

A Talk with Krištof Kintera
Museum Tinguely, Basel, February 11, 2014

Participants:

KK: Krištof Kintera, artist

RW: Roland Wetzler, director, Museum Tinguely

AP: Andres Pardey, vice-director, Museum Tinguely

JS: Jiří Švestka, gallerist

RW: Krištof, you first worked with theater performances and things like that, and then you focus more on sculptures, which is more classical somehow—how come?

KK: It's because when you do your own stuff, you don't have to spend a lot of time arguing with other people, it's more introverted, inside, I think, and in the end, I liked it, I enjoy it, it's my own—how do you say, adventure. Honestly, nowadays I really have to not forget that I also have friends. They help me with this adventure, that's true and I really appreciate it. But this is why I like to be in my work and not have to argue with anyone else.

RW: At the same time your sculpture, your work is very extroverted, it's got some kind of a new approach as well, it's how to deal with materials, it's always language. There's always a content, it has several layers ...

KK: That's why I call it an adventure, because it IS an adventure, the fact that it's really MY decision what I do, how I do it. But it's a completely different kind of sport, I mean doing things with people, it's also amazing, because you have these common and shared situations and direct feedback for example. This is what I miss with the sculpture. When you do music or theater, you have this [snaps fingers] something that is happening, right there, on the spot, and this is what we don't have in sculpture. We just do it, and then it radiates, without our presence.

AP: But then by doing installations or exhibitions, you in a way go into interaction with them, what you do with the shop, what you did in Prague or what you do here in Basel, or what you did with these street lamps that you installed in Prague, where you provoked reactions of viewers, in a way that's more than just creating a sculpture, and putting it somewhere, and there it's discreetly doing its thing—it's *mise-en-scène*.

RW: It's always a dialogue, these are machines for a dialogue with the public, right?

KK: Maybe these are the leftovers from the experiences in the theater. Maybe—of course I don't analyze it myself—but maybe that's how it is. I like when something happens by doing sculpture. Doesn't have to be a theatrical reaction, it doesn't have to be a machine. You have different methods, it doesn't have to be mechanical always, just can be simple, like just add something to the existing element and things are happening.

AP: But you kind of put things there, and then it's up to the viewer, it's their place to act on it, to play maybe also with your sculptures, get into interaction much more than you would be with a painting or something.

KK: Yes, and that's fine, that's great. That is why I do sculptures, as they are possibly more alive than paintings.

RW: So your sculptural work somehow began with kinetic sculpture? But isn't there a shift towards less movement in your works?

KK: Yes, and on purpose, because I felt it can very easily become a routine. You can repeat it and be in the cycle of doing mechanical attractions, and that's why I always try to find new ways of sculpting, that I like to work with different kinds of materials and also it's risky, because sometimes you end up with something that's stupid or bad, but I think that's ok. We have a right to make mistakes, and that's better than repeating some things that will surely be a success. I can make not just a talking raven, but the next time it

can be a dog or a cat, and I'm sure that people would appreciate it and love it, but I would feel like I'm losing something.

RW: Repeating yourself.

KK: Yes. So, sculpture doesn't have to speak or move to be good, that's what I've said many times, but it's true.

RW: Is your biography and life—you have children—is there an influence? What Tinguely said; his most important public are the children. I think this is true for your work as well ... It has a background, but it works in a very interactive way with children as well.

KK: Yes. Well, honestly, I love all kids, and my kids, as everyone does, but I never think about children when I do art, because I think there is art for kids and there's art for adults, and I'd rather do art for adults. For example, the show in Městská knihovna („Analysis Results“, City Gallery Prague, Municipal Library, 2012) was let's say successful, and it was even successful for kids, and I was surprised because I never thought I am doing art for kids. On the other hand, when I have these courses, commenting on works in the show, it was very difficult for me to handle a group of kids in contrast to a group of adults. With adults, you have these stories, and this intellectual background, you can speak about consequences, motivations and so. With the kids, I almost didn't know what to tell them about it. On the other hand, I love to spend time with my kids in my studio, and now that they are older, they are enjoying it more and more. They like to come there and do stuff, glue different kinds of things together and that's beautiful.

RW: It's also, you're so much into the materials, and into weird transformation of materials. I recently met an artist in Paris, she was part of our last exhibition, Brigitte Zieger, and I talked to her about our next exhibition, Křištof Kintera—and she said “Oh I like his work very much, because of this change of meaning in the use of materials ...”

KK: Yes. Thank you!

JS: People who comment on your work upfront, they often say they see some kind of connection with the Czech cultural tradition. And the Czech cultural tradition means not what we now think of what Czech cultural tradition is, Dvořák and Smetana, but much more the animation movies with a little bit of Surrealism, Karel Zeman, Jiří Trnka, Jan Švankmajer, Dadaism, as well as puppet theater. We already spoke about it some time ago. I know how it comes, this is you. You cannot detach yourself from a tradition. You are in this, but I'm sure you don't cultivate this tradition, it just developed, but maybe therefore, it is so successful in Prague, in the Czech Republic, you use a language they do understand, and this is in some way familiar ...

KK: Yeah you are right I'm not following a line of Schwejk on purpose, and Czech grotesque, for example, but you are right, it's happening by itself, and I like humor, and also the dark side of humor. Irony for example, is something which we are quite armed with in the Czech Republic, and that's what I like about our mentality. There's many things I don't like about our mentality and of course it's also difficult to generalize at all, but the humor! Layered and sophisticated humor, not a stupid one, but some sharp humor with some other levels. That's what interests me. Whether it's Czech or not, I don't know, but, I'm from Prague.

JS: Great, like the jokes, were your stencils. You displayed them in the city, or was it ...?

KK: I was spraying also in the city, ...

JS: We are still back in the 90s.

KK: Yes. For me, it was just a, let's say, side effect of it, it's not so much graffiti, I was spraying also illegally on the buildings, but for me, the message can be spread also if it's sprayed in the gallery space on the wall or on paper. So I was not rigidly doing it like graffiti. There is one more, let's say more developed graffiti piece I did, and no one knows much about it, and

that's this piece when I made stencils of logos of banks, and I sprayed them on the buildings of the competitor banks. That was in order to make everybody nervous, even people in the graffiti scene, when they see a stencil of a bank logo on a wall, they completely panicked like, „What's happening? Are banks already spraying their plans on the walls?“ And then I also was spraying it on the banks, so the employees of the banks, when they came to work, they thought, „Oh they are already spraying on our bank“ you know? So that was quite simple and on top of that it was very interesting to cut these very well known logos and all of a sudden simplifying them into this black and red stencil spray. The logos looked quite scary in that black and red color.

JS: This would be a good piece for your show in Switzerland!

KK: It is a bit Swiss ... [laughter]

JS: A re-edition, this would make a big chaos here, I'm sure.

KK: Maybe I will do it. Roland doesn't have to know about it. [laughter]

JS: The famous sprayer at the end of the Seventies, beginning of the Eighties, Harald Nägeli, he was from Zurich, he was arrested in the 80s.

RW: He was in jail, then emigrated to Germany. He is now back in Zürich from time to time.

JS: He's more or less forgotten?

RW: Yes, he's not the center of attention. He gives some lectures from time to time. He's in his 70s now, an interesting person. He is known for his linear drawings.

JS: A figurative work. That is a really good piece. It was also good in the context of Switzerland, in the graduated bank world, that would elicit a different reaction than in Prague, it was more or less chaos, not understanding ...

KK: I feel now, I'm gonna do it! [laughter]

RW: I think this is typical for your work as well, it's quite a smart, simple intervention, but there's a whole story that goes behind it, it's like the little spark that makes a fire.

JS: Very subversive.

KK: Yeah I think, I try to be simple. When you hit the target, good, then a lot of things can happen and then you have a feeling it's a good piece, but you, of course, don't hit the target when you always do black ...

RW: What is also special about your sculpture, it's not always about beauty, or it's not only about beauty, but it's also the opposite. You need to have things that are disgusting, somehow.

KK: I like to work with these moments that also make people nervous. But what is beauty? It's hard to say, beauty can be found in something ugly as well.

RW: Like things you never look at, like a pile of old snow, you don't look at it, it's just something else ... but you can make something really interesting with it.

KK: It's not beautiful, but it IS.

RW: It's unique.

KK: It is! So, for example, these recent sculptures of the dirty snow. It's like sculpting something that doesn't have any value, any interest, any beauty, whatever, and that's why I decided to do these sculptures of dirty water, basically.

RW: Yes, but it's also maybe in your head, you have the place where it will be shown, the institution, and this I think is also special for your work, there is a lot of reflection how and where your work is presented, as interventions show that you've made in the gallery in Prague, and you're also going to do in Basel.

KK: It's quite recent also because of course I didn't have so many possibilities to have a big show at an institution. This is the second one. But the first one, in Prague, was quite a good experience. I knew I have to come up with something on top of just my pieces, an extra element of surprise, some ele-

ment, some moment that will basically overcome the very dull and orthodox atmosphere specifically at that institution. I knew I had to do it, and if I succeed, it will put a new light, also on the sculptures and on everything. So I wanted to bring some fresh air into this institution and I had a plan, and I also had friends like Jiří Ptáček telling me before the show „Aren't you afraid the energy of your sculptures will be lost?“ And I said yes, I know what you mean, but I have a plan, and this plan was finally 80% successful and then something happened. I had a good experience with this show and I also have a plan for this show, and I hope this plan is good.

JS: Be careful, you know, you bring fresh air into the City Gallery in Prague and the director was dismissed!

[laughter]

KK: That's true!

JS: But so what? You say 80% successful, but it was 100%. Stuff was completely changed.

RW: But also, there were first some people working there, they said, no, we do not do this, because, a museum, it's about conservation, about keeping things.

KK: They were absolutely not ready for doing something out of their routine. Which is bad, it's about attitude and they are stubborn with their attitudes, not the director who was kicked out, he was not that stubborn, but don't worry, he was not kicked out because of my show.

JS: This is your subversivity. Everybody says, Krištof is a good guy, but this is the danger. I know it ...

KK: It's not because of me, but, on top of that I don't want to brag, but they had a record number of visitors. But funny thing, they don't care about it. I didn't find them to be happy about it, when I talked about it to them at the end of the show. They just don't care.

RW: Too much trouble.

JS: Too much trouble. This is difficult for an institution to show that the institution is happy. But it was considered the best show of the year, artist of the year. Come on, this is good.

KK: I'm not complaining.

RW: So you're challenging conventions. Another thing we're discussing now is the catalog itself. You had two other catalogs before, that were rather classical, and your idea was to do something different, and also, you have a certain ... you don't like graphic design that much.

KK: I made my living with it for 15 years, so my relationship to graphic design is nowadays almost at ground zero. I am not interested in kind of fonts and layouts. In fact, this so-called „book“ now: the idea is from my friend Peter Babák, because I was still stuck with the very traditional way of going through a book with pages and a chronology of bound pages. He came to my studio, and said come on, let's just do loose sheets, as you have it here on your table and everywhere around. And here you have your drawings in a shoe box! Let's put it all in a shoe box! I did not like it at first glance, but after some time I found that this idea is quite challenging because all of a sudden you have this feeling of freedom, you don't have pages bound in a chronological way, but you can spread them. You can give them away, you can change the order as you like! You never tear pages out of books but here you can, because they are just a pile of ideas in this super well-known standard office format of A4. That makes the book quite unique, I hope, and I'm very much looking forward to the result, because I have a feeling we are doing something a bit unusual.

RW: So it's much closer to the way of how your creativity happens, how your brain works. You can bring it all together, you can make stories out of it. You can assemble it in a way that is good for today but maybe not for tomorrow.

KK: Yes. Things don't always have to happen in a practical way. And kind of chaotic, which I am a little bit in my life, and in the studio. I'm trying to

show the things from the angle of being created, not just official, final photos from the institutions or galleries, but from the process, to show people how it's, in a way, a dirty job!

RW: That was something you showed in Prague, you tried to demonstrate all this material, how ideas can be generated.

KK: That's right, in fact you saw the book already there. I just couldn't see it myself, that the book could be done like this, but the book was already there, on the walls. Book on the wall.

JS: One thing about your work: I'm always surprised how the things can get actual. The artist did it, and they became a political actuality two years later. I'm thinking about the raven, the sculpture, entitled „I see I see“, which is what the raven says. For example: „Pay your taxes!“, which is just now, in the daily political German and Swiss context very timely. So I tried to get behind this, because this is not done, because of contemporary context, this is done before it, I'm just trying to get behind your thinking, how it is done.

KK: Well the raven is a wizard, and he knows a lot.

JS: Perfect.

KK: He knows what will happen. The story with the raven is: At the beginning, I wanted to give him a very simple language capacity, almost similar to some intelligent parrot, who can repeat just some simple sentences. And I wanted to teach him these notoriously well-known sentences from the advertisements, like, „Just do it“, „Let's make things better“, and give him this capacity of these simple sentences, which, when you take them out of context of these corporations, they become nearly metaphysical.

RW: But also stupid.

KK: And also stupid.

JS: The border between the metaphysical and the stupid is there.

KK: Yes. And I like to be exactly on this edge. But later when I was recording and giving him his language, I just wasn't so sharp, and I started to speak a little bit more, so there are some sentences about taxes, time, problems, crises and these things which are in the air. It just works. I remember a lot of situations with him when he said something just at the right time and at the right place....

JS: This is one of the works I saw already the first proposals for in Amsterdam. Do you remember this? To execute it, how many years did you need for this?

KK: Yes, there's a big gap. I will explain. I wanted to do him already in 2003, but it was a short time after I finished „Talkmen“, I already had a little figure, and in the beginning it was a human figure, sitting at the end of the branch.

JS: I saw this in your studio in Amsterdam, was that in 2002?

KK: Yes I think so, may be 2003... But I stopped doing it because I felt like, „Ah, you are repeating yourself!“ This time it will be a smaller guy, speaking again, ... and, I would say, 7 years after that, I changed my mind and there was this idea of working with a raven because I read an article about ravens. It's a mythological creature, it's quite interesting, and I decided to change my mind and not to do a human speaking but a raven speaking. By the way they are the most intelligent birds in our climate, in Europe, or in the place where we live, and it's all quite interesting.

JS: That's right, they know the future.

KK: Yes.

AP: Is the public part of your conceptual work? If you think about the work to be done, is the public part of your thinking?

KK: Sometimes. I would say. Sometimes really not. Sometimes I think one shouldn't really care about any kind of public or the viewer. But sometimes things even get social, like Memento Mori („Of One's Own Volition—Memento Mori“, permanent installation under Nuselsky bridge, Prague, 2009–2011), which I still take as a—success is not the right word—but as

something being overcome. I'm quite proud of that. It was not easy, it was not happening on demand from the city, there was no commission, it's just a sculpture that you decide to do in the city and if you are pushy enough, one day, it stays there. This makes me happy. I'm still a bit disappointed that it's not shining all day long, and I hope I will be able to do it one day. And it's also so complicated, such a simple thing, to make one more lamp shine all day. You have to get 40 different kinds of stamps to get a steady electric connection there, it must be planned by an architect, and everything and it costs money but I will do it, because whenever I pass it, I feel like it should be shining all day long. But it is there.

JS: But as I said, this is a unique situation, that this was your idea, your activity and your realization, this is just perfect.

KK: It's very social and it's about a topic that is still very controversial. So for example, in that piece I take care of what it brings and what it means, and it's symbolic that it's public, it's all important. By coincidence—it's really strange—I have two public sculptures in the Czech Republic, and both of them are memorials. That's really a coincidence. One of them was not my idea, but I was invited to do so, a memorial of a founder of a cyclist movement, called Automaten, because I like that people move in the city by bicycle („Bike to Heaven“, 2007–2013, memorial to Jan Púp Bouchal and all bikers who died in streets of Prague). I felt honored to do it and also I knew the person personally. It's nice. What connects these sculptures is that they came from the bottom, they are not commissioned by the municipality, they come from the people, and they were financed by the people, and that's nice.

JS: They were financed by crowd founding. Super.

KK: It's quite a strong community that rides bicycles in Prague, or better said who fight for better conditions for cyclist. I was surprised, within one week they collected almost 300,000 Czech crowns, 10,000 Euro.

JS: This is quite a lot. You also have a public sculpture in Tilburg, if I remember well, is it still there?

KK: Yes.

JS: It's permanent.

KK: But it shouldn't be.

JS: It should just be temporary?

KK: Yes. There was a deal that they were only to have it for a certain time, and when we were thinking with the organizers for how long, maybe 2 months or 3 months, they said OK, until the bulb in the lamp breaks, that will be the end of the sculpture. And because Philips wrote on this bulb in the manual, they estimated the lifetime is 500 days, we called it „The Miracle of 500 Days“ from the day it was raised up, „Miracle“ (500 days from 12.09.2008). But the city and the people of Tilburg started to like it, so now they are changing the bulbs.

JS: It's time to send them a bill, no?

KK: After some years I was asking them, because at the beginning, they told me that most probably the city will buy it. Later they said, „Oh, Holland now is in a difficult time ...“ It is there. [Laughter] It's quite nice, that in Holland it was very smooth, everything was very smooth, everybody was excited about the idea, from the organizers to the technicians installing the lamp. For us, this is still kind of a new experience because in the Czech Republic, we are used to having to overcome a lot of bad moods and bad minds of people, and so that's why in Holland I was quite surprised that things can go easy, but then you almost miss this pleasant moment that you have when you have overcome a difficult moment.

AP: You need the pressure or the complication ...

KK: ... to get more satisfied. Yes.

AP: For me that's also a way of getting into a dialogue. With people, with the administration, with museum employees ... if you were to do nice paintings, maybe this dialogue would not happen. Obviously, this dialogue is part of what you are doing.

KK: That's true. But it's good that for example here, you are open to doing something that let's say is slightly different and not very orthodox. I just would like to have more open-minded people. At institutions it's kind of accepted, and I would like to have it in politics, in municipalities. That's what I miss in the Czech Republic. They are still waiting for educated, sensitive clerks who want to give a chance to creativity and that's the problem at institutions ...

AP: But by doing these sculptures, these installations, you are kind of educating people ...

JS: Exactly.

AP: ... forcing them to open up.

KK: I hope so. Because for example, for them, a bended tube of a lamp, it's not a sculpture, it's not a memorial—because memorials should be made of bronze, you know. Now, maybe, they can realize—aha!—it doesn't have to cost millions to cast from bronze, it can be cheap, that's also an important aspect. Just be open, and let's do it. But, the public area can be also spoiled by having a lot of art around. It's quite a complicated topic. Now we are sort of demanding that we need more public art in the city but it can be a disaster as well.

AP: If it becomes too decorative, but I don't have the feeling that this is what you are doing.

KK: Exactly. And who will judge it? And who will say this yes and this not, and how many, and where? It's not so easy.

JS: Definitely. In this context, and yet a little bit outside, but I think this is important for the text, I would like to ask you about a sculpture I know nothing about, and that's „The Public Jukebox“. This will be done especially for this show, this will be in the garden, and, what could you, today, say to this? Is it still not finished?

KK: I'm also quite curious.

JS: It will be interesting to read what you said in February, and people will read this in June.

KK: I'm busy now with the technical things a lot but of course the most important thing is what is it going to play? It's about sound, the power of sound, and the historical heritage of sound, and I'm still quite impressed by the power of the memory of sound, like, what it can do with the emotions and feelings.

RW: To remember things of a setting, most often it's in a restaurant or something like that.

KK: Yes. Most of them is Muzak, making our life, the daytime more pleasant when we are shopping or whatever, but this will be more like provoking something again.

JS: But what does „The Jukebox“ mean, to pay 1 Swiss Franc or 1 Euro, in the time when you can get more or less free everything from the internet?

KK: The aspect of paying for that is just that I want to avoid teenagers playing with it without investing in the decision. That's why there's this coin machine, that you have to make a choice, and be aware of this choice, and invest in this short moment that will define the atmosphere in the next 3 or 5 minutes of music in your particular spot, and that's important because of course, music is everywhere, on the internet, in headphones of people and all around us, but this amplified sound right there, right in that moment, in that particular spot, creates a situation with a participant who is choosing what he is going to broadcast in a way. That's what I'm looking for. The playlist is still a bit of a mystery, but I want to do quite a broad range of any kind of sound you can imagine.

RW: The sound of noise and speech?

KK: Yes. Barking dogs, rainy storm, wind, the sound of the universe, heavy, doom and trash metal, grunting pigs, baroque laments being pitch-shifted, and so and so. It will be a lot.

JS: With the investment of 1 Franc, the person investing in this will decide what more people will hear.

KK: Yes. That's it. Very simple, it's just a public jukebox.

AP: Of course it's kind of the same if you have a jukebox in a restaurant, it's also one person who decides. If I'm in a romantic mood and somebody presses, I don't know, a heavy metal piece, maybe this destroys my evening, but I have to accept this because I'm there. This atmosphere that might be right for you and your own feelings it's different to other people.

KK: Yes.

AP: Talk with the neighbors after the show.

JS: I'm afraid the neighbors will talk to you during the show.

AP: Maybe they talk to the police. As we'll see, of course, that's part of business, part of the game, obviously.

KK: It's true.

AP: There are such a lot of works like „The Jukebox“, like „The Raven“, that have quite a concrete social impact; it astonishes me how close you are to everyday life in your work. I think it is unusual to have art being—not a comment on politics, but it is political.

KK: Well what is public is very easily political, but not in a concrete, too concrete a level.

JS: Political in the Greek sense.

KK: Yeah. That's true. 'Cause everything that is concretely linked to politics smells of course. It's more about criticizing or overcoming some pariahs but to be directly political, that's not my interest at all in art.

RW: But it can have a direct impact on politics.

KK: Yes. Maybe opening up new lines of thinking. But it's up to them, you know, you can't change the viewer.

RW: You can cause a revolution.

KK: [laughs] Yes. You can't, but you can try. We will try here from the basement.

RW: That's another important work, I think, which I like very much. That struck me. It's extremely extroverted, „Revolution“. How did you get there, to do this?

KK: Well, there is an almost family story: our daughter Emma, when she was one year old she would from time to time bang her head to the floor. And that was proof for me that we are born already with this stress, and self-destructing energy, but also a lot of aggression and power to fight and change things, maybe. I just slightly turned this moment into this small man who is banging his head on the wall in order to change something but he will never succeed but he will just make a lot of noise. There is something aggressive in the piece, but that's how nature behaves. You cannot make nature much different. You can't change the wind. That's why I called it „Revolution“. It's got an almost profane expression, a kind of slogan. Everybody's talking about revolution, but what is it? If some revolution can be successful, then only a personal one. Not a big one.

AP: The strange thing about this work is that this revolution is our aggression directed at the person itself. It kind of reminds me of the suicide bombers, it's an aggression that is counterproductive in a certain way, but in another way it might be very long term, revolution might be successful, might destroy a building.

KK: It can be seen also as a comic, that's why the scale is shifted. Honestly I was not thinking ... Some people read it as a kid banging the head, but I was not thinking about this association at all.

RW: Just about scale. Also, it's a kind of commentary. It's not a weak person ...

KK: It's a fairytale. And that's why the scale is shifted. If you would do it with a normal size of a man, it doesn't work. It's like an image. To my surprise, and naturally, some people look at it as a kid, but it's so nice about art that the viewer has so many points of view, and that's also the adventure

of all the things that make it so interesting. I so often hear interpretations that I myself would never think of, and that's beautiful.

RW: That's this openness that a simple gesture can have, and when you come across it, there's something. You cannot just go away.

KK: Yes, even too much. And that's his problem. He's very hard to install in a group show. He immediately becomes a persona non grata, because people and other artists as well just hate it.

RW: Especially people who are there for a long time.

KK: Of course, like guards, but also curators.

JS: Do you remember the crying artist neighbor in New York? She was so sweet.

KK: There are a lot of stories, he made a lot of trouble, all over, everywhere he was basically—so let's see what is gonna happen here...

AP: The trouble starts with finding a place for it. Actually, it's not easy now in the museum. You told us a story of New York, where they built a special house for it?

RW: In Prague, you had to change the place several times.

JS: At Harvard, the Fogg Art Museum, the curators went on strike. Their offices were located above the installation. So they stopped working! Perfect.

RW: On the one hand, it's nonsense, because you see him banging a wall and it's just stupid, on the other hand it has a lot of impact on people and institutions. It's not nothing.

KK: I was asked many times to reduce him. Also from Boston, they wrote me to ask if it's possible to to soften the bangs somehow ... I can't!

AP: Do it with a soft head.

KK: With a pillow. Of course it's pointless, it's nonsense, it's part of this. This is the sculpture.

RW: There is a kind of radicalness, which is in a lot of your works. No compromises.

KK: Maybe, but it is not my very first aim to shock or to provoke, I think. That would be too easy, just to provoke.

AP: How is it for you if a sculpture like „Revolution“, which is, quite strongly, meant to be in a public space, or just to get into contact with a lot of people, when such a sculpture goes into a private collection? Is this a break?

KK: Nice question. I have one piece, it's called „IT“, which is very personal to me. I will never sell it to anyone. I'm not that sensitive anymore where they end up. Because they did their radiation in museums or shows, and afterwards, if it ends up in a collector's house, that's its destiny, in a way. But you are right, that it means that he's losing a bit of his possibility to radiate. But on the other hand it can be exhibited in shows later, it's not the end of his days, I hope.

JS: There's the question of what is a private collection today. Because people who buy, especially this piece, they would also like to show it. Maybe they show this to the general audience, or just friends from the boards of other companies. It doesn't matter, this is probably a more efficient message, if it's another audience. Do you agree, nor not? I don't know, but this is my feeling. It does not lose, you cannot privatize this. This is art. The public influence. You cannot privatize this or hide this through buying it.

KK: It's good when the piece is exhibited from time to time, and that's it. But it's of course interesting to pick your nose. I've been to collectors' houses several times, and it's bizarre, when the pieces finally can end up in what kind of consequences.

RW: Some kind of trophy ...

KK: Yes. But this is how it goes!

RW: What about chance in your work?

KK: Chance? Oh, yeah! This is one of my favorites. You know what it is? There's a paper I started to write once—„Why“—I really started to write „Why“, and during it, I had in my mind some question, a longer sentence, and during writing the „Why“, the pen stopped working! So wonderful!

JS: Perfect.

AP: So the „Why“ just ...

JS: ... disappeared.

RW: I see this quite often. You have a collaborator called chance who is very often part of your work, or of a process.

KK: Yes, but you have to give chance a chance.

JS: That's right.

KK: And know how to do it. That's all I can say.

AP: Yeah, you have to accept it.

JS: You have to accept it and you have to recognize in the right moment, that's it! Like here.

KK: Not to continue ...

JS: Not to continue or change, just to be sensitive with that.

AP: It's not a problem for you, to speak about your work?

KK: It is. But you can survive that, it's like going to the dentist, you have to do it from time to time. Denisa told me that I should clean my teeth before going to Basel. I did. Sometimes I like it, because we are people using language, and just saying „I don't want to make any comments, I don't feel like it“—that's also not enough. I like to get questions. Sometimes I don't know what to answer. Last time when I was doing a show, I had many, these publicly commented works around the exhibition, and it was too much. It was good, I felt that people wanted it, because this is our culture, we want to hear these stories and consequences, and that's normal. I realized people want to get behind the curtain, behind the scenes and then of course have a broader perspective about the work. But when you do it 20 times, you get into a kind of routine, but I did it 20 times. Of course, you are not enjoying it that often, because it's hard to find a different way of explaining the same things and you can easily get overeaten by yourself, which I sometimes feel like ... and then I am not interested in me, I am rather interested in you, I would say.

JS: Do you remember this TV show, we were together, on a live broadcast on Czech television for 1.5 hours, a live show at night. We arrived as guests, and the moderator was ill. They told us 20 minutes in advance as we arrived in the studio, the moderator is ill, so we should go home. We said why, we shouldn't go home. We made this ourselves, we were the moderators! And this was really good!

KK: You're right!

JS: I recognized that my artist is also intelligent in this show. It's a long time ago.

KK: But it's only my mask, I try to look stupid.

JS: Better to survive.

AP: It's good to be underestimated.

KK: Yes. And it's better than trying to look smart.

RW: This could be a good title; Give chance a chance. For the interview.

KK: Yes. Why not?

JS: It's perfect that you talked about local roots. This is I think very good, should be probably in the written form, a little bit more specified.

AP: When you said that you are kind of working locally, I thought then, for sure this is correct, that your work comes out of a local, or regional or whatever context, but it doesn't stop there. It gets into a local meaning or a local sphere by doing, by having its roots in your local, private story.

KK: Of course I'm glad that I'm not just being understood where I come from but also from other places, that really makes me happy. And it also

makes me happy to do stuff that people understand. And that's why I'm also criticized by some artists or people, they sometimes take me as being too populist. Which I find funny, because I don't try to do so. Nowadays there is quite a strong conceptual scene in Prague, and all over—I have nothing against it, I like it because I'm an art lover and I think art doesn't have to be that obvious, but sometimes I feel frustrated when you really don't know how to read it. So that's why I do art that is readable in many languages or cultures.

JS: It's difficult to say. You are the number one accepted, local artist there, and when you say local, you don't mean local Czech, you don't mean local Prague, you mean local as a part of everywhere. This is what you mean.

RW: Your work is international or universalist because in the context you're engaged, involved, you have a sounding feedback from people around you and this a quality that makes it readable everywhere. Because it's not just in the empty space, doesn't happen in empty space. It's not intended for the art market, or something like that.

KK: That's true. And it's also quite different because there was nearly no art market. Jiří knows a lot about this. So what's nice about this Czech situation, is that all these artists I know, they really aren't speculative from the beginning. They just do it by passion, because there is—I mean, it's slowly changing now—there wasn't ANY market, so if you did art you just did it by the need of doing it, never by motivation of being bought. And that's quite nice about Prague. It's not like this in Paris, or in London, that's why I also like the Prague scene, which is off-wind and very natural. So it has advantages but also disadvantages of course.

RW: What about your gallery?

JS: I will also record this. [laughter]

RW: It's interesting, you're not the usual gallerist or art seller. There is a real involvement with the arts. How does Jiří support you, what do you get from him?

KK: It is very easy. Because he was basically the only one in Prague from the very beginning and for a long time. I was surprised that he approached me. It was not me knocking on his door. The truth is that he came with some foreign experience, and he approached a few same-aged, let's say young artists, and he started to work with us. There was NO other gallery doing it, the only one in the Czech Republic, so he started, not just with me, but also other artists, to promote and to take them into the Western world, basically. That meant for us a chance to survive and even though in those days I was not living from my art, it was just if something was sold I was happy, but I was doing jobs to pay my bills. We were slowly becoming a part of something not local, but a part of this, let's say, international context. Now it's a little bit different, because there are more, fortunately more, of these galleries in Prague. You can still count them on one hand, but it's different and he's still there, working in Berlin as well. I hope he can keep going. That's why I like him.

RW: But it's also kind of unusual that a gallery owner knows your work that well and is also kind of a sparring partner for asking questions and for thinking about a concept for an exhibition ...

KK: He is not stupid, and that's what makes him different from many other gallerists and that's why we are still in some relation. I have respect for his intellect. There are many galleries I wouldn't like to work with. It's especially his point of view, that he is complicatedly all-knowing ...

JS: We do speak a lot ... we have here this work. He showed me the sketch; I would like to show this with you. I said Krištof, no, this is completely nonsense. And he exhibited this. I meant this really, no, that's not good. And now I like this all the more. The best! This took me a while to recognize this. People don't have to have a feeling that I'm some kind of censor of your ideas or

that I'm a collaborator or whatever, or that the best ideas are from me. No, it's not true.

AP: If you're talking about „Do it yourself after Brancusi“, that's also something I find very interesting in your work. There are these works that have a clearly social meaning, and then you have a work like this, which is a reference to the history of art. With something like this you open up a completely different story of what you are doing. But in the same moment you are on the same track by using these cement sacks, by doing this reference, this homage to Brancusi, through the back door, you are again, in your own story. I thought that's very interesting, and it shows a kind of strategy.

KK: That's not the only piece where I refer to the history of art, and it's just important that I wanted to point out, that there is a hidden importance in this vertical, which refers not just to Brancusi but to all totems, to all verticals, and to show people, it's just a cement sack, but there is this hidden power of these verticals. What I added to this is that moment of collapsing. You really feel it just starts to fall down in a second, because it's not totally vertical but it's leaning to one side. It's kind of in imbalance. It's again very simple to create some kind of reaction or nervousness because people are walking around with a lot of respect.

RW: Maybe one thing that we could talk about with you is on how you came to the museum and what your thoughts are about the exhibition. The liftable walls, for instance.

KK: Yeah I'm really excited of course because it's a kind of challenge to do something extraordinary. I again have some plan, even though I'm reducing the methods a little bit now. There was for example this idea to bring the apparatus of the museum, that means, offices with people working, directly into the show. Which would be a very interesting social test—I would call it pure: „social plastique“. Also other methods of making kind of a new atmosphere, a new context, a kind of chaos, like using these „office houses“ as a gallery too ... People working inside the exhibition. Audience visiting show in offices ... you know that would be a lot of fun ... I must say the Tinguely team was realistically thinking about it which I find very open minded and it is more me now who is reducing this sort of radical changes ... But still the aim is to bring a kind of new understanding to the obligatory visitor experience of the Museum. For example, the main door will be closed, in order to make it a bit uncomfortable, and all that means is that you have to experience the building differently. You have to find your own way to the museum, you have a different look at the architecture. You get a little bit nervous, a little bit pissed. You don't know whether it's Monday—Are they closed? No, it's Saturday; it should be open. Then again there will be another compression zone where we're going to install a very profane shop, which is also unexpected in the museum. So being already in the building, still you are not in the show, and before you are entering the show itself, which is of course the most important, you will experience something unusual, which makes you think: Why is there a shop in the museum? What does it mean to have a shop in the museum? And all of a sudden, you look at the reality as being part of this context of art, and you can also look at it of course in a real shop, later on, as a very absolute installation as we experienced every day. There are quite a lot of interesting installations already in reality, so I like to play with this, to mix it. And, what I want to bring is that we experience the building, and the visit of the museum—not just showing the sculptures. There are also moving walls, not to forget this, they are also something I am really looking forward to, and because of course this opportunity is not everywhere, to have 18 meter long and 5 meter high giants cutting the main space into different units. I think this will be quite extraordinary, to experience the place in a completely different situation. And I hope all of this will make some kind of experience. Not just the sculptures. Of course I take care what kind of sculptures I'm bringing and what kind of radiation they have,

but I'm really looking forward to this allover experience, all landscape, also outside the museum. So let's see what will happen.

AP: Yeah, by playing or by changing the architecture, of course you are also going into a dialogue with the institution. I don't know, maybe it's a drag to talk about institutional critique. Anyway, it might be an interesting question: What is a museum for you?

KK: It's a good place. It should be a good place. As I said, I'm an art lover. When I'm in a different city, I go to museums. It interests me. So museums should be a place where you feel good, and where you get something. But mostly a place where you don't have to be worried about speaking loudly or behaving in a certain manner. It should be a lively place, and many institutions have a problem with it.

JS: I'm thinking about the show now in the context of contemporary art, in the context of other exhibitions. I could imagine that to many contemporary artists, and the viewers are used to seeing it that way, for a good show one gesture would be enough, one gesture that says everything. Just to make a shop there, a cheap clothes shop, at the entrance this is the art piece, this is the gesture, and that's it. And you are combining this with some kind of public part, jukebox, lamps, whatever, as well as, let's say, a traditional sculpture exhibition. You are aware of this?

KK: I am. Of course. It does not sound, let's say, it's a clean manner, clean way of doing concepts. But this is exactly how I am. I like this chaos. Things don't have to be that pure and clean. I think this combination of elements can also in the end come out with some feeling.

JS: This is more democratic thinking, rather than chaotic, I would say.

KK: But on the other hand I was also reducing for example this idea of having offices in the exhibition, it was too much.

RW: Yes, I like the idea of having this shop as an opening to the exhibition. Your works often are stories in themselves, and that's the way how it all comes together somehow.

JS: This is important, this is one story. The shop as a decompression chamber. That's it. In Prague we got this effect. People went into the Vietnamese shop, and this changed their perception of the show.

RW: Usually, when you go into the museum, it's this pathway, along the river Rhine for the decompression. Here we have another approach.

KK: But in that sense, it's very special here. Usually, we have to face these institutional rituals, like tickets, discounts, you know ... In 99% of all museums, you go through these. Cloak room, and all these rituals you have to do, guards. We want to somehow make it different.

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Director, Co-Curator: Roland Wetzel

Vice-Director, Co-Curator: Andres Pardey

Research Associate: Annja Müller-Alsbach

Curatorial Assistant: Miranda Fuchs

Archives and library: Claire Beltz-Wüest

Registrar: Daniel Boos

Restoration and conservation: Jean-Marc Gaillard, Albrecht Gumlich

Art Handling: Niku Muçaj, Daniel Reichmuth, Thomas Ruch

Assistants of the artist: Richard Wiesner, Rastislav Juhás

Technical services: Urs Biedert

Public relations: Isabelle Beilfuss

Educational Services: Beat Klein, Lilian Steinle-Schmidt

Office Management: Céline Strässle, Heidi Juen

Museum Tinguely

Paul Sacher-Anlage 2

Postfach 3255

CH-4002 Basel

Tel.: +41 61 681 93 20

Fax: +41 61 681 93 21

infos@tinguely.ch

www.tinguely.ch

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