Texte 6

ARTIST TINO SEHGAL: ‘HUMAN INTERACTION HAS

BECOME MUCH MORE PALPABLE’

Tino Sehgal’s work is designed to leave no footprint. The London-born German-Indian artist

wants nothing of those moments left behind. He is the Instagrammer’s nightmare.

He has created some of the most affecting exhibitions of the past decades. For The

Progress, he filled the spiral of the Guggenheim gallery in New York with “interpreters”; children to

octogenarians, who, following a set of rules, engaged visitors in suddenly intimate conversation. In

2012, at Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall, he populated the vast space with a choreographed shoal of

70 local storytellers, who buttonholed visitors to impart secrets. Many people stayed for hours, as if

at the party they had always dreamed of. As an artist of conversation, of surprising human

engagement, Sehgal, 45, feels like the perfect post-lockdown choice for the annual summer

exhibition at the stately gardens of Blenheim Palace.

He is assembling his show with a troupe of locally recruited “participants”, people selected on

the basis that they seem “measured and profound, and enjoy singing”.

Sehgal suggests he was attracted to do this project by the promise of a new, large audience

of country house day-trippers. As an “experimental” artist, he says, the danger is always ending up

“in a kunsthalle in Scandinavia and have 60 people visit per day. At some point, you are like: ‘What

am I doing here?’”

He hopes that the work will have something to say about the ways in which we re-emerge

into more social worlds. “The materiality of human interaction,” he suggests, “is something

palpable, much more palpable after the lockdowns. I remember my first in-person meetings and

I’m like, ‘What is this?’, I can almost feel the kind of energetic exchange between souls that was

happening when you actually meet somebody. I thought it reaffirmed what I’m doing.”

He talks about the interactive scenes he creates in terms of algorithms – the rules he

establishes that the participants will follow (he refuses any written documentation of those

rules; when he sells his work, contracts are only ever verbal agreements of what will be involved).

He likens the parameters he creates to the rules of games. “Sports have that kind of balance: very

simple rules that allow the whole complexity of life to show itself, like in a tennis match.” Sehgal’s

work This Variation, for example, involved 12 performers, singing and dancing in the dark. It took

him six years to establish the rules that would “make it a game that people might enjoy playing

over time”. Because otherwise, it would become too chaotic?

“For example, in football, the offside rule is a balancing rule. Without it, the whole thing would

fall out of balance.”

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Adapted from The Guardian

July 2021

(453 words)