

VENET FOUNDATION

Press kit 2019

"It is not art if it doesn't change the history of art." Bernar Venet

VENET FOUNDATION

Since 2014 the Venet Foundation has been open to the public during the summer (visits by advance reservation only, Thursday afternoons and Fridays). The exhibitions of the foundation are mounted in the village of Le Muy (Var) in France.

Each year this unique site located on some nine acres of the French countryside offers visitors an original tour of a “total work of art” designed by one of the most famous French artists in the world, Bernar Venet, in collaboration with his wife Diane. The foundation is also an “exceptional mental studio” for Bernar and a unique setting for the monumental works in the collection by major artists of the last 50 years..

The Venet Foundation also includes:

- **Diane and Bernar Venet’s collection of Minimal and Conceptual art** (which includes works by Donald Judd, Dan Flavin, Sol LeWitt, Carl Andre, Robert Morris, Lawrence Weiner, Richard Long, among others), one of the most important such collections in the world ;
- **The Sculpture Park** also presents monumental works by artists Arman, Tony Cragg, Tony Smith, Robert Morris, Sir Anthony Caro, Phillip King, Larry Bell, Ulrich Rückriem, Richard Deacon, Richard Long, and Ollie Baertling, as well.... as those by Bernar Venet, including a major work from his exhibition at the Château de Versailles in 2011.
- **The Stella Chapel created on site by Frank Stella** for the foundation’s inauguration in 2014 and featuring six of the artist’s large reliefs ;
- **The two ongoing installations by James Turrell** first unveiled in 2016 ;
- **Two exhibition spaces: the gallery**, which hosts the designated summer exhibition, and **the factory**, which hosts an exhibition of Venet’s works every year.

In 2019, the Venet Foundation celebrates Claude Viallat, one of the most important colorists of his time, in a new monographic exhibition this summer entitled : “Claude Viallat – Unleashing Color”, open from 13 June to 13 September.



The gallery with
Diagonal of 74.3°,
2006

© Jerome Cavaliere
Courtesy Archives Bernar
Venet, New York

Intention

Created in 2014, the Venet Foundation aims to preserve the site in Le Muy, conserve its collection, and ensure that Bernar Venet's work will continue to be presented in an ideal setting.

The foundation is the culmination of more than fifty years of artistic creation and Bernar Venet's encounters with an impressive roster of other major artists, French and foreign, who have become his friends; it is also the outcome of twenty-five years of intense work transforming the property at Le Muy into a "total work of art."

Discovered in the artist's native Provence, the property in Le Muy is both the inspiration and a beautiful setting for the Venet Foundation exhibitions. The project of a lifetime, this exceptional nine-acre site where nature is omnipresent blends old, industrial, and contemporary architecture, a sculpture park, historical and recent pieces by the artist, and an extensive collection that is emblematic of minimal and conceptual art. Bernar Venet and his wife Diane wish to share their passion with a broader public, one that is able to sense the magic of this unique place and the incredible concentration of creative energies in works by Bernar and the fellow artists in his collection.

THE SUMMER EXHIBITION 2019



Installation view at the Venet Foundation, 2019

Claude Viallat, CF3.9.43, 1979

© Jerome Cavaliere

Courtesy Venet Foundation et atelier Viallat

Claude Viallat – Unleashing Color

13 June – 13 September 2019

The exhibition displays a selection of twenty works of Claude Viallat realized on military tarpaulins, part of a series that started in the 1970s and has continued over the past years. The exhibition's core features works shown at CAPC (the Museum of Contemporary Art) in Bordeaux in 1980, a major retrospective of Claude Viallat's work for the use of a thick support, the search of polychromy, and the cut-out of the canvas in registers. This exhibition was a turning point in Viallat's work and celebrated him as one of the major colorists of his generation.

"What I wish they would offer all painters is a going over the top in terms of ideas and dimensions for the Magnum Opus." Interview with the artist, 31 January 2019

The CAPC was still a raw space in the late 1970s, and to tackle its vast size, the center's founder and then director Jean-Louis Froment asked Claude Viallat what support he would like to work with. Viallat was dreaming of a circus tent, Froment sent him over a truck full of army surplus tents.

Exorcising color

Faced with this khaki mountain, Viallat decided to get rid of the connotation surrounding this heavy robust cloth by covering the first tent in white, a preparation to which he applied his characteristic form in vertical sequences. In each register, the form was worked out in one direction and one color against a monochrome background.

Once he had “washed” the cloth in this way, exorcised it by moving beyond the usual symbolism of color, he had to recall to memory the drawings of the Avignon Fauvist Auguste Chabaud, which were done on sheets of greenish butcher paper. By pointing to a different system of references, he accepted the military support and gradually integrated it while keeping it in reserve.

The first specificity of this historical show is its support and what it implies: a working with the material itself, denser than the “historical” pieces that are more readily associated with Supports/Surfaces, which float on light canvases.

The second specificity has to do with the exhibition venue, a spacious hall with balconies overlooking the site, a view down that justifies how the works are hung, i.e., classic arrangements (on the wall), customary ones for the artist (paintings hanging free in the space), or entirely new ones (paintings laid out on the floor and visible from both the passageways and the ground floor).

After the avant-garde

The third specificity touches on the exhibition date, 1980, that is, nearly fifteen years after the appearance of Viallat’s signal form in his work. This raises a question that is applicable to other artists of the same generation that blossomed in the middle of the 1960s: what happens after the avant-garde? What happens after that radical moment of laying things out flat, which implicitly entails a progressive view of history? In the 1960s, this was given expression in Minimalist Art, Conceptual Art, Land Art, Arte Povera, the systemization of happenings and performances, and the manifestations of BMPT or Supports/Surfaces. *La peinture en question* (Painting in Question), the title of a 1969 show featuring Viallat along with Alocco, Dezeuze, Dolla, Pagès, and Saytour, proposed explorations of the picture and the support, and of the composition through its neglect. Yet in the early 1980s, in a limited lapse of time, we see a weakening of the principles that sustained radicalness and the burgeoning liberation of both color and art materials in general. Artists who had never strayed from a limited palette tackled color with a sensuality that was fairly unusual for them. Sol LeWitt turned his *Wall Drawings* into frescoes that are like heirs to the Renaissance; Donald Judd was developing his multicolor pieces; Daniel Buren began devising complex works like his huts; Bernar Venet freed his gesture with the *Indeterminate Lines* sculptures; and Frank Stella, starting in 1983, transformed his still-geometrical works into colorful explosions that expand in space. It was a liberation that was all the more accepted in that the 1980s were the years of the new fauvists, neo-expressionists, free figurative painting, graffiti, the trans-avant-garde, etc.

Already in late 1980s, Bernard Ceysson had rightly sensed this transition. It was at this

time that he put together a show for Saint-Étienne's Museum of Art and Industry he called *Après le classicisme* (After Classicism), and Viallat was very much a part of it.

For Viallat, one needs "minimal shifts for an upheaval in the work," as is well known to the ethnologist, who observes that "through the simple change of attitude of the observer, the observed changes shape." (CYRULNIK, Boris, *Sous le signe du lien*, collection *Pluriel*, Fayard, Paris, 2010) . Yet we have to admit that the change Viallat effected in 1980 (in reality around 1978, the year of the first works exhibited at CAPC) offers something more than minimal shifts with the compartmentalization of the picture, the use of a denser pigment, multiple points of view that haunt the space like interferences. As Jacques Beaufret points out, **"one wonders if it isn't appeals like these to 'high art' and 'high culture' that would be the bearers of truly subversive values today."**

Retrospectively, this transition proved essential in building **the work of one of the greatest contemporary colorists.**

It is also a chance to honor Bernard Ceysson, historian, museum director, gallery owner, and Viallat's traveling companion for many years now, who will be the Venet Foundation's guest of honor this summer.

Alexandre Devals , director of the Venet Foundation

The Inspiration behind the Venet Foundation

In 1979 the American minimalist artist Donald Judd began devoting his energy to creating in Marfa (Texas) an ideal place to display his “specific objects,” having criticized galleries, collectors and museums for distorting and damaging them.

Judd discussed his project, on-going work and ambitions with Bernar Venet, who would only discover the place a few years later in the early 1990s, experiencing the obvious necessity of the undertaking as an almost “Stendhalian” shock. The idea strengthened his wish to reproduce his friend’s plan but on a humbler scale. Thus Bernar acquired in 1989, following a long search, the mill and factory of Le Muy in the artist’s native Provence.

The ambition to plan and lay out a site dedicated to works of art, both his own and those of other artists in his collection, took shape during many long talks between Bernar and Judd. In Marfa, groups of works are devoted to Dan Flavin, Richard Long, John Chamberlain, and others; in Le Muy, the collection likewise includes works by these major artists of the American minimal and conceptual movements, but it also boasts pieces by Sol LeWitt, On Kawara, Robert Barry, Lawrence Weiner, Carl Andre, and of course Frank Stella, who designed the Chapel, which was inaugurated in 2014. The collection also includes major works by Arman, César, and François Morellet.

For Bernar, from now on the emphasis is to preserve this remarkable site, conserve the collection and ensure that the works will continue to be shown in an ideal setting.

As he sees it, these works belong to anyone who, like him, has a sincere and genuine passion for artists who have shaken up the history of art. That is the foundation’s very reason for being.

“With the Venet Foundation, I am trying to make more widely known the adventure my friends and I experienced during an extraordinary period—the 1960s and after—in the United States, a country that opened doors for me from the moment I set foot there at the age of twenty-four. While I’ve had and still have the great privilege of living with them, the works I’ve created and those I’ve acquired do not belong to me. They were produced for cultural reasons and as such they belong to everyone, they are for everyone’s eyes, pleasure and knowledge”

Bernar Venet



Waterfall along the Nartuby River,
and Arc bridge by Bernar Venet
© Serge Demailly,
Courtesy Archives Bernar Venet, New York

Le Muy, an exceptional mental workshop, built over the years

In the late 1980s, Bernar Venet was looking for a space to store and safeguard his sculptures. In 1989, after several months of searching, he acquired the Serres property. Laid out around a dam with a mill that was built in 1737, the property lies next to the village of Le Muy, nestled in the Var countryside. This is Bernar's native region. He spent his childhood in the Alpes-de-Haute-Provence area of France and cut his teeth as an artist in Tarascon and Nice.

The site quickly came to occupy a central place in Bernar's art practice while defining new connections between art-making and the exhibition space.

Le Muy has to be understood then as a new type of workshop where nothing is created. No drawing, sculpture, or work of art has been produced there. All that remains is a mental space, a veritable crossroads where ideas, knowledge and theories are exchanged.

The Le Muy property has been constantly evolving since its purchase, like a protean work of art in a state of perpetual reinvention. It is above all the work of the artist with the support of his wife, Diane.

THE SCULPTURE PARK

The expanded sculpture park has transformed the physiognomy of the site and the path visitors take. Since 2017, they start outdoors by the sculptures, the vast majority of which are being exhibited in Le Muy for the first time. The new park connects to the existing site housing the *Stella Chapel*, the James Turrell skyspace, *Elliptic*, *Ecliptic*, and a new monumental sculpture by Bernar Venet, *Effondrement: 24 Angles*, 2017.



Among the works on view:

Richard Long, *Bush Stone Line*, 1994

This line of 18 meters made of white stones from the Australian outback evokes, by its format, the road, and of course the lines of movement that the artist has followed in wilderness regions around the world since 1967.

Sol LeWitt, *Horizontal Progression*, 1991

A master of the mathematical system, and the author of *Serial Project* in 1966, LeWitt built here a kind of elongated pyramid, the elements of which are all proportionally linked.

Ulrich Rückriem, *Ursprung*, 2016

Formerly a cathedral restorer and stonecutter, Rückriem always leaves the traces made while cutting his sculptures. This is Rückriem's latest sculpture, envisaged specifically for the Venet Foundation.

Larry Bell, *Something Green*, 2017

A member of the Light and Space movement alongside James Turrell, Larry Bell has produced three entangled green glass cubes for the Venet Foundation, modeled on those exhibited at the Whitney Biennial.

Phillip King, *Slant*, 1966

Phillip King's emblematic sculpture was made in 1966 for the exhibition, *Primary Structures*. These "boards" mimic the drawing of a broken cone, a recurring figure in the artist's work during those years. Representing Great Britain at the Venice Biennale in 1968, King was one of the pioneers of New Generation Sculpture, and a student of Anthony Caro.



In Le Muy, the sculptures, in harmony with the space that surrounds them, integrate with the environment.

Art is everywhere, and the works of art lead to reflection

For the garden, Bernar Venet remembered his conversation with Donald Judd in Marfa, placing large works in perfect harmony with the environment he was going to model. Le Muy's conception starts from this idea, on a smaller scale. Designed for sculptural works, the site showcases works by Venet as well as those of other artists in his collection. Art and nature are one in an endless dialogue.

In 2005, a 700m² gallery is designed by the architects Berthier + LLamata. Conceived as a silver shell, in inox steel, the contemporary architecture breaks with the grass and the landscape it reflects. It is located across the old 2,000 m² factory, and was made into an exhibition space. A Diagonal by Bernar Venet leans on the building, at the 74.3° that is reflected in its engraved title. These two spaces allow the artist endless possibilities for ambitious installations.

In 2008, the huge footbridge, *Pont-arc*, is designed by the artist and made of Cor-ten steel. It is comprised of a long, curved, square passageway, with a white lacquered interior. Pierced randomly with holes to compose a mosaic of luminous points, the bridge connects groups of works across two sections of the park.



In 2014, the Venet Foundation is inaugurated with an exhibition of major Minimal and Conceptual pieces of the collection, and with the construction of the *Stella Chapel* (by Frank Stella).



In 2015, the cycle of summer shows dedicated to a single artist starts with *Jean Tinguely – Last collaborations with Yves Klein*.



In 2016, two perennial works of James Turrell are installed for the summer show *James Turrell – Inspire the Light*.



In 2017, the Sculpture Park is expanded, and the summer show ***Pedestrian Space*** is dedicated to **Fred Sandback**.



In 2018, the Venet Foundation participates in the celebrations in honor of what would have been Yves Klein's 90th birthday, and presents the summer show ***Yves Klein – Pure Pigment***.



In 2019, the Venet Foundation pays homage to Claude Viallat, one of the most important colorists of his time. ***Claude Viallat – Unleashing Color***, is open from from 13 June to 13 September.

BERNAR AND DIANE VENET'S ART COLLECTION OF MINIMAL AND CONCEPTUAL ART

In the old mill, the property's most intimate space, the Venet Collection boasts a hundred works of Contemporary Art, presented alongside Venet's most historic and recent pieces. His torch-cut steel furniture affirms its sobriety. Imagined as functional sculptures, the couches, tables, and chairs also show the artist's interest to the human body. The important library, full of exhaustive books and monographs, is quite important to the artist. He fuels himself with these writings, and shares the exhaustive resources of artist books and monographs with researchers and art historians who sojourn there. The library is thus part of the collection.

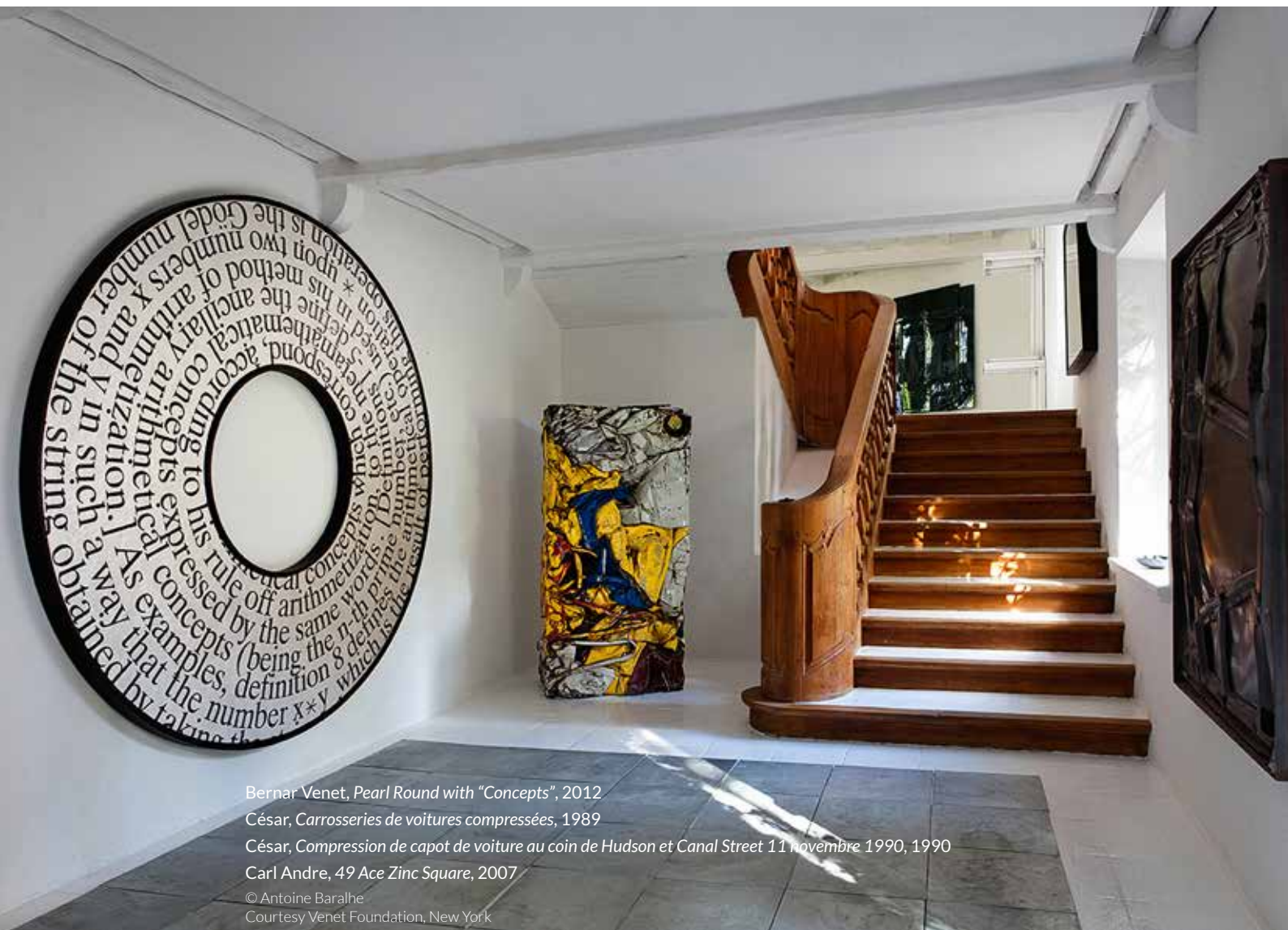
Numerous art movements are represented in the Collection such as Nouveau Réalisme, Conceptual Art, Narrative Art. Minimal Art holds a central place in the collection, and it manifests itself in works exchanged between Venet and artists he met upon his arrival in New York in 1966.

The Foundation's collection as seen by Bernar Venet: exchanges, purchases, and friendly arrangements

"In 1963, I quickly drew the support and friendship of artists like Arman, César, Villeglé, and Deschamps, who were very generous to me. I was a complete nobody, and to enjoy the privilege of interacting with artists who were in the process of changing, in Europe, the course of history was gratifying and reassuring to me.

Some pieces are not very important in terms of size but precious for their originality. During a very late evening spent at the Rosebud Bar in Montparnasse, for example, Raymond Hains, Villeglé and Rotella signed the artistically torn label of a box of Seita matches for me. The three signatures on what you might call a "miniature" dating from 1964 remain something precious for me.

I had the good fortune to meet and regularly see the great majority of the artists whose work I own. The exceptions are rare and most of the works were done for me, with a story that attaches to them in each instance. There was, to mention just a few, Morellet, who created a piece from the letters of my name; Arman, who did my *Trash Can*, and my *Portrait robot*; César, who compressed my car; and Rotella, who created one of his *Blanks* in my studio on Canal Street. I remember an exchange with Takis when we were both staying at the Chelsea Hotel in 1968. Jean Tinguely realized a very baroque candlestick for my fiftieth birthday. Soon after my arrival in New York, Christo also did a wrapped portrait for me, and in exchange I offered him a *Diagram* painting, which I see each time I visit him. That was the spirit in which my collection began to take shape. My exchanges with Sol LeWitt and Donald Judd date from the late 1960s and the very beginning of the 1970s. On Kawara, who I was very good friends with because we frequently got together to play ping pong, sent me a series of "I Got Up At" postcards every day for the month of December 1969. "



Bernar Venet, *Pearl Round with "Concepts"*, 2012

César, *Carrosseries de voitures compressées*, 1989

César, *Compression de capot de voiture au coin de Hudson et Canal Street 11 novembre 1990, 1990*

Carl Andre, *49 Ace Zinc Square*, 2007

© Antoine Baralhe

Courtesy Venet Foundation, New York

Quotations from Bernar Venet

Excerpts from the *Collections d'artistes* catalogue, Avignon/Arles,
Collection Lambert/Actes Sud, 2001

WORK FROM VERSAILLES, EXHIBITED BY THE VENET FOUNDATION IN LE MUY

In 2018, three new monumental sculptures by Bernar Venet are installed in a new section of the park, including a large *Effondrement*, comprised of the 22-meter long Arcs shown on the place d'Armes at the entrance to the Château de Versailles in 2011. Disorder. Instability. Haphazard. Turbulence. Collision. These are the concepts that govern this part of the park in Le Muy, and the the 16 arcs piece in particular. To the verticality and the grandiloquence of Versailles, the 2018 version responds with entropy. Venet's questioning is demonstrated here, as well as in his already vast spectrum of sculptural works, and his use of *Arcs*, *Angles*, *Straight Lines*, and *Indeterminate Lines* are the materials of a permanent metamorphosis.



Bernar Venet
Versailles Effondrement : 85.8° Arc x 16 , 2018

© Xinyi Hu
Courtesy Archives Bernar Venet New York

THE ONGOING INSTALLATIONS

Frank Stella

In 2014, the Venet Foundation inaugurated an unprecedented commission by Frank Stella: the *Stella Chapel*.

When Bernar saw Frank Stella's large composite reliefs in the artist's studio, he immediately sensed that he was in the presence of an important work. He thought he might hang one in Le Muy and eventually left with six pieces without knowing where he was going to place them. Their imposing size (around 450 x 250 x 150 cm each) discouraged interested institutions from taking them on loan since access to such monumental works would be impossible in practical terms.

Thus, a building had to be constructed especially to house the works.

During discussions between the two artists, the idea of a chapel quickly took shape. Such a building is part of the tradition of artists' chapels, with, for instance, Matisse's chapel in Vence, not far from Le Muy. Bernar himself designed the furnishings and stained glass for a chapel in his native village. But the initial model remains the Rothko Chapel in Houston, where the entire space is covered by paintings by Mark Rothko.

The building in this instance is a chapel in the ecumenical sense of the term, that is, above all a space for meditation where art and thought take precedence over religion. Frank Stella designed the hexagonal building that has a diameter of fifteen meters and a work of art hanging on each of its walls. Every edge of those walls meets empty space, leaving visitors free to wander through the chapel while opening it up completely to the natural setting.



Stella Chapel, 2014

© Antoine Baralhe
Courtesy Venet Foundation, New York

James Turrell

In 2016, The Venet Foundation inaugurated two works by American artist James Turrell.

Turrell's light appears thanks to concealed devices that the artist plans out and constructs with great precision. That light reproduces natural phenomena that the artist builds up and stages like a dramatist.

Elliptic, Ecliptic belongs to a series of "Skyspaces", buildings (in this case egg-shaped) in which viewers are invited to take a seat and observe the sky through a narrow space freed of all visual pollution and illuminated by a device that the artist conceals in the structure. Like Yves Klein, who sought to paint the sky, Turrell sculpts it in space and color by tinting its surroundings. The concentration within a confining space of the color blue, which runs from the lightest at the start of the day to the darkest at night, brings out its intensity and the immensity of the infinite. Freed from all context, the sky is an abstract monochrome that the viewer contemplates, a monochrome defined by its outlines but whose depth is unknown, even unexplainable.

Prana is on view in the Venet Foundation's Gallery, which was designed by Berthier + Llamata. The piece consists of a space that is hermetically sealed off from all exterior light. At the end of this space a red rectangle that actually conceals its exact nature can be seen. What seems to be an object painted in a pure pigment or a light projection of some sort proves to be, upon closer inspection, an opening (an aperture in Turrell's terminology) onto a light reflection. Behind the frame cut into the wall, all notions of space melt away in a kind of abyss clouded by a flaming red hue that suggests the inside of a seething volcano.



Arman
Déchainés, 1991
Anchor chains
326 x 145 x 62 cm

© Jonty Wilde
Courtesy Archives Bernar Venet, New York

NEW INSTALLATIONS

Bernar Venet's work in the Factory

This summer, Bernar Venet presents his most recent wall reliefs in the factory: an installation of multiple *Continuous Curves* (2018-2019), in torch-cut steel, as well as a new portfolio of prints, *Random Combination of Indeterminate Lines*.



Installation view in the Factory of the Venet Foundation, 2019
Bernar Venet, *Continuous Curves*, 2018-2019
Torch-cut steel, variable dimensions

© Jerome Cavaliere. Courtesy Archives Bernar Venet, New York

BIOGRAPHY OF BERNAR VENET



**Bernar Venet and
*Effondrement of Arcs: 200 Tons
Le Muy, 2017***

© Gerard Schachmes
Courtesy Archives
Bernar Venet New York

1941

Born in Château-Arnoux-Saint-Auban,
Alpes-de-Haute-Provence

1961

First tar-painted works

1966

Settles in New York and paints his first
mathematical diagrams

1967

Lays out a four-year program for making
art and decides to bring his artistic
activities to a close

1971

Retrospective of his conceptual period at
the New York Cultural Center, *The Five
Years of Bernar Venet*

1976

Takes up making art again and exhibits at
"Documenta VI" in Kassel

1983

Initial scale models of *Indeterminate Lines*

1985

Meets Diane Segard; they marry in 1996

1989

Acquires the property in Le Muy

2011

Solo show at the Château de Versailles

2014

Opening of the Venet Foundation

2016

Bernar Venet is the first French artist
to receive the Lifetime Achievement
Award, delivered in New York by the
International Sculpture Center.

2017

Bernar Venet receives the Prix Montblanc
de la Culture in France, for his cultural
initiatives as founder of the Venet
Foundation

2018

Retrospective at Musée d'Art
Contemporain in Lyon *Bernar Venet,
rétrospective 2019 - 1959*

2019

Bernar Venet's poetic writings, incarnated
in the work *Poetic? Poétique? Anthologie
1967-2017* won the Prix François
Morellet

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

For visitors

Venet Foundation
Chemin du Moulin des Serres
83490 Le Muy

For further information

Venet Foundation
145 Avenue des Americas #5C
New York, NY 10013

Claude Viallat – *Unleashing Color*, 13 June – 13 September 2019

Open to the public from 13 June to 13 September 2019 for guided tours,
on Thursday afternoons and Fridays, by advance reservation only;
registration online at www.venetfoundation.org or for groups by email at:
info@venetfoundation.org

Rates: Adult \$15 / Student \$8 / Free under 12 years old

Venet Foundation, Editions Bernard Chauveau, 2014

Stella Chapel, Editions Bernard Chauveau, 2015.

Texte by Serge Lemoine, introduction by Alexandre Devals

www.venetfoundation.org

#venetfoundation

Instagram : @venetfoundation



Sir Anthony Caro,
Skimmer Flat, 1974
Rusted and varnished steel
175 x 627.5 x 122 cm

© Jonty Wilde
Courtesy Archives Bernar Venet, New York

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Cover:
Bernar Venet
14 Acute Unequal Angles, 2018
Corten steel
818 x 820 x 420cm
© Jonty Wilde
Courtesy Archives Bernar Venet, New York