**John Cage / Milan Grygar – Chance Operations & Intention**

1 September – 8 November 2015

**Exhibition Curator: Prof. Dr. Beate Reifenscheid**

**Ludwig Museum, Coblenz, in collaboration with Galerie Zdeněk Sklenář, Prague**

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**Press Release**

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The Ludwig Museum in Coblenz presents two exceptional artists – John Cage and Milan Grygar – in a specific form of confrontation, highlighting their work from the perspective of chance and intention. The exhibition presents their experimental methods, the innovative interpretation of everyday sound and ambience, and their revolutionary expansion of the notions of music and art. Cage was one of the most important 20th century composers, and at the same time an active draughtsman and painter. Milan Grygar is one of the most distinctive Czech avant-garde artists. Since the mid-1960s, his “acoustic drawings” and performances have expanded the definition of drawing by adding the dimensions of sound, space and time, as he has also made the discovery of the notion of time in the process of painting. World art history recognizes him precisely for his revelations concerning sound in the process of an image coming to life.

It was in the 1960s that Milan Grygar (b. 1926) thrilled the art world as one of the most notable artists in the countries of the former Eastern Block. As early as 1964, he began exploring the integration of intention and chance, of everyday ambience and mechanical sounds, into his drawings, and in doing so transcended the limits of both the visual arts and music. In his reduced colour scheme, sound becomes a substantial part of his pictures, watercolours and scores undertaken in the medium of drawing. Recording the process of drawing and its sounds as well as the background noise and surrounding ambience of everyday life on tape gave rise to his so-called “acoustic drawings”. When performed before an audience, these became “live drawings”. The process-based nature of these acoustic and live drawings is particularly evident in the accompanying series of photographs which document these happenings.

Fourteen years Grygar’s senior, the composer, painter and poet John Cage (1912–1992) is regarded as the originator of the happening and the godfather of the Fluxus movement. His very first happening – *Untitled Event* staged together with Merce Cunningham, Robert Rauschenberg and David Tudor, as well as his “silent” composition *4 minutes 33 seconds* established Cage’s fame as an avant-garde composer in 1952. His works during the 1950s drew on Asian philosophy and its notions of chance, silence and autonomy.

In the late 1960s, his encounter and friendship with Dada artists such as Marcel Duchamp and younger American artists such as Rauschenberg and Warhol inspired Cage to also take up painting and produce series of prints. Much like his musical compositions, these visual works manifest Cage’s highly sophisticated artistic method of chance operations based on the Ancient Chinese *Book of Changes* (*I Ching*).

Through comparison of these mutual pursuits, John Cage and Milan Grygar enter into a fascinating dialogue. Expanding the notions of art in different directions, their work shows close similarities in terms of the visualization of sounds and ambience, as well as the rendering of pictures and visual impulses in audible form. After John Cage’s visit to Prague in 1964, and after the joint presentation of John Cage’s and Milan Grygar’s works in the late 1970s, the extraordinary new exhibition “Cage/Grygar: Chance Operations and Intention” displays the work of both experimental artists through the medium of visual art, inviting the audience to discover anew the dimensions of sound and image, and of intention and chance. The organizers wish to thank a number of institutions and museums for kindly loaning works for the exhibition – among others, the Kunsthalle Bremen, the Staatliches Museum Schwerin (State Museum Schwerin), Kunstmuseum Villa Zanders in Bergisch-Gladbach, Pori Art Museum (Finland), the Maria and Walter Schnepel Cultural Foundation in Budapest, Edición Block in Berlin, Schüppenhauer art + projects in Cologne, and several generous private collectors, and, last but not least, Zdeněk Sklenář Gallery, Prague, for their friendship and support in the realization of the Milan Grygar exhibition.

The exhibition is accompanied by an extensive catalogue brought out by KERBER publishers, featuring a large number of illustrations and essays by eminent art historians. In her revelatory article, the exhibition curator Prof. Dr. Beate Reifenscheid describes the significance of the oeuvre of Milan Grygar and John Cage for contemporary fine arts and music in the following terms: “(in the 1960s) they worked intensely towards a new understanding of music and art, the hubs of this effort focusing around John Cage in America, around Joseph Beuys and Fluxus in Germany, and in the East around Milan Grygar. Both Cage and Grygar utilize their potential, transcending the narrow line between music and painting, opening up horizons where the world is perceived as harmony – as a space for visual and acoustic experimentation. They exploit to the fullest the potential of chance as a moment of fulfilment of the acceptance of the hitherto unknown. They explore the ambience of everyday life, the chirping of birdsong as well as the rattle of mechanical toys, and in doing so – like John Cage – they gain the measure of silence, in line with the teachings of Asian philosophy. In the aftermath of the Second World War and the midst of the Cold War, the world was a place where many artists could only exist in a state of revolt, in anarchy, demolishing the old, narrow-minded systems. All the same, this lent them wings towards the freedom of experimentation, in order to reclaim for humanity that which had long been buried: to return to it the gift of hearing by sight, and seeing with the ear – their improvisations addressed all the senses, making the observer part of all. Though they were not free from all rules, their concept was free from any limitations.”