

Trisha Donnelly is the artworld's best-kept secret. Working on a strictly need-to-know basis, the 32 year old San Franciscan creates photography and performance pieces that defy categorisation. Notoriously arriving at her NY gallery debut on a white stallion and in full Napoleonic regalia, the myth is as important as the method to this artist's artist. Here Donnelly and renowned international curator Hans Ulrich Obrist move through her cryptic worlds

# THE CRANK CALL

INTERVIEW  
BY  
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HANS ULRICH OBRIST: A sense of time and time codes seems to be a thread that runs through many of your works. I just saw your new piece at Casey Kaplan gallery which is a very sporadic sound piece. Can you tell me about it?

TRISHA DONNELLY: It's the sound of a cannon from the turn of the century and it goes off randomly, so that when you're looking at somebody else's work a cannon goes off in your mind. It's not that loud but it's frightening maybe.

How is it triggered?

It's just randomly set up. It's not triggered by anything. It goes all day long and all night long...

Is it different sometimes? Is it always the same sound?

It's slightly different. It has slight different reverberations but pretty much the same sound.

So much of your work is to do with time codes. I was wondering if you think there is any link

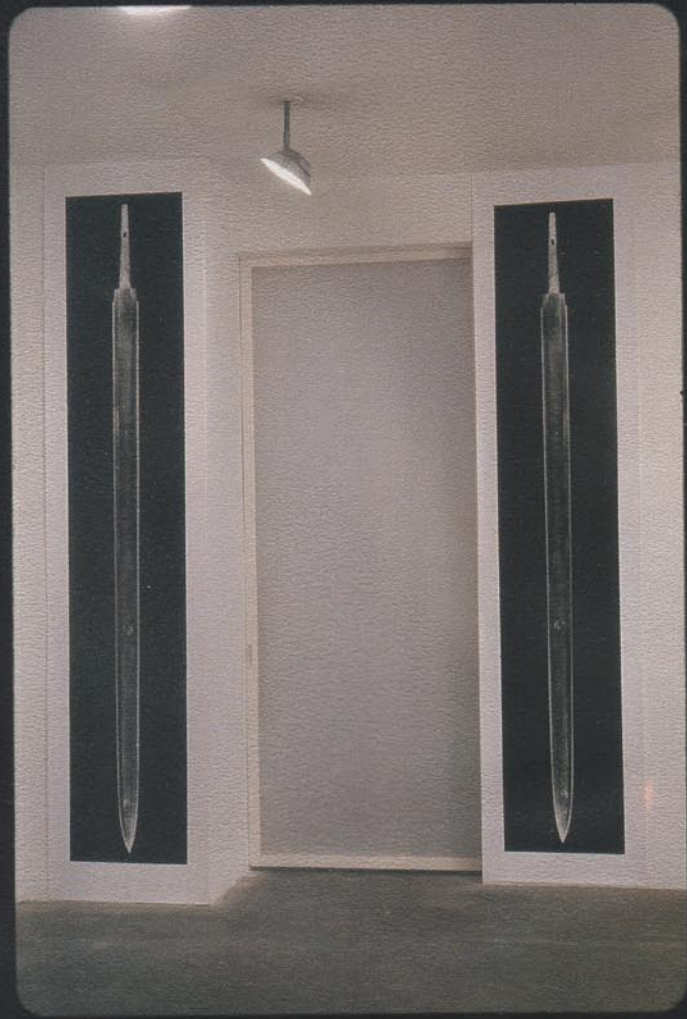
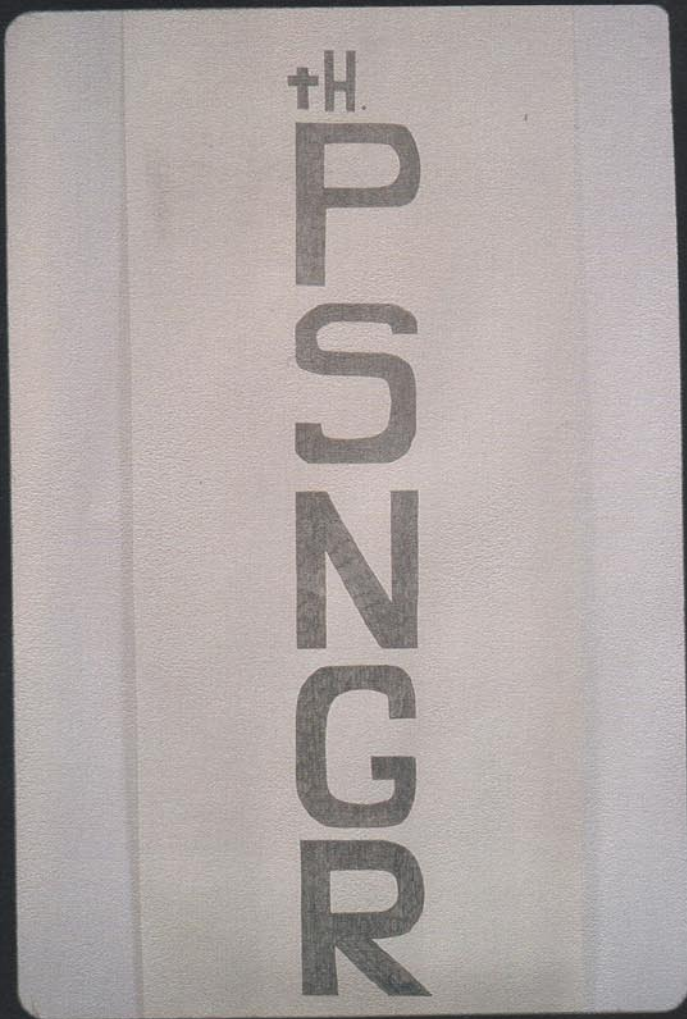
to the work of John Cage?

I think automatically there is a link to Cage whenever there is something that is running all the time and people are talking over it. I think that it's a natural understanding of mine that when you have something like an artwork, you experience it then it's over.

It happens, you experience it, most of the time you forget it, then you remember it later. The sound just ends up being memory of another sound, because it doesn't stay around long enough to figure it, you know?

Besides Cage I was wondering who are your other heroes?

Maybe it started with more musicians. I really like Johnny Mathis. It was in sounds and voices like that that I kind of understood certain things. As for artists, I change my mind so often, but recently I really like that Steven Braun. Steven Braun who has declared all shoe stores in Amsterdam to be an artwork. Secrets. I'm very interested in the concept of secrets in your work. The first time I got



Above, left: 'The passenger', 2004 pencil on paper 269 x 105,5 cm. Above, right: 'Untitled', 2004, RC prints diptych, 340 x 76 cm each. Opposite page: 'Untitled', 2004, pencil and ink on paper, 47 x 33 cm. Courtesy Casey Kaplan, New York and Air de Paris, Paris.

to know your work it was all to do with events which are somehow performances but are actually secrets. So I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit about your own notion of the secret, this aspect of you not wanting things to be announced?

I think it's more than that. It began as terror like fear, because if you tell somebody everything, then they can know exactly when and how you're going to do something wrong. So if you replace that kind of knowledge with waiting, sometimes people are happy that something actually happened at all! I think that was my first inclination, so it wasn't begun as a secret but it's much more natural for me now to work without telling people when things are going to happen. I do like that if you're in the wrong place at the wrong time at some party, then you miss something really good. Like when somebody goes through a glass window or something.

What were the beginnings of such secrets? There is obviously a very famous event from your first show in New York, but I was wondering if there was a chronology – what was the beginning?

Well I think that when I was in college, I did what I thought was a form of mental

arts. This was: spatially you could build a house with different gestures and nobody would see it. What I realised was that certain actions and certain things you say can become evasive and invasive. It's like a crank call.

What?

Crank call. You know, somebody says 'Hello, is your refrigerator running?' They say 'Yes'. And you say: 'Oh you better run and catch it!' [Laughs]. Or something like that.

I was also interested to know if you had any projects that had been too big to be realised or even too small.

I still wish I could make the Vibration Station, the organ that goes into the ground. But it's much better if it's never made.

How would this work?

You would walk through the vibrations of a box organ concerto. It'd be really great, because instead of the organ pushing air up to the ceiling, it would push air up through the floor. You know you could walk through the vibrations rising in the room. But it would never happen because it would cost millions and millions. But you know that's probably my most unrealised dream. But I don't think I make my work anyway – if happens inside

MATTHEW

