

Exhibition at Guy Pieters Gallery, Knokke-Heist, Belgium

Dynamic Play of Lines by the Artist Bernar Venet

Reflection by Prof. Anton van der Geld, BeNeLux-University Center (B.U.C.)

Bernar Venet is considered one of the most influential contemporary European artists. His extensive oeuvre is rooted in conceptual art and minimalism, yet it speaks a strikingly physical language: lines that bend, twist, and make the weight of Corten steel visible. Many people know his impressive 60-metre-high Arc Majeur (2019) along the E411 motorway in Belgium—the tallest sculpture in public space anywhere in Europe.



An innovative and versatile artist

Bernar Venet is a versatile and inspiring artist. With one foot in the minimalism and conceptual art of the 1960s and the other in the monumental sculpture (tradition) of the period after 1980, Venet links idea and material with rare clarity. His work is at once rigorous and corporeal; it shows that a single line—measured or indeterminate—can be enough to recalibrate an entire space and the way we look. In all his monumental sculptures, alongside chance, one sees scientific inspiration and a mathematical approach. This creates, for him, a recognisable field of tension: between discipline and chance, between concept and material weight. And that is precisely the essence of his art and his view of art as he taught it at the Sorbonne in Paris. He lives and works between New York and Le Muy (southern France), where he founded the Venet Foundation.

Gallery Guy Pieters and three artists: Venet, Christo, and Arman

Gallery Guy Pieters has exhibited Venet's work frequently—already in the 1990s and many times since. Venet stands alongside two great artists who are likewise inextricably linked with the Guy Pieters Gallery: Arman and Christo. The story of this close collaboration began in the French city of Antibes, where Guy and Linda Pieters met Arman and forged an artistic bond. Soon afterwards came the connection with Christo and Venet.

Arman and Christo were artists from the Nouveau Réalisme group and founders of this art movement. Arman was a French-American object artist; Christo was a Bulgarian-American artist. They shared an interest in the use of everyday or familiar objects—though in completely different ways. Arman created new works from the objects themselves, while Christo transformed objects (such as Paris's Arc de Triomphe) by masking their appearance with fabric. Venet adds unexpected challenges to this, using a strictly rational path to open up a dimension previously thought impossible. What concerns Venet are new, unpredictable states of equilibrium—a chaotic yet wholly logical balance.

The B.U.C. was present at Gallery Guy Pieters in Belgium for the opening of Bernar Venet's exhibition Generative Painting. I had the pleasure not only of seeing the impressive works, but also of speaking about the inspiration behind the exhibited pieces and their creation in personal conversations with Bernar Venet; his partner, the art historian Diane Venet—known for her collection of "artists' jewelry"—and with Guy and Linda Pieters.