

YVES KLEIN

Yves Klein
1928-1962
Selected Writings

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Contents

Preface 5

Introduction 8

Selected Writings 10

Preface

In England the work of Klein is better known by report than by direct experience. Like a number of other artists, therefore, his influence has been exerted not so much through his paintings as through the character of his activities generally. However, at all times he continued to paint and make splendid art works in other materials as well as to carry out, document and publicise his activities. These two sides cannot be separated; both emanate from and objectify the same sensibility. The present exhibition, including this catalogue, aims to present the whole range of his activities, as far as possible, in a concise form.

Klein's work lends itself very well to this mode of presentation. Although immensely varied in its means it seems to divide into sections naturally and with unusual clarity as if it were the chapters of a book, each chapter pressing home one particular point. This characteristic does not, of course, rob Klein's art of subtlety, mystery or ambiguity-quite the reverse; it is perhaps the result of his trenchant, often theatrical or ritualistic modes of expression. Certain of his activities have, therefore, a quality which makes them at once memorable, mythical and self-defining. At the same time they are all concerned with a single constellation of ideas.

I shall not attempt to describe what this is since it is expressed in Klein's own words (in translation) by means of the quotations scattered throughout this book and can easily be discerned as the thread which connects the events in the chronology of his doings and writings. Klein turned his attention to aspects of the art process or system that have been among the dominant concerns of artists in all countries since his death. He did this, of course, in his own way and with intentions that may have been very different from those of his successors.

However it seems right to try to point out here, without arguing precedents, those aspects of his work which have been prophetic or influential even at the risk of over-interpreting or putting anachronistic ideas into his head.

Comparing him with the artists who dominated the art world in the 1950s; the Abstract Expressionists, Tachists and survivors of the School of Paris, the most obvious thing is that while all of them produced a series of complete paintings or sculpture which varied from one to another and evolved more or less rapidly in style in the attempt to express new thoughts or feelings, Klein produced a whole sequence of

paintings which were without any internal relationships to be varied and were identical except in size and hue.

Sometimes altogether identical in appearance, they were distinguished only by the fact that they were materially separate. His own account of this is given on pp. 27 and 28 and, more obliquely, in his Malevitch cartoon on p. 31. At the same time he may be said to have finally eliminated representation from painting by eschewing even the abstract painting of mental objects and to have launched an attack on the notion of the unique art work as a medium of expression.

After this he applied the same, usually blue, paint to various objects, often sponges, attached to rods and panels. This may be seen as a way of fusing the two senses of painting: A paints (a picture of) B; A paints (puts paint on) B. In this way he raises the object to that special level of aesthetic attention, sensibility, and universality that he desired but at the same time it remained a real object, a metaphor but not an illusion.

The 'Anthropometries', 'Fire Paintings' and 'Cosmogonies', although they have more of the air of traditional paintings, develop a similar theme. They represent the physical result of the collaboration of the artist with natural or human participants. Klein did not unilaterally determine the outcome; he produced the situation and even directed it and revelled in its theatrical possibilities but the work carried the direct imprint of the physical body of his collaborator. Three other works appear even more prophetic. In 1958 he exhibited the Iris Clert Gallery, painted white and empty to be guarded by men in the uniform of the Garde Republicaine. In 1960 he exchanged certificates of 'Zones of Immaterial Pictorial Sensibility' for gold, the certification only being complete when it and half the gold had been destroyed or lost.

In the same year he leaped from the first floor of a building in order to create the photograph of 'A Man in Space' injuring himself as he fell to the ground.

All three works exemplify his astonishing fantasy and his will to go beyond the conventional limits of art. At the same time, even more decisively than in his 'Monochromes', they contest the notion of a work of art as a human manifestation that becomes at once an object of commercial speculation. In the last mentioned he confined the work to a single dangerous moment in the existence of his own person. A photograph and photomontages were all that was left. In the case of the 'Zones of

Immaterial Pictorial Sensibility', photographs, counterfoils and samples of gold leaf remained as evidence of the art work but there was no clear distinction of art work and document on record. This combination, with many variations and additions, has become a frequent one in the art of the late 60s and 70s.

Although it is now nearly twelve years since Yves Klein died, he would have been only 46 this year and his work seems as relevant to the concerns of artists today as if he had still been living. It has never stood in higher esteem.

Michael Comptou
Keeper of Exhibitions

Introduction

Who better to write about Yves Klein than Klein himself?

We have selected short extracts from Klein's own notebooks, documents and talks, describing the more important events and stages of his development.

These texts are arranged chronologically by the date of the event described, not by the date of the text itself.

The photographs accompanying these writings are illustrations of the events or copies of documents; we have chosen not to reproduce any paintings or sculpture.

—J&J



Yves Klein, 1929

1928

I arrived on earth in 1928. Born into a milieu of painters, I acquired my taste for painting with my mother's milk.

1946

In 1946, when I was still an adolescent, I went and signed my name on the other side of the sky during a fantastic 'realistico-imaginary' voyage.

1947

It was in 1947 that the idea of a conscious monochrome vision came to me. I ought to say that at that time it was rather through my intellect that it came; it was the result of all the passionate researches I was then engaged in. Pure, existential space was regularly winking at me, each time in a more impressive manner, and this sensation of total freedom attracted me so powerfully that I painted some monochrome surfaces just to 'see', to 'see' with my own eyes what existential sensibility granted me: absolute freedom! But each time I could neither imagine nor think of the possibility of considering this as a painting, a picture, until the day when I said: Why not?

von Klein
Symphonie - Monoton. Silvan
 1947 - 1961

*Dauer: 5 bis 7 Minuten
 1st 49 Punkte der
 Silvan erhalten.*

*Für Orchester
 mit 2 Choristen
 und 100 Instrumenten*

*Choristen 6 (Chor für alle Stimmen)
 für die ersten 6 Choristen*

<i>Compositoren der</i>	20 Chöre
<i>Orchester</i>	10 Violinen
	10 Violoncellen
	1 Flöte
	1 Horn
	3 Orgel
	3 Contrabassen

The score of the "Symphonie Monoton"

1947

Around 1947-8 I created a 'monotone' symphony whose theme is what I want my life to be. This symphony lasts for forty minutes and consists of one single, continuous, long-drawn-out 'sound'; it has neither beginning nor end, which creates a dizzy feeling, a sense of aspiration, of a sensibility outside and beyond time.



In Venice, 1948, Yves Klein still wore the shirt imprinted with marks of his own hands and feet.

1947

To project my mark outside myself—but I did it! My hands and feet impregnated with colour, I found myself confronting everything that was psychological in me. I had proof that I had five senses, that I knew how to get myself to function! And then I lost my childhood...

1952

Thursday 13 March

A day is space
and so is a year
and an hour
and a second and a life.
Should we live by the year?
or the hour? or the day?
or the second?
I love space
and I feel immense
when I dream
of the infinitely great
and the infinitely small.
Equilibrium doesn't exist in space
and yet it isn't chaos!
That's right,
I feel it,
it's right
I want space.

1952

Friday 14 March

Day is blue
silence is green
life is yellow
light traces
lines, and never ends,
and I trail behind,
transpierced by indifference!

1953



Yves Klein in Singapore, 1952



Yves Klein in Hong Kong, 1952



In Tokyo, 18 December 1953, Yves Kelin was awarded the diploma of the Kodokan Institute.

It was pure chance that led me to judo. Judo has helped me to understand that pictorial space is above all the product of spiritual exercises. Judo is in fact the discovery by the human body of a spiritual space.

1956



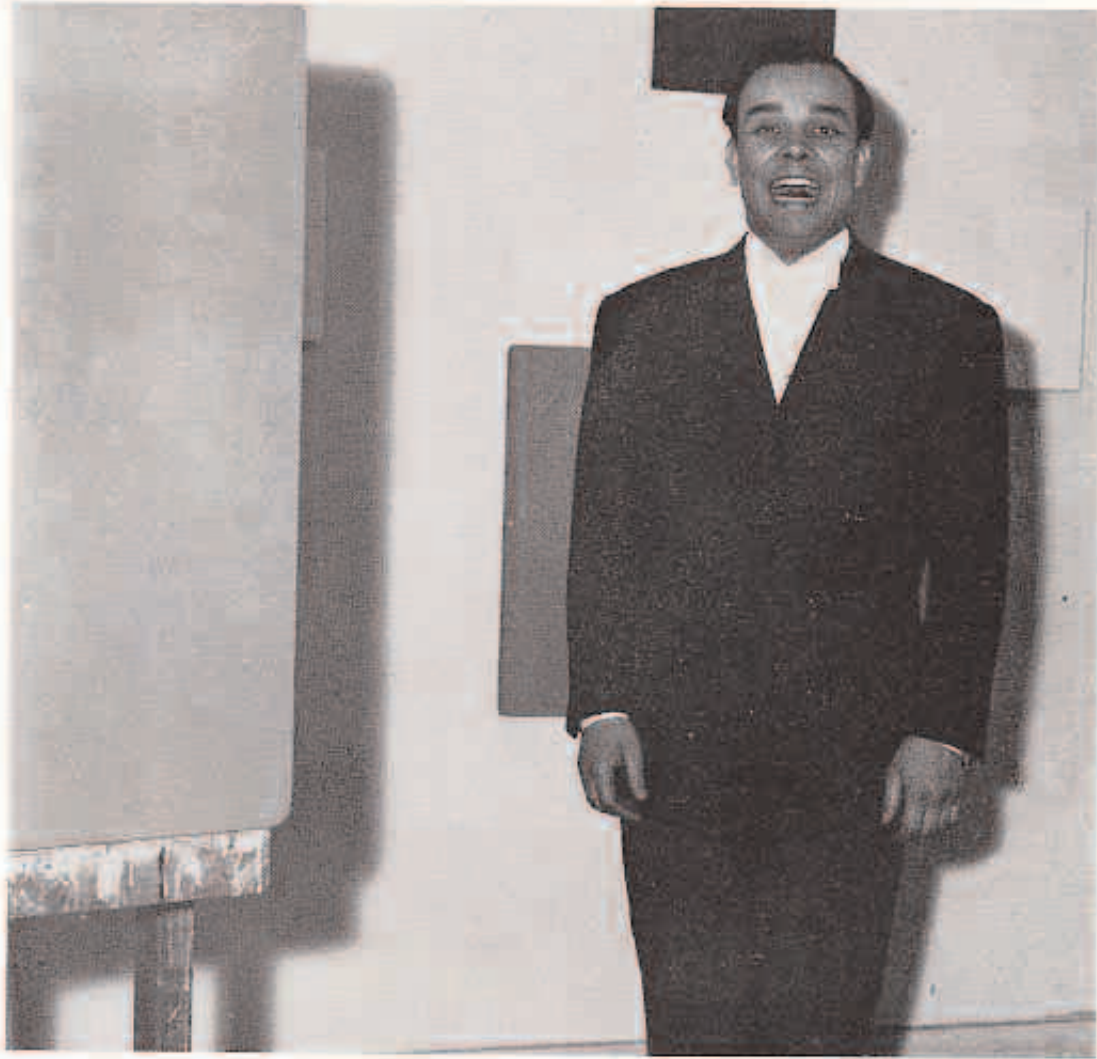
Yves Klein wearing the grand uniform of Knight of the Order of St. Sebastian

Dubbed a Knight of the Order of Saint Sebastian, I espoused the cause of pure colour, which had been invaded by guile, occupied and oppressed in cowardly fashion by line and its manifestation: drawing in Art. I aimed to defend and deliver it, and lead it to triumph and final glory.

1956



In 1956, Yves Klein was not yet using the word 'Monochrome'...



... he talked about his 'Unicolor' paintings.

At the Galerie Colette Allendy I exhibited some twenty monochrome surfaces, all in different colours: greens, reds, yellows, purples, blues, oranges and so found myself at the start of my career in this style. I was trying to show colour, but I realised at the private view that the public were prisoners of a preconceived point of view and that, confronted with all these surfaces of different colours, they responded far more to the inter-relationship of the different propositions, they reconstituted the elements of a decorative polychromy.

1957

It was then that I remembered the colour blue, the blue of the sky in Nice that was at the origin of my career as a monochromist. I started work towards the end of 1956 and in 1957 I had an exhibition in Milan which consisted entirely of what I dared to call my 'Epoque bleue'.

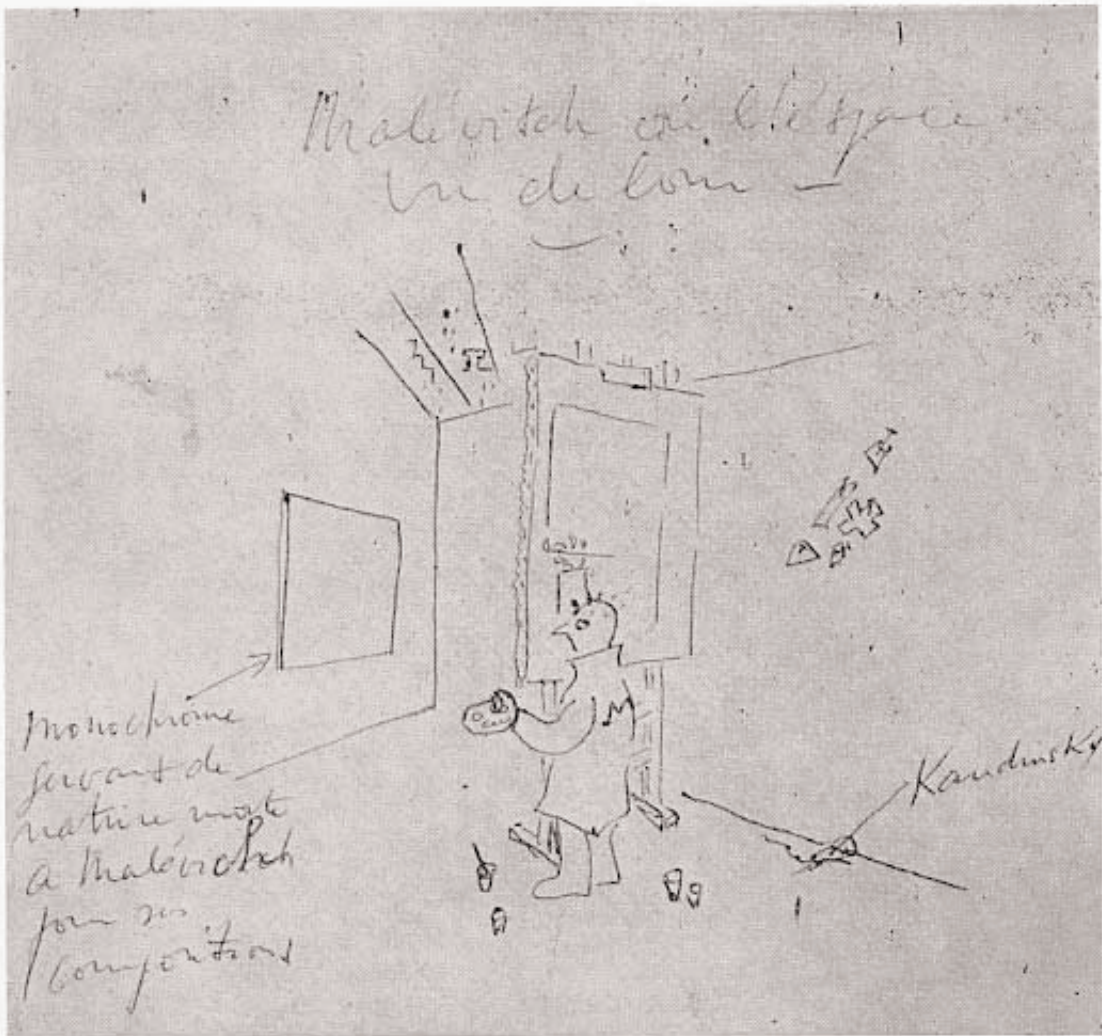
1957

This period of blue monochromes was the product of my pursuit of the undefinable in painting which that master, Delacroix, was able to indicate even in his day.

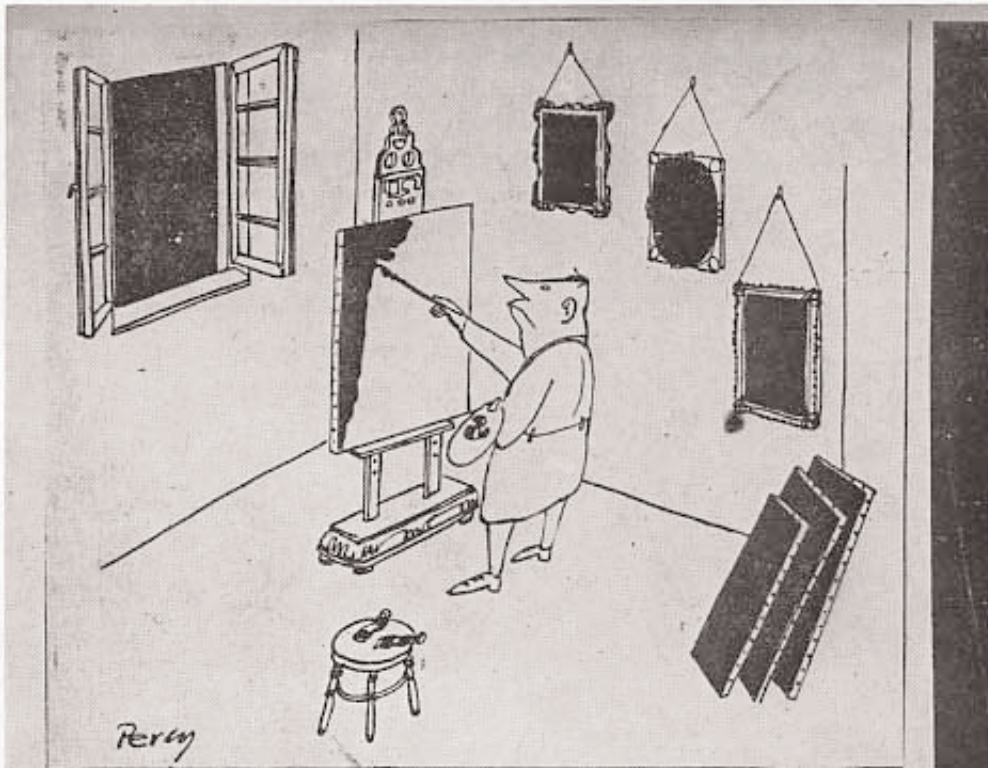
1957

My monochrome pictures are not my definite works, but the preparation for my works. They are the leftovers from the creative processes, the ashes. My pictures, after all, are only the title-deeds to my property which I have to produce when I am asked to prove that I am a proprietor.

1958



With this drawing, Yves Klein wanted to explain "The true position of Malevitch in relation to him, Yves Klein."



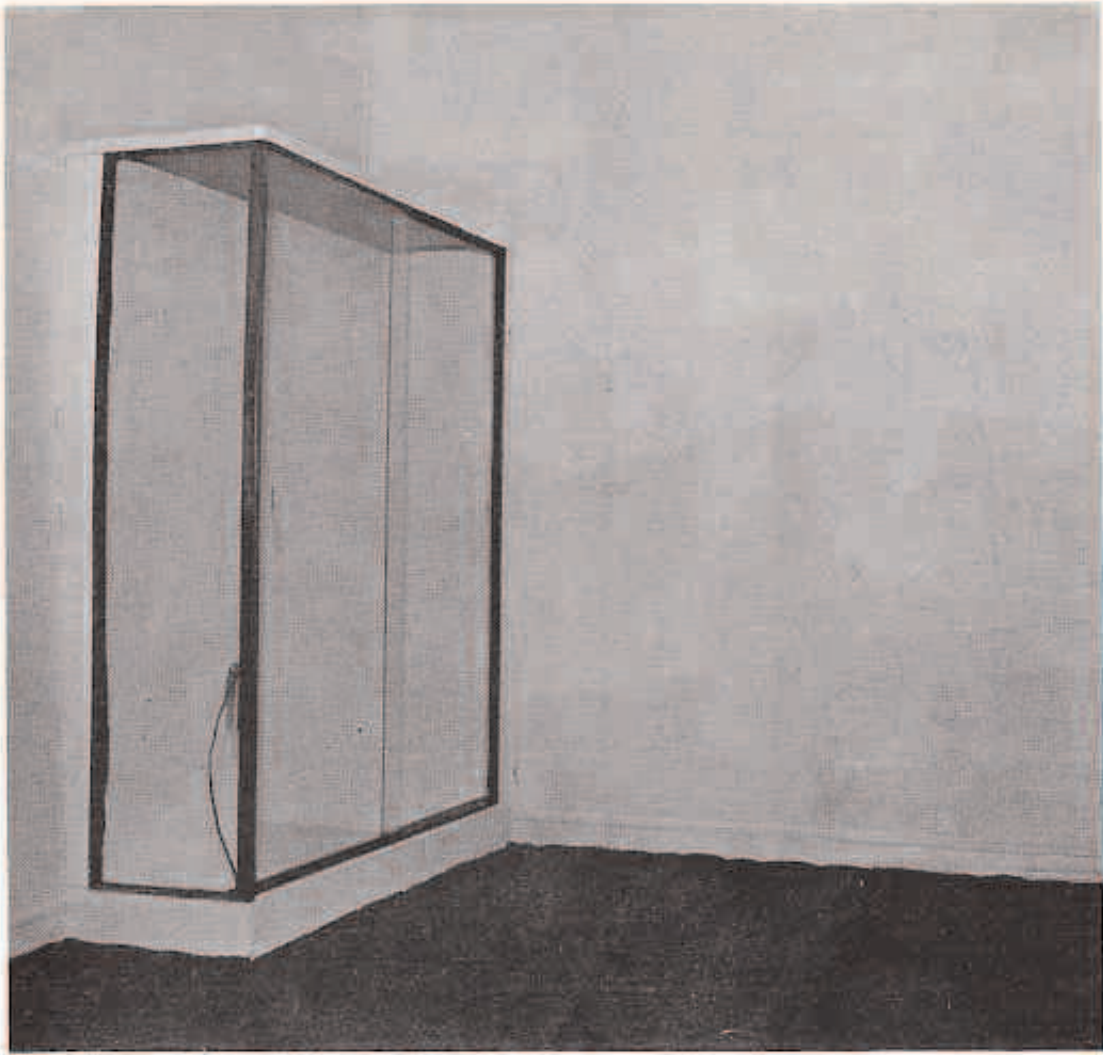
Zeichnung: Wilfried Gründler

Yes Klein painting the
 black night sky! hardly peaking
 time Uelz + Schmelz
 Bie / autou

Yes Klein painting the blue night sky!

God the father almighty, it is with faith that I ask you, in the name of Christ your son, Jesus of Nazareth, to grant me the presence of the Holy Ghost in the gallery during my exhibition. Create for me an exceptional atmosphere, let an inexpressible sound fill both the spiritual and existential ears of all the visitors, let an invisible yet real and powerfully and terribly beautiful light raise this event to the highest spiritual and existential level of vision. Let everyone without exception see the supernatural that is in Art so that faith, the new faith of Art, may enter into them all, and all men may enter into a great new worldwide civilisation of the beautiful. So be it.

1958



April 1958, the exhibition *Le Vide*, which Yves Klein called his Pneumatic Period.

I had left the visible, physical blue at the door, outside, in the street. The real blue was inside, the blue of the profundity of space, the blue of my kingdom, of our kingdom! ... the immaterialisation of blue, the coloured space that cannot be seen but which we impregnate ourselves with ... A space of blue sensibility within the frame of the white walls of the gallery.

1958

I want to take as the canvas for my next picture the entire surface of France. This picture will be called 'The Blue Revolution'. It isn't the fact of my taking power in France that interests me, but rather the possibility of creating a monochrome picture in my new manner: 'The Refinement of Sensibility'.

1958



1958. Koppersbusch Factory in Germany, Yves Klein carried out experiments for his Air-roof Patent

Through all these researches into an Art that would lead to immaterialisation, Werner Ruhnau and I came together in the architecture of the air. He was hindered by the last obstacle that even a Mies van der Rohe hadn't been able to overcome: the roof, the screen that separates us from the sky, from the blue sky. And I was hindered by the screen that the tangible blue on the canvas constitutes, which deprives man of a constant vision of the horizon.

1958



Working with Jean Tinguely for their exhibiton in 1958, Yves Klein demonstrates that he could immaterilse very easily.

The immaterial blue colour shown at Iris Clert's in April had in short made me inhuman, had excluded me from the world of tangible reality; I was an extreme element of society who lived in space and who had no means of coming back to earth. Jean Tinguely saw me in space and signalled to me in speed to show me the last machine to take to return to the ephemerality of material life.

1960



1959 was for Yves Klein the year of official success of 'La Monochromie', on 3 June he gave a lecture at the Sorbonne in Paris...

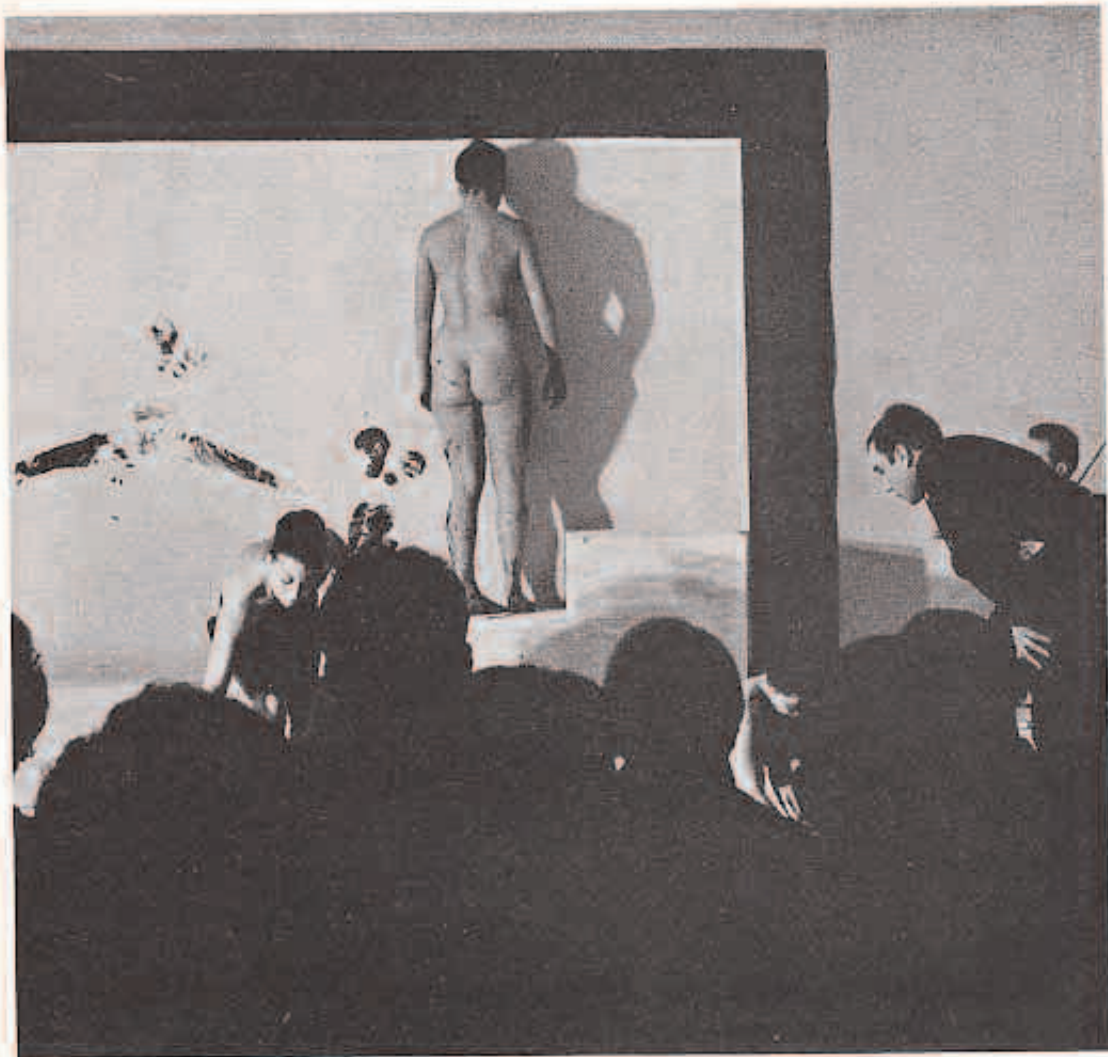


... and in December the opera house in Gelenkirchen was opened; he had decorated the foyer with huge reliefs which 'move, arouse, excite the colour'

The immaterial told me that I was indeed an occidental, a right-thinking Christian who correctly believes in the 'resurrection of the flesh'.

A whole phenomenology then appeared, but a phenomenology without ideas, or rather without any of the systems of official conventions. What appeared was distinct from form and became Immediacy. 'The mark of the immediate'—that was what I needed.

1960



9 March 1960, Paris, first public exhibition of 'Anthropometry'. Yves Klein directed three nude models, while an orchestra of twenty musicians played the 'Symphonie Monoton.'

I remain detached and distant, but it is under my eyes and my orders that the work of art must create itself. Then, when the creation starts, I stand there, present at the ceremony, immaculate, calm, relaxed, perfectly aware of what is going on and ready to welcome the work of art that is coming into existence in the tangible world.

1960



9 March 1960, the public exhibition of 'Anthropometry' has ended, the audience looks at what Yves Klein called, 'the ashes of his art'

Hours of preparation for something that is executed, with extreme precision, in a few minutes. Just as with a judo throw.

1960

I get the mark of the flesh through the impressions taken from the bodies of my models, but the mark of nature's states/moments?

1960



Yves Klein collects the imprint of the reeds on the banks of the Loup, at Cagnes

I dash out to the banks of the river and find myself amongst the rushes and reeds. I grind some pigment over all this and the wind makes their slender stalks bend and appliquéés them with precision and delicacy on to my canvas, which I thus offer to quivering nature: I obtain a vegetal mark. Then it starts to rain; a fine spring rain: I expose my canvas to the rain... and I have the mark of the rain!—a mark of an atmospheric event.

1960



Sunday 27 November 1960, Yves Klein reads the newspaper of a single day
in front of the Eiffel Tower

Amongst other innumerable adventures, I have caught the precipitate of a theatre of the void.

1960

And at the same time I succeeded in painting with fire.

1961



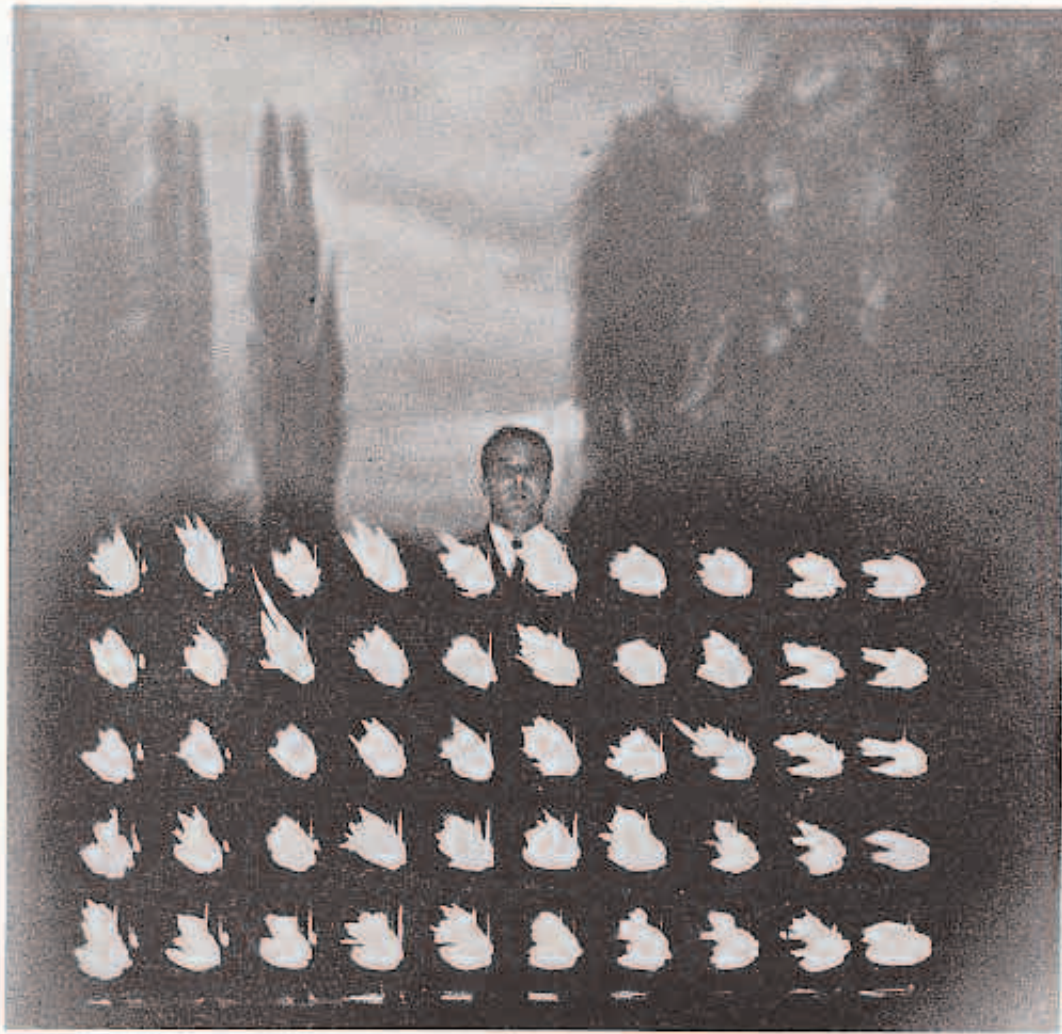
1961, Yves Klein makes his first fire paintings with a flame-thrower at the Centre d'Essai du Gaz de France, in the suburbs of Paris.

I made the flames lick the surface of the painting in such a way that it recorded the spontaneous traces of the fire. But what is it that provokes in me this pursuit of the impression of fire? Why must I search for its traces? Because every work of creation, quite apart from its cosmic position, is the representation of pure phenomenology—every phenomenon manifests itself of its own accord. This manifestation is always distinct from form, and is the essence of the immediate, the trace of the immediate.

1961



At the beginning of 1961, for the Yves Klein exhibition in Krefeld which opened on 14 January, the workers install gas pipes in the Museum gardens...



... two weeks later, Yves Klein's 'Fire Wall' became a reality.

Left below travelling, cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin waves as he enters elevator which will take him to space ship

Spaceman Hints He'd Like to Fly One of New Russian Moonships

(Continued from Page 1) Gagarin said he would like to fly one of the new Russian moonships in the next few years. He said that he would like to fly to the moon and back. He said that he would like to fly to the moon and back. He said that he would like to fly to the moon and back.

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Spaceman's Experiences Gagarin said he had a very good time in space. He said that he had a very good time in space. He said that he had a very good time in space.

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the rest of a collective farm... Gagarin said he had a very good time in space. He said that he had a very good time in space.

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*Le Globe et le
Sculpture 1957*

12 April 1961, Gagarin from his space capsule said 'The earth is a beautiful blue colour.'
Gagarin vouches for Yves!

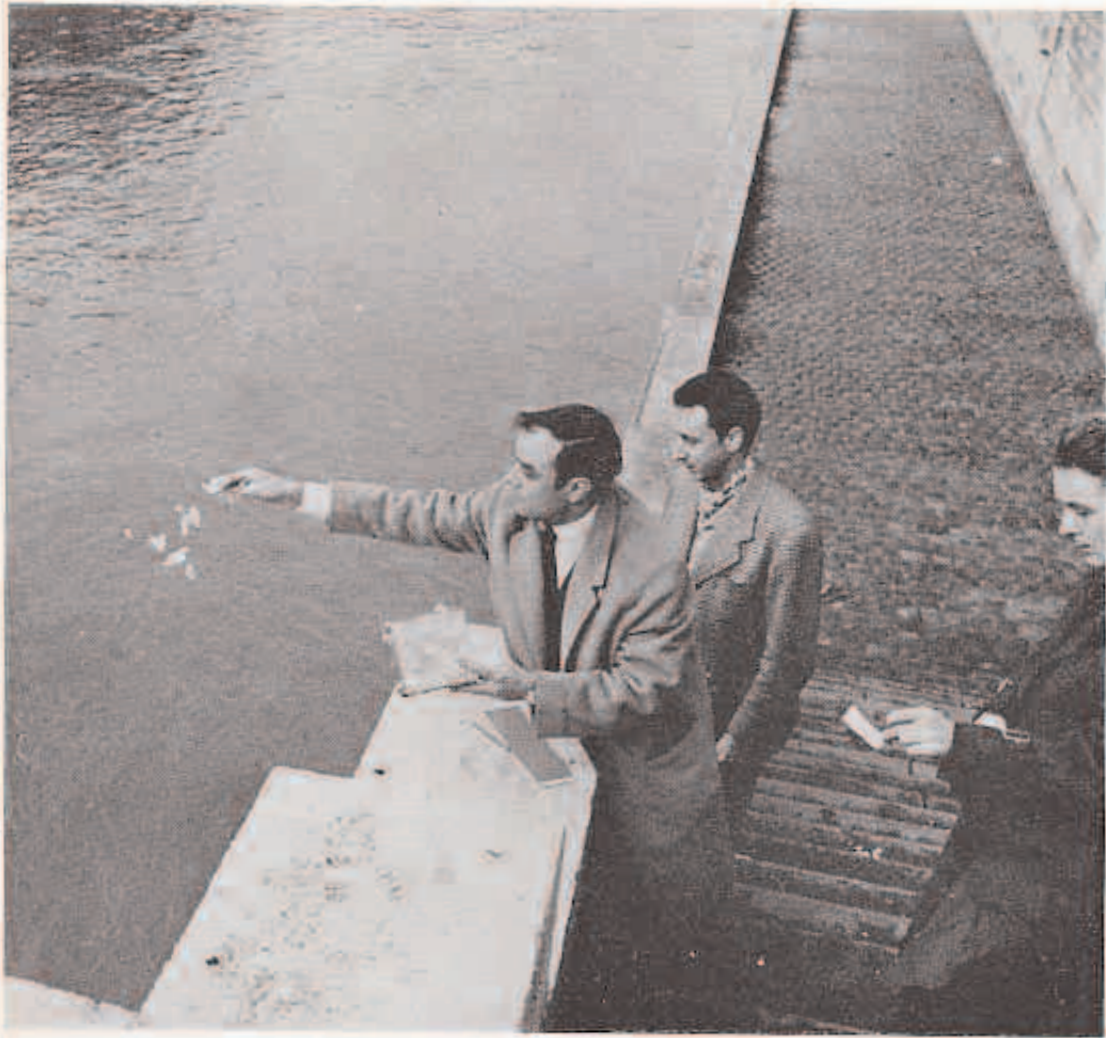
Today anyone who paints space must actually go into space to paint, but he must go there without any faking, and neither in an aeroplane, a parachute nor a rocket: he must go there by his own means, by an autonomous, individual force; in a word, he must be capable of levitating.

1962

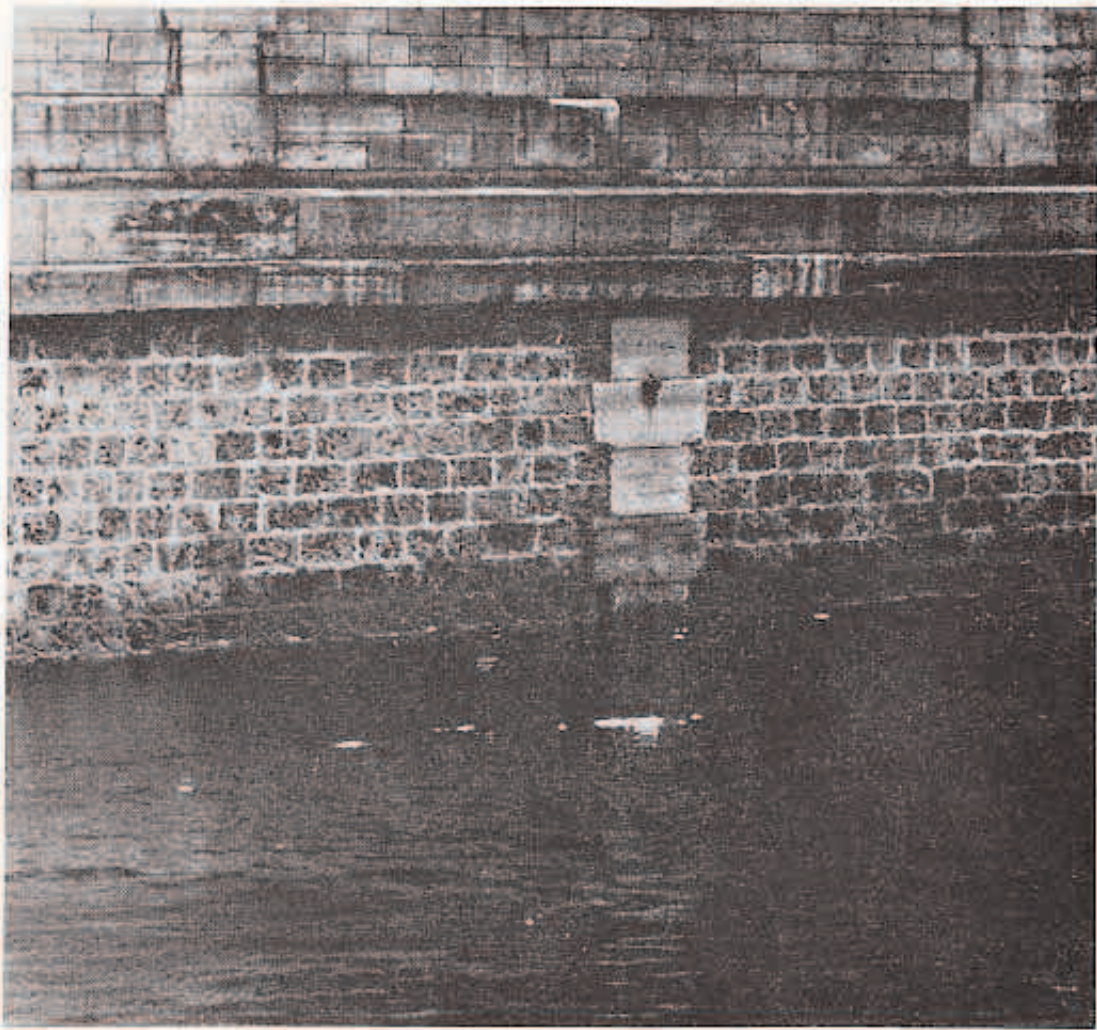
On the sixth of June 1962 at 6.30 p.m. Yves Marie Klein, painter, died at his home, 14 rue Campagne-Première, Paris. He was born on the twenty-eighth of April 1928 in Nice (Alpes-Maritimes) and was the son of Frédéric Klein, painter, of 89 rue de Vaugirard, Paris, and of Marie Joséphine Raymond, his wife, painter, of 116 rue d'Assas, Paris, and the husband of Rotraut Uecker.



26 January 1962, Yves Klein exchanges 20 grammes of gold leaf for the Immaterial Pictorial Sensitivity Zone No. 05 of the Serie 1, the 'buyer' was Dino Buzzati



4 February 1962, Yves Klein exchanges 20 grammes of gold leaf for the Immaterial Pictorial Sensitivity Zone No. 06 of the Serie 1, the 'buyer' was Claude Pascal...



... a few moments later, all that remains of the ceremony is the gold leaf floating in the Sienne



10 February 1962, Mr. Bankfort gives Yves Klein 160 grammes of gold in 16 ingots for the Immaterial Pictorial Sensitivity Zone No. 01 of the Serie 4...



... a few minutes later, he burns the receipt given to him by Yves Klein
in exchange for the gold

