

# TAKIS

- ▶ Much of his artistic career and activity was focused in Paris, London and New York, as well as Athens, between 1950 and 1970, and then in Athens. This exhibition will be the first solo presentation of his work in Barcelona.
- ▶ Takis was one of the pioneers of advanced, experimental art in the 1960s and in particular his work investigated the relation between artistic, scientific and philosophical research. He became an innovator in incorporating natural forces into his work, most centrally magnetism, light and electricity, in sculptures and paintings as well as in performances. Similarly, he moved from figuration to work that was more closely allied to experimental abstraction.
- ▶ The exhibition features a significant documentary section referring to Takis's relationship to the Signals gallery and publication, to MIT, AWC and other radical spaces, galleries and groups at the time. In 1968 he was among the first artists invited to the Center for Advanced Visual Studies, founded by György Kepes at MIT; and in 1969, his removal of one of his works of art from the Museum of Modern Art in New York was the catalyst for the creation of the activist group, the Art Workers Coalition (AWC).
- ▶ Some Takis's works were showed the year 2000 at MACBA in the exhibition "Force Fields" curated by Guy Brett

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**Title:** TAKIS **Opening:** Thursday 21 november 2019 at 07.30 p.m-. **Dates:** from 22 november 2019 to 19 april 2020. **Organized by:** Tate Modern MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona and Museum of Cycladic Art, Athens **Curated by:** Guy Brett (critic and independent curator), Michael Wellen (Curator of International Art, Tate) and Teresa Grandas (Curator, MACBA)

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 **PHOTOS** TAKIS: [www.macba.cat/press/takis2901](http://www.macba.cat/press/takis2901)

# TAKIS

**Press Conference: 21 November**

**Opening: 21 November**

**Dates: 22 November 2019 – 19 April 2020**

**Curated by: Guy Brett (critic and independent curator), Michael Wellen (Curator of International Art, Tate) and Teresa Grandas (Curator, MACBA)**

The Greek artist **Takis** (Panagiotis Vassilakis; 25.10.1925-9.08.2019) pioneered new art forms using magnetism, light and sound. Takis was born in Athens in 1925, where he died on August 9, 2019. Much of his artistic career and activity was focused in Paris, London and New York, between 1950 and 1970, and then he has been living in Athens. This exhibition will be the first solo presentation of his work in Barcelona.



*Telelumière 4* 1963-1964

Iron and mercury lamp, 109 x 30 x 30 cm. Private collection, London

Over a 70-year career, Takis has created some of the most powerful, innovative – as well as playful – works of twentieth-century art. With these he reinvented the formats of sculpture, painting and music in relation to energy. Takis was one of the pioneers of advanced, experimental art of the 1960s and in particular his work investigated the relation between artistic, scientific and philosophical research. While his earliest sculptures make explicit reference to ancient Greek culture, he later became an innovator in incorporating natural forces into his work, most centrally magnetism, light

and electricity, in sculptures and paintings as well as in actions. Similarly, he moved from figuration to work that was more closely allied to experimental abstraction.

Among his most significant contributions, are the sculptures he called *Signals*, inspired by railway signals and often displaying flashing lights, and the tele-magnetic sculptures, which were begun at the end of the fifties and first exhibited at Galerie Iris Clert in Paris, involving metal objects suspended in space by means of magnets. In 1964, his work was the source of the name for the gallery Signals London; in 1968 he was among the first artists invited to the Center for Advanced Visual Studies, founded by György Kepes at MIT; and in 1969, his removal of one of his works of art from the Museum of Modern Art in New York was the catalyst for the creation of the activist group, the Art Workers Coalition. Sound, light, electrical and magnetic energy are the main elements of a rich and very personal language, which is presented through a selection of the most significant works of his trajectory.

This exhibition seeks out the essential poetry and beauty of the electro-magnetic universe explored by an artist, who was interested in making the viewer recognise the power of the invisible forces that animate the world. Embracing technology, Takis used industrial debris and scientific technologies in his work, which he invested with an existential meaning. Throughout his career, he produced the antenna-like *Signals* that could be imagined to be receiving and transmitting messages of far-off, cosmic events, and musical devices using magnets, electricity and viewer participation to generate resonant and random sounds. Such inventions earned Takis the admiration of the international avant-garde, ranging from the American Beat poets to artists such as Marcel Duchamp.

At MACBA visitors will encounter forests of *Signal* sculptures, works incorporating salvaged aircraft dials and magnetic objects inspired by radar. The sounds of Takis's *Musicales*, his slow-moving *Silver Musical Sphere* and his *Gong* will complete the presentation. The exhibition in Barcelona also includes an important documentation section with the relation between Takis and Signals, MIT, AWC, among others.

*«Electromagnetism is an infinite, invisible thing, [...] I would like to render it visible so as to communicate its existence and make its importance known, I would like to make visible this invisible, colourless, non-sensual, naked world which cannot irritate our eye, taste or sex. Which is simply pure thought.»*

Takis

*«The only vision I ever had of magnetism was during a conversation with Takis in Paris in his studio, looking at his little metal cones hummily waveringly pulled by like wires straight at their little magnet fathers; and he, Takis, explained to me that the stars were all pulled together with myriad thin invisible wires or magnetism radiating from every star to every other star – so we imagined, if you pulled out any one star the whole thrumming mechanism would slip a cosmic inch like a quavering mobile and all twang together into place at once on lines of unseen magnetic tracks, thunk.»*

Allen Ginsberg, Bombai, 22 April 1962

## About some works

Takis's early work was inspired by ancient Greek, Egyptian and Cycladic art. He began sculpting figures from plaster in 1952, before learning to cast, forge and weld metal. He experimented with contrasting materials and forms throughout the 1950s. His exploration of opposites can be seen in works he called *Flowers* and *Idols* whose metallic finish contrasts with their organic forms.

Takis produced various 'telemagnetic installations' in the early 1960s using plinths, walls and the ceiling of the gallery as anchor points for his art. The installations challenged the traditional conventions of sculpture. Waves of magnetic energy move through these spaces, holding the individual elements in suspension. The works in this area have been brought together to resemble Takis's telemagnetic installation at the Alexandre Iola's gallery in New York in 1960.

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### Insects

Takis has produced thin, flexible sculptures called Signals. Early Signals, like this one, resemble radio receivers. Takis has reflected on how they relate to communication and connection. For him they are 'like electronic antenna, like lightning rods... They constituted a modern hieroglyphic language....' The bases are made from forged metal, or in some cases springy radio antennae typically found on American military Jeeps during the Second World War. The elements at their heads, simply by being raised in the air, become an indicator of cosmic space and distance.

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### Magnetic Ballet

#### **Ballet magnétique**

Cork, electromagnet, paint, steel, wire and wood An electromagnet sits at the centre of this work. The suspended ball and cork have metal bases which make them leap and dance in response to the electromagnetic charge. Takis has observed that 'real movement, not illusion, invites spectator participation. It's no longer a trick but a physical fact in which you are involved.'

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### Magnetic Walls

Takis began his Magnetic Walls series in 1961. Magnets are hidden behind the canvas of these single-colour paintings. Hanging metal objects are attracted to these magnets, hovering just above the canvas surface. The result is an expansion of painting where abstract elements, instead of being painted on the canvas, float in space over it. Takis spoke of his work as creating an 'action in space', rather than the 'illusion of space' that many previous artists had achieved.

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## Electromagnet

A powerful magnet holds a needle in suspension, highlighting how magnetism can override the laws of gravity. Takis stated: 'electromagnetism is an infinite, invisible thing, that doesn't belong to earth alone. It is cosmic; but it can be channelled. I would like to render it visible so as to communicate its existence and make its importance known; I would like to make visible this invisible, colourless, non-sensual, naked world which cannot irritate our eye, taste or sex. Which is simply pure thought.'

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## Radars

Takis's exploration of radar and magnetism were bound up with a desire to understand the cosmos. He explains in his 1961 autobiography *Estafilades* [Slashes]: 'I was always enchanted by aerodromes and their great radars, which turned slowly searching for metallic objects hovering in space. It is as if they were gigantic instruments recording cosmic events...If only with an instrument like radar I could capture the music of the beyond...If this object could capture and transmit sounds as it turned, my imagination would be victorious.'

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## Signals

Takis's Signals sculptures from the 1970s include bomb fragments from the Greek Civil War. They were gathered from the hillside around his Athens studio. The use of these materials transforms the remnants of war into monuments of beauty and contemplation. Formed by an explosion, the bomb fragments also relate to Takis's fascination with all manifestations of energy, from the subtle to the dramatic. 'Sometimes I explode materials in order to increase the flow of energy and observe the effect.'

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## Télélumières

Brass, electromagnet, iron machine parts, light bulbs, paint, string, steel and wood Takis became expert at manipulating electronic parts. Around 1962, he began to incorporate mercury-arc rectifiers into his work. These glowing blue valves use magnetism to convert alternating electrical current (AC) into direct current (DC). They were commonly used in electric railways, power substations and radios before the 1970s. For Takis, these valves had a visual importance beyond their original functions. He used them to make viewers aware of the energy fields surrounding them.

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## Gong

Within the Takis Foundation is an openair theatre space featuring an ensemble of Takis's works arranged around a central Gong. This giant musical instrument is made from the rusted wall of an oil tank. In a shift in energy, this container for fossil fuels is now an instrument for producing meditative and resonant sounds. Inspired by Zen Buddhism, Takis's work often relates to his contemplation of the individual's connection with the universe. 'In the greatest solitude I feel the greatest happiness,' he has said.

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## DOCUMENTATION

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While in Paris in the late 1950s and early 1960s Takis frequently visited writers staying at a run-down boarding house nicknamed the 'Beat Hotel'. Guests included William Burroughs, Brion Gysin, Gregory Corso and Allen Ginsberg. Takis drew inspiration from their work, as they did from his, dedicating poems and odes to him. In 1962, Ginsberg wrote how discussing the cosmos with Takis helped him to see the magnetic forces holding it together: 'We imagined, if you pulled out any one star the whole thrumming mechanism would slip a cosmic inch.' That section also presents some writers texts on Takis

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### Art Workers Coalition

On 3 January 1969, Takis removed his work from the exhibition *The Museum as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. It was being exhibited there without his consent. This protest led to the formation of the Art Workers' Coalition (AWC). *Documents 1* is a collection of correspondence, press and other items related to the foundation and rise of the AWC. It was first published at the height of the group's activity in mid-1969. It begins with a statement from Takis.

Copyright 1969 by Artworkers Coalition –

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### MIT

Takis was invited to undertake a fellowship at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1969. He worked with the scientist Ain Sonin to create a machine which transformed wave energy into electricity. They used a bicycle wheel in their design. This was a tribute to the artist Marcel Duchamp who presented everyday objects as 'readymade' artworks, specifically to his sculpture *Bicycle Wheel* 1913.

In 1968, he was one of the first visiting fellows at the Center for Advanced Visual Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the United States. There he continued to produce works using electromagnetism. He also developed work harnessing renewable energies in conjunction with scientists and engineers. Takis described these collaborators as 'poets' and 'creators'. His residency resulted in a patented device for transforming water currents into electricity. In an effort to democratise art, he also collaborated with engineers in London to produce affordable, mass-produced editions of his sculptures.

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### The impossible: A Man in Space

Takis publicly introduced magnetism into art in 1960 when he staged the performance *The Impossible: A Man in Space*. He suspended the poet Sinclair Beiles in mid-air through a system of magnets. While floating in space, Beiles recited his poem 'Magnetic Manifesto'. At the time, the Soviet Union and the United States were competing to send the first person into orbit. This 'space race' was an extension of an ongoing arms race between the two global superpowers. Takis's event was both a poetic act and a critique of warfare.

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## *Signals*

Signals London was an experimental artist-run space named after Takis's Signals sculptures. While active, from 1964 to 1966, Signals produced a monthly bulletin. It featured art, poetry, and philosophical and scientific articles. The bulletin circulated ideas among artists in Europe, the United States and Latin America. This network was concerned with breaking boundaries between art and science.

The October–November 1964 issue of *Signals Newsbulletin* was mostly dedicated to Takis. It featured 'cut-up' poems by William Burroughs and Brion Gysin made from new and recycled pieces of writing, as well as a visual poem by Alan Ansen shaped like an electromagnet. Sinclair Beiles's 'Magnetic Manifesto' was also included. Beiles had recited this while suspended by magnets in a performance orchestrated by Takis in 1960. The bulletin gives a snapshot of Takis's international network of friends and collaborators during the 1960s.

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### *Takis's studio, King's Road, London*

In the 1960s, Takis worked between Paris and the UK. He rented a studio apartment in London along King's Road in Chelsea. The neighbourhood was at the heart of 'Swinging London's' anti-establishment scene. At the centre of Takis's artistic life was his workbench. As seen in these photographs, a range of tools and electrical instruments were neatly arranged on the bench. It was little more than arm's length from Takis's tiny bed tucked in the studio's corner. His *Electro-Magnetic Musical* 1966 is visible above the bed.

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Takis Unlimited

1968

Video, color, so, 23min

Produida per Anthony Williams | Mahmoud Khosrowshahi

Cortesia d'Anthony Williams

Takis worked with the London-based inventor and arts patron Jeremy Fry to mass-produce an unlimited edition of his Signal sculpture. Takis aimed to challenge the exclusivity of the art market by offering more affordable artworks. The prices of his unlimited Signals ranged from £10 to £20 (equivalent to about 175 to 350 € today).



# TAKIS

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## ACTIVITIES

### Visits

By **Antonio Gagliano** and **Albert Tarrats**, artists  
Friday, 6 pm

### Accessibility

Guided tours for people with hearing and visual impairment, and accessibility supports for “Let’s talk about...” (sign language interpretation, magnetic loop, and accompaniment for people with visual disabilities) are available upon request. Please contact [educacio@macba.cat](mailto:educacio@macba.cat).

### Family Programme

+ - / + + *Magnetisms*

Experimentem amb l’ART workshop. For families with children aged 2 to 5  
Saturday 23 and 30 November, 7, 14 and 21 December 2019, and 11, 18 and 25  
January, 1, 8 and 15 February 2020, from 11 am to 12.30 am

### Let’s talk about...

Let’s talk about *Takis* with **Teresa Grandas**, Curator, MACBA  
Thursday 12 December, 6.30 pm  
Let’s talk about *Takis* with **Lolo & Sosaku**, artists  
Thursday 19 December, 6.30 pm

Friends of MACBA

### Exclusive Guided Tours

Guided tour of the *Takis* exhibition with Teresa Grandas, Curator, MACBA  
Wednesday 4 December, 6 pm

### MACBA App

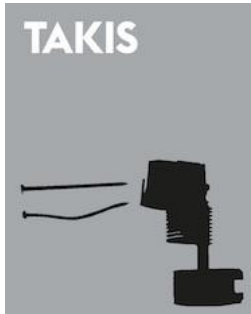
Enjoy the explanatory pages and audio guide descriptions of a selection of works from the exhibition, as well as detailed information about exhibitions and activities, videos, interesting facts, and practical information for getting to the museum.

More information at [macba.cat](http://macba.cat)

# TAKIS

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## Publication



The publication is an introduction to Takis (Panagiotis Vassilakis), key figure of Europe's post-war avant-garde and using magnetism, light and sound.

Guy Brett (critic and independent curator), contextualises Takis work in avant-garde art circles in London and Paris; Michael Wellen (curator of International Art, Tate) explains the artist's engagement with poetry, sexuality, and science, with a specific focus on Takis responses to Greek culture and war-torn Europe, and Melissa Warak (US scholar specialised in the history American avant-garde music and art) looks at Takis' musical collaborations from 1950s through 1990s.

This solo exhibition has been organised by Tate Modern and will tour to MACBA, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona in 2019.

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■ **MACBA:** Plaça dels Àngels, 1, 08001 Barcelona, [macba.cat](http://macba.cat)

■ **TIMES:** Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, 11 am – 7.30 pm. Tuesdays except public holidays, closed. Saturdays, 10 am – 8 pm. Sundays and public holidays, 10 am – 3 pm.

■ **Ticket valid for one month**

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 **FOTOS**

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