

Press Release

## **Barry Le Va**

### **In a State of Flux**

26 April – 29 September 2024

**Opening:** Thursday, 25 April 2024, 6 p.m.

**Press conference:** Wednesday, 24 April 2024, 10.30 a.m.

Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, skylight rooms

*I guess at that time the body was a new territory, and it had to be investigated.*

—Barry Le Va

Barry Le Va (1941–2021) is regarded as a moderniser of sculpture in post-1960s art. Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein is staging the first retrospective since the death of the US artist, whose multidisciplinary oeuvre is associated with process art and postminimalism.

As indicated in the title, *In a State of Flux*, Le Va extended the concept of sculpture by fragmenting form and incorporating the principles of transformation and instability into his work. The show presents a survey of his work from the 1960s to the last series, always following a 'red thread': the relationship between his drawing and sculpture. Particular attention is given to the artist's early artworks.

#### **Precision and improvisation**

Le Va's installations are executed with care and only after meticulous planning, but chance and improvisation remain defining elements of his work. He explores actions, their causes and effects, at different levels of perception, be they physical, mental or visual. Often he uses such materials as felt, glass or chalk for his expansive works. All his life, the floor was the artist's 'ground' and field for experimentation. Created as early 1966 in Los Angeles, his first *Distribution Pieces*, scattered on the ground, gained him wider public attention overnight with a cover story in *Artforum* magazine in November 1968. He moved to New York in 1970.

#### **'Drawing allows me to think'**

Drawing is an integral part of Le Va's oeuvre. On the one hand, he saw it as part of his thinking process and, on the other, he understood his drawings 'as diagrams that function almost like musical scores or compositions'. In this sense, they often pave the way for the sculptural work,

sometimes serving as a plan views, while simultaneously permitting interpretation and improvisation in situ. Sometimes they are also artworks in their own right.

**Art as a crime scene: On the trail of Barry Le Va's works**

From the outset, the relationship between the artwork and the audience was of the utmost importance to Le Va. Not unlike crime scenes, his installations prompt viewers to look for clues in order to reconstruct the sequence of actions that led to their creation and the underlying concept. This approach is based on Le Va's love of the crime genre: 'I became intrigued by the idea of visual clues, the way Sherlock Holmes managed to reconstruct a plot from obscure visual evidence'.

Le Va's oeuvre is enigmatic and highly complex. The first comprehensive display without the artist's presence poses a challenge and entails many questions regarding execution and installation. Curator Christiane Meyer-Stoll has done extensive research in many archives for the show. She unearthed letters, notes and drawings that provide valuable information regarding re-installation, in addition to discovering works in museums and private collections that have not been shown for decades, along with an undiscovered film fragment by video pioneer Gerry Schum. Meyer-Stoll explains: 'We are presenting the work of three-time *documenta* participant Barry Le Va with many discoveries. Equally, and for the first time, the exhibition exemplifies how to handle posthumously the work of an artist who cultivated process and his own form of improvisation'.

Together with Kunstmuseum St. Gallen and MMK Museum für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt, Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein holds several key and early works by Le Va from the collection of Rolf Ricke, the first gallerist to show the artist's work in Europe in 1970. These works form a central starting point of the show.

A Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein production curated by Christiane Meyer-Stoll.

The exhibition is accompanied by a three-volume **publication** that places particular emphasis on the artist's own words in the form of his *Notes* (statements) and various interviews published for the first time or republished.

The show will subsequently travel to the Fruitmarket, Edinburgh (26 October 2024 – 2 February 2025) and Museum Kurhaus Kleve (spring 2025).

**Barry Le Va** was born in Long Beach, California, in 1941 and initially studied architecture and mathematics before switching to art. His exhibiting career spanned more than fifty years; following a number of early shows beginning in 1969 with a solo show at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and ending with a long-term installation (2019–2021) at Dia Beacon, New York, where he re-enacted installations from the 1960s. A participant in various exhibitions including *documenta 5, 6 and 7* (1972, 1977 and 1982), he was soon regarded as one of the most eminent postminimalists and graphic artists of his generation.

His works are in the collections of renowned museums around the world, including Art Institute of Chicago; Dallas Museum of Art; Museum of Modern Art, New York; mumok, Vienna; National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Le Va died in New York City in 2021 aged of 79. *In a State of Flux* is the first exhibition without the artist's participation.

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