

*Yves Klein / John Cage*  
*PLAYING WITH FIRE*

Yves Klein and John Cage are two of the most influential artists of their generation. And while each is widely recognized for his innovative experimental artistic principles and practices—especially in his own respective native country—rarely have they been seriously discussed together. The exhibition *Yves Klein / John Cage: PLAYING WITH FIRE* will mine and explore one particular affinity between these two formative artists: their attraction to and manipulation of fire as an art-making tool.

Throughout their careers, both Klein and Cage sought out purposefully unpredictable techniques and (anti)materials by which to create art. One particularly striking visual and conceptual parallel is their use of smoke and fire. Both artists were drawn to and inspired by the volatile—potentially destructive, unquestionably magnetic and awesome—power of flames. In 1961 Klein made a series of “Fire Paintings” by launching an open flame at chemically modified paper. Similar to the technique he used to create his famous “Anthropometries” series (wherein nude models covered themselves in paint and then rolled directly on the canvas), to create the “Fire Paintings” Klein used models who were coated in flame retardant. Wherever the models’ bodies touched the surface of the paper the action of the flames was, to a certain extent, blocked. The “Fire Paintings” were made with the assistance of the Centre d'Essais du Gaz de France, the central research laboratory of the National Gasworks of France and are a breathtakingly beautiful component of Klein’s oeuvre.

Decades later, in a much less dangerous working environment, Cage also turned to fire as a way to induce unsystematic imagery on paper. While working at the Crown Point Press in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Cage created numerous monoprints on smoked paper. The crispy burn holes and organic shapes left by the smoke and fire are aesthetically in tune with Klein's fire paintings. Furthermore, both artists shared in common a certain satisfaction in letting the flame and smoke themselves be responsible for the colors and shapes left on the paper. These two bodies of work capture the wildness and hypnotic allure of fire in two unique and innovative styles. Bringing together Klein's "Fire Paintings" and Cage's smoke prints work will reveal a rich and heretofore unexplored parallel between these two seminal artists.

Joachim Pissarro  
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