

# martin creed

“I don’t know what i want to say, but, to try to say something, I think I want to try to think, I want to try to see what i think. I think trying is a big part of it, I think thinking is a big part of it, and I think wanting is a big part of it, but saying it is difficult, and I find saying trying and nearly always wanting. I want what I want to say to go without saying.”

Martin Creed, 2001

## artist’s background

UK artist and 2001 Turner Prize winner, Martin Creed uses materials which are light and playful; ordinary, yet transcendently evocative. Creed creates ‘situational projects’ which make use of the particularities of space and circumstance. His visual art practice also strongly intersects with his own music and performances.

Creed’s work can also be characterised as witty and minimalistic, focusing on anti-materialism and defying commodification. Believing there is enough “stuff” in the world, Creed says his work is about the qualities of ‘nothing’

## inspiration and investigation

Creed uses the central theme of the nature of art itself and the relationship between art and reality, art and life.

“I think I’m inspired by the desire to be loved by other people. The inspiration for me is a lot to do with other people. I want to be loved so that’s one reason to make things and show them to people and put them in front of people because that’s what you are doing as an artist, you are saying look at this, look what I did and that’s partly because I want to be loved.”

Creed started his studies at The Slade School of Fine Art with a traditional representational style folio as the standard entry requirement. He was attracted to art because, unlike science, he said, there was no sense of right and wrong. “You decide what is right in your work, there aren’t any rules” Creed says.

At Art school, creating paintings and particularly sculpture, Creed felt increasingly dissatisfied, wanting to try to incorporate the process of ‘the making’ into the work itself, as one can in a song or in music. Thereafter he was interested in blurring the edges and shifting the way in which he presented his ideas.

From learning to play the violin at 3 and then the piano, Creed began writing his own music at Art school, which later became a



Martin Creed  
**Work No.370** 2004  
 balls of various kinds  
 Installation view at Hauser & Wirth,  
 London  
 Courtesy the artist and Hauser &  
 Wirth, Zurich & London  
 photo: Hugo Glendinning

conscious part of his art practice. He now writes and performs his own music with his band formed in 1994 called 'Owada'. Songs titled "1-2-3-4" and 'nothing' bear strong relationship to his visual art practice.

Martin Creed says he has always read a lot with many literary figures and books influencing his work. Influential writers have been Samuel Beckett, William Shakespeare, Ernest Hemmingway, Anthony Burgess and Ivor Cuttler's songs and poetry. Musical and artistic influences include: Frank Stella, Henri Matisse, the mid to late period of Pablo Picasso, Egon Schiele, Johannes Vermeer, Andy Warhol, Gustav Klimt, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Bob Dylan.

## materials and techniques

Creed's spaces are filled with objects, sounds, smoke, neons and ambient light or nothing. Existing materials in his work include paper, music, light, air. His works pare back and reveal what we don't normally see, allowing the reduced or the removed back into light. Creed's works in a way make themselves and at the same time cancel themselves out. Objects also include paper crumpled into balls, blu-tack rolled up and pinned against walls, neon flashing signs, rooms filled with balloons, signs on the sides of buildings. He also uses sound as an additional element in his gallery-based work using doorbells and metronomes.

Believing in the power of mystery, Creed says he tries every time to make something afresh, as if he had never made anything before, from zero, from the point at which nothing has been made before.

Creed's preparatory work is recorded as notes in a journal. His drawings are created as separate works, like paintings and are often abstract, single colour drawings using marker and highlighter pens, created in groups.

Creed believes all works are a consequence of failure and by finding enough faith in one object is to try to embrace the failure and succeed. He describes every element as being important, with not one material or thing more special than another. As in creating work no. 370, balls 2004 and deciding to use the sphere, Creed explained this choice provided a solution to the problem of choosing one shape and in the end a way of choosing 'everything'. "Every conceivable sphere, of all types and colours were included in that work for that reason. The balls found their own place compositionally with no boundaries. No balls were the same. In choosing the maximum number of balls that I could, in all colours and sizes, I was creating a composition like a painting, like exercises in making compositions which involve colours, shapes etc. None are more special than the other. They are all equal."

A previous installation in 1998, *Work no 201: half the air in a given space*, initially filled gallery, Gavin Brown's Enterprize, New York, with multi-coloured party balloons. The air within several thousand balloons, equalled half the cubic volume of air in the Gallery space. While the work used only simple elements of air and balloons, visitors were immersed in a unique multi-

Martin Creed  
Work No. 200 1998  
white 12" balloons  
installation at Galerie Analix, Geneva  
Courtesy the artist and  
Hauser & Wirth Zurich London



Martin Creed  
**Work No.289** 1999  
white neon, installation at The Portico,  
Linscott Road, London  
Commissioned by Ingrid Swenson  
Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth  
Zurich and London  
photo: Hugo Glendinning

sensory bubble-bath like experience, while moving through and displacing balloons with their own bodies.

Another previous work by Creed, a public art work, *Work 203* in 1999, *EVERYTHING IS GOING TO BE ALRIGHT*, used fluorescent tubing, which illuminated the frieze of a portico at the front of a disused orphanage and stretched over 40 feet across.

## professional practice

### The Turner Prize

In 2001, Creed won the £20,000.00 Tate Britain Turner prize, with the most minimal work ever to win. Creed described 'The Lights On and Off' as activating the whole of the space without anything physically being added. "The people, he believes who are looking at the work become a part of the work, or are in the work itself.

Creed believes his works are traditional and not different from paintings, believing art happens in people's heads, not in the painting on a wall.

### 'The Lights Off'

"I don't believe that my work is conceptual art. *The Lights Off* is a visual rather than a conceptual work. While it sits within conceptual art making, it is like a painting. And while it has different elements, it is compositionally similar to painting, only using light and shade."

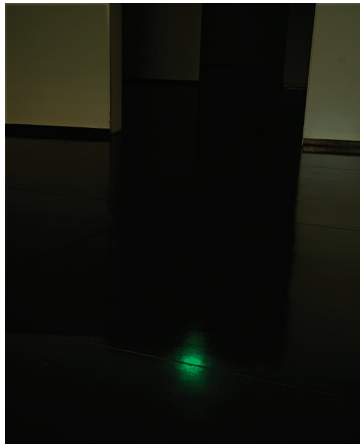
Martin Creed, 5 October 2005

Creed explains; *The 'Lights Off* is a work which is about absence and by the lights not being on, the work is not immediately noticeable. All of the action is in fact created by everything that is not the work, everything is from outside the work.

Central to the creation of *The Lights Off*, the space needed to be large, so it highlighted aspects of the work, such as the existing light and the space. Creed described it would have been even better if the work were within the whole of ACCA.

Creed explains; the idea of the work is not to challenge the visitor. For the visitor, he says, *The Lights Off* can be a relief or a safe place to be, like a nightclub, where you can be completely anonymous.

When the lights are off, it actually illuminates more around you.... like when you turn the lights off at night and everything becomes clearer, so you can actually see more. By having the lights off, as you do at night, more becomes illuminated around you and it allows the lights to come from the outside in. The work is also like a big soup, which contains feelings and experiences. What is important is people and their feelings. The work is a catalyst. It is a transcendental, spiritual experience. For the visitor, it is what they bring to the work, they are a part of it, making meaning for them, so the artwork is inseparable from the visitor.



Martin Creed  
**The Lights Off** 2005  
Australian Centre for Contemporary Art,  
Melbourne  
photo: John Brash

Creed believes works of art are interrelational, describing the significance of things as being created by everything around them, rather than by the things themselves. Similarly, he explains, a painting can't be separated from the wall and becomes a part of the space it occupies. The work is 50% and the other 50% is everything else. Creed explains; *The Lights Off* reduces that percentage, so the whole experience is dominated by the space.

Describing the work, *The Lights On and Off*, Creed explains; was a process happening in time and the piece made itself, like music. And like music, the work is all around you, everywhere and anywhere, it envelops you. There are only material differences in a work like this; the essential elements are from the heart. Ultimately, it is the trying and the desire to make work that is important. "Ideas are not in things, they are in people. The lights going off, is not an idea, it is an event."

Creed has been involved in numerous group exhibitions and held many solo exhibitions across the world. He is represented by Hauser and Wirth, London and Zurich and Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York.

## research

[www.martincreed.com](http://www.martincreed.com)

Explore the work of Martin Creed and the relationships between a range of other artists below who have explored similar subjects and ideas.

### **Carl André (1935 - )**

Andre, began this work in the early 1950s, actively producing poetry alongside his sculpture until the mid 1970s. Andre's poems, which can also be read as drawings, related directly to his three-dimensional work. Carl Andre worked as a minimalist sculptor, using natural or simple, commercially available materials and everyday objects and challenged the public's preconceptions about the role of art and what it should be. London's Tate Gallery acquired a sculpture entitled *Equivalent VIII* (a stack of fire bricks) which was criticised as a waste of money.

### **Donald Judd (1928 -1994)**

Influenced by Abstract Expressionism, Judd used industrial materials, such as plexiglass and plywood to create abstract works and emphasise particular materials and the space created by them. In the 70s, Judd started to make room-sized installations which dealt with architecture, volume and presence of the structure and the space around it. Judd wished to concentrate on the relationship between the object, the viewer and its environment.

### **Sol LeWitt (1928 - )**

In the 1960's, LeWitt made open modular white cubes using mathematical systems. LeWitt emphasised the conceptual basis of art in direct opposition to the expressiveness and gesture identified with the work of the Abstract Expressionists. In the 1970's, LeWitt introduced architectural scale works, Wall

Drawings, based on verbal proposals or systems suggested by LeWitt but executed by others.

### **John Cage (1912 -1992)**

Pianist John Cage created his 4'33" (1952) with no sound added to that of the environment in which it was performed. Other works show his growing interest in the theatre of musical performance (Water Music, 1952, for pianist with a variety of non-standard equipment) and in electronics (Imaginary Landscape no.5 for randomly mixed recordings, 1952; Cartridge Music for small sounds amplified in live performance, 1960), culminating in various large-scale events staged as jamborees of haphazardness (HPSCHD for harpsichords, tapes etc, 1969).

### **Dan Flavin (1933 - 1996)**

In 1961 Flavin began experimenting with minimalist style fluorescent tubing which he called 'icons.' Flavin became known as an originator of 'Minimal' art through inclusion in key group exhibitions such as "Black, White, and Gray" at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut in 1964 and "Primary Structures" at the Jewish Museum in New York City in 1966.

Explore the 1966 exhibition, Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculptors.

Explore the work of other contemporary artists whose work examines light and space.

Research the Turner Prize and the controversial history surrounding this prestigious prize held by Tate Britain, London.

I would like to thank Martin Creed for his time and generosity in discussing his practice whilst in Melbourne, for the exhibition, *The Lights Off* at The Australian Centre for Contemporary Art.

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