kusama
Ohkurayama, Yokohama (October 1986)



6/15. Andy Warhol. Tokyo Oct 1974. Azei

Andy Warhol
Tokyo (October, 1974)





Ms. Cindy Sherman Tokyo April 1984 Anni

Cindy Sherman
American Center, Tokyo (April, 1984)



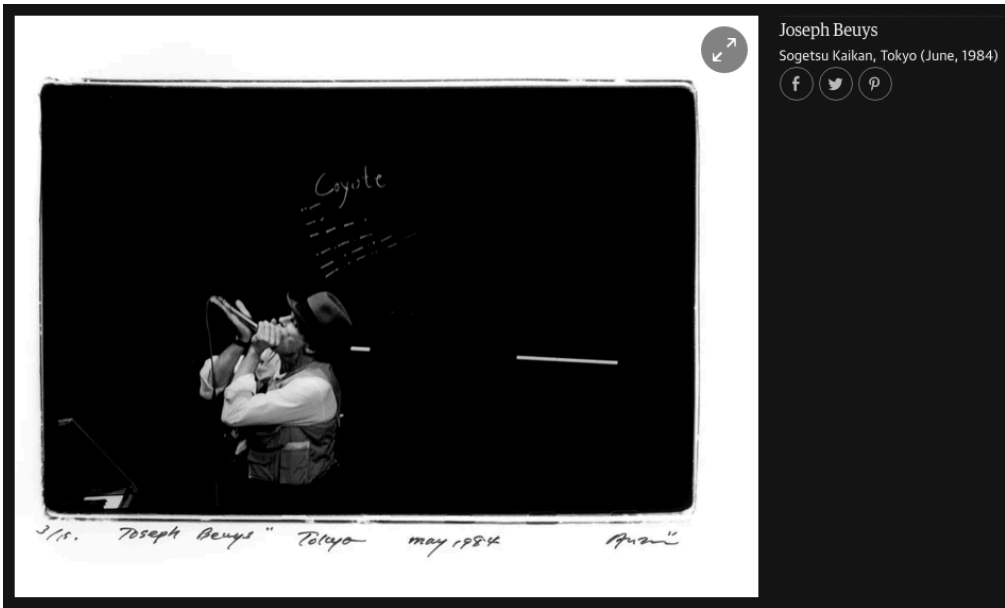
Ref. Kusama Yayoi. Anni

Yayoi Kusama
Hara Museum of Contemporary Art,
Tokyo (October 1993)

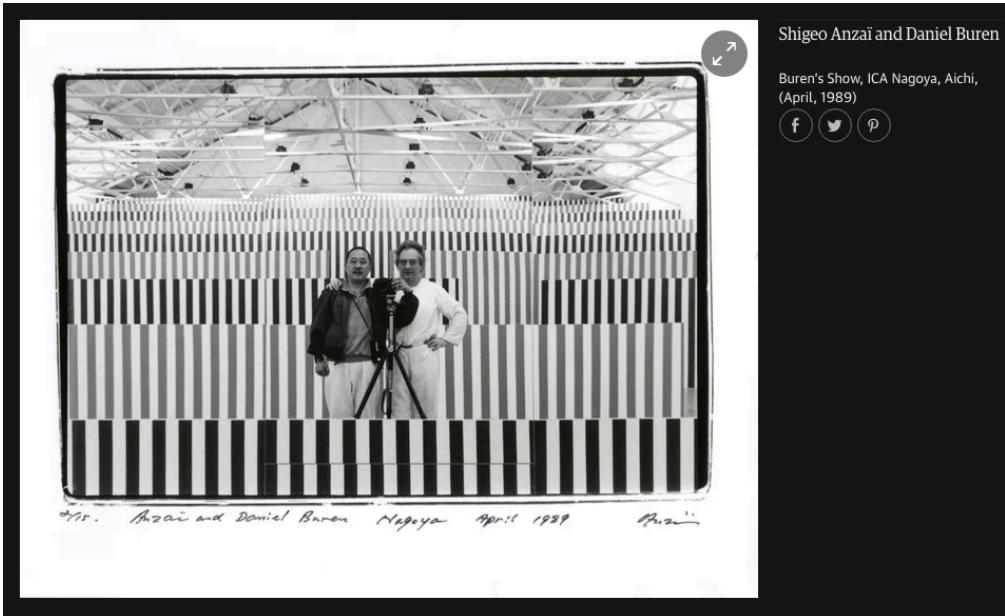




Anish Kapoor
 Venice Biennale (June 1990)



Joseph Beuys
 Sogetsu Kaikan, Tokyo (June, 1984)



Shigeo Anzai and Daniel Buren

Buren's Show, ICA Nagoya, Aichi,
 (April, 1989)

