



Signal Series II

Takis

Not on display

Title/Description: Signal Series II

Artist/Maker: Takis

Born: 1968

Object Type: Kinetic

Materials: Acrylic, Chrome-plated steel, Electrical components, Glass, Steel

Measurements: h. 202.0 x w. 25.0 x d. 25.0 cm

Accession Number: 31234

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: Britain, England

Takis created an entirely new art by using magnetism, light and sound as his materials. In doing so, made energy visible. Takis developed his series titled *Signals* from 1955. They are thin poles topped with flashing lights or found objects. The rods are malleable and gently move in ambient air, offering another visualisation of otherwise invisible energy. Takis' revelatory idea was prompted whilst waiting at a train station from London to Paris:

'The station was a huge [complex], a forest of signals. Monster-eyes went on and off, rails, tunnels, a jungle of iron. I got out a chalk, and drew it on all the cement. I drew all those phenomena. I tried to show clearly the needs of human imagination and thought by an exact execution: man constructs for his own use tunnels and exits, symbols for his evasion of death. We have chased the sacred symbols into the desert and replaced them with electronic eyes.' [1]

Curator Michael Wellen argues that this anecdote reveals how Takis was perceiving and interpreting his surroundings as a foreigner. [2] Takis had emigrated to Paris from Greece in 1954. Wellen compares the loneliness suggested by the *Signals*, with 'lamps blinking intermittently like the "monster eyes" of the railway station', with that of Takis, who wrote, 'I have never been in such solitude... In Paris, every stranger is alone. Loneliness is worse than hell.' [3]

The early *Signals* were almost calligraphic, with swirling, bending wire at the top. Later *Signals* became more flexible encouraging gentle movement as they lightly sway. From around 1962 Takis began to top them with lights, from buses, bikes or traffic lights, which he found from military stores

or flea markets.

Whereas the *Signals* described above were made by Takis himself, *Signals Series II*, in the Sainsbury Centre collection is a multiple, produced by Unlimited, based in Widcombe Manor, Bath. Unlimited was set up by the engineer and art collector Jeremy Fry. Takis worked with him as he wanted to make his work widely available and to act outside the conventional art market. They worked together for a year in order to make the work suitable for mass production. *Signals Series II* has extendable, flexible poles topped by flashing lights, one in blue and one red.

Jeremy Fry also funded the 1969 film, *Takis Unlimited* by Mahmoud Khosrowshahi. The film, which opens with a forest of Takis' *Signals* sculptures, addresses the benefits of producing artworks as multiples, follows the making of the multiples, and closes with an exhibition of his mass-produced work. In the film, Takis explains that 'art should be eaten, should be placed in a coffee place... used and broken. Not just looked [at]'. [4] The film shows the base of *Signals Series II* being cast and includes responses by the workers in the factory.

Takis' work was so important to an avant-garde group of artists and curators that they named their London gallery Signals. Originally titled the Centre for Advanced Creative Study, Signals ran from 1964 to 1966, and was accompanied by the Signals Newsbulletin, which transmitted their ideas internationally. Signals, run by David Medalla, Gustav Metzger, Marcello Salvadori, Paul Keeler and Guy Brett, celebrated the intersection between art and science.

Tania Moore, June 2021

[1] Originally published in Takis, *Estafilades* (Paris: René Julliard, 1961), pp.132-133. Cited from a translation by Sebastian Brett in *Signals*, vol. 1, nos. 3-4, October-November 1964, p.2.

[2] Michael Wellen, 'Any One Star' in Guy Brett and Michael Wellen (eds.), *Takis* (London: Tate, 2019), p.67.

[3] Takis, 1961, quoted in Wellen, 2019, p.68.

[4] 'Takis Unlimited' in Nzonscreen, <https://www.nzonscreen.com/title/takis-unlimited-1969/overview>

Exhibitions

'Rhythm and Geometry: Constructivist art in Britain since 1951', Sainsbury Centre, UK, 02/10/2021 - 17/07/2022

'Rhythm and Geometry: Constructivist art in Britain since 1951', Djanogly Art Gallery, UK, 07/03/2023 - 23/07/2023

Further Reading

Tania Moore and Calvin Winner (eds.), *Rhythm and Geometry: Constructivist art in Britain since 1951* (Norwich: Sainsbury Centre, 2021), p.47.
