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EXHIBITION

**BRION GYSIN**

***DREAM MACHINE***

16 OCTOBER - 28 NOVEMBER 2010

**INSTITUT  
D'ART CONTEMPORAIN**  
Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes

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**Brion Gysin was a subversive. Gay, stateless, polyglot, he had no family, no clique, no fixed profession, and often, no fixed address. He claimed no religion, and no credo, save that humans were put on this earth with the ultimate goal of leaving it. Working simultaneously with painting, drawing, collage, sound, literature, performance, and something more ineffable that can be called perception, he created a body of artwork that was wildly uneven, radically interdisciplinary, and virally influential.**

**Gysin has been called an “idea machine,” and he made pioneering discoveries in painting, poetry, sound, performance, and kinetic art over a period of less than a decade at the beginning of the 1960s that continue to have significance today. He was generous, almost carelessly so, with his innovations, investigating some, like the disentanglement of the symbol from its received meanings,**

for his entire artistic life—and gifting others, like the *Cut-Up Method*, to his friend the writer William S. Burroughs, who used it with inspiration in his most famous literary and visual arts efforts.

Although painting and drawing were his first, and throughout his life, preferred, means of expression, Gysin wrote both prose and poetry as well as at least one screenplay, and performed and composed song lyrics. To him, the disciplines of painting, drawing, writing, and performance were equal as means of expression, if not interchangeable.

Gysin's visual art production can be divided chronologically and formally into four bodies of work, which include his calligraphic paintings and drawings; permutations of words in written form, sound, and performance, which developed simultaneously with the practice of the closely related *Cut-Up Method* that culminated in *The Third Mind*, a book-length collage collaboration with Burroughs; the *Dreamachine*, a work of kinetic art meant to be apprehended with closed eyes; and photo-based collage and montage created in the last decade of his life.

Most of his works, though, integrate elements of more than one of these individual periods: calligraphic paintings in 1961, painted in the hot oranges and yellows familiar to Dreamachine users, also might include permuted poems; performances of permuted poems might include the projection of slides hand-painted with Gysin's personal calligraphic mark; and photo-collages from the late 1970s feature Gysin's signature grid pattern, applied by a roller the artist modified in 1961.

Gysin was born in London in 1916, and spent his childhood in Edmondton, Alberta. At the age of eighteen, after English boarding school, he moved to Paris, a city to which he would return to for extended periods throughout his life. Spending the 1940s in New York City, he crossed paths with Surrealist artist exiles like Roberto Matta and Abstract Expressionists like Jackson Pollock. In 1950, Gysin moved to Tangier, Morocco, where he spent almost a decade, painting, writing, running a restaurant, and listening to the incantatory music of

the pipe players from the village of Jajouka.

This exhibition starts in 1958, when, at age forty-two, Gysin relocated to Paris and began a sustained period of discovery and artistic production. It was also the year that he moved into a cheap residence hotel on the Left Bank, at 9 Rue Gît-le-Coeur, and became close friends with Burroughs, who was living there along with other *Beat generation* literary lights like Allen Ginsberg and Gregory Corso. Gysin's four years at the so-called "Beat Hotel" would be the most productive of his entire career. All of Gysin's subsequent work until his death from cancer in 1986 has its roots in the innovations of these years in Paris.

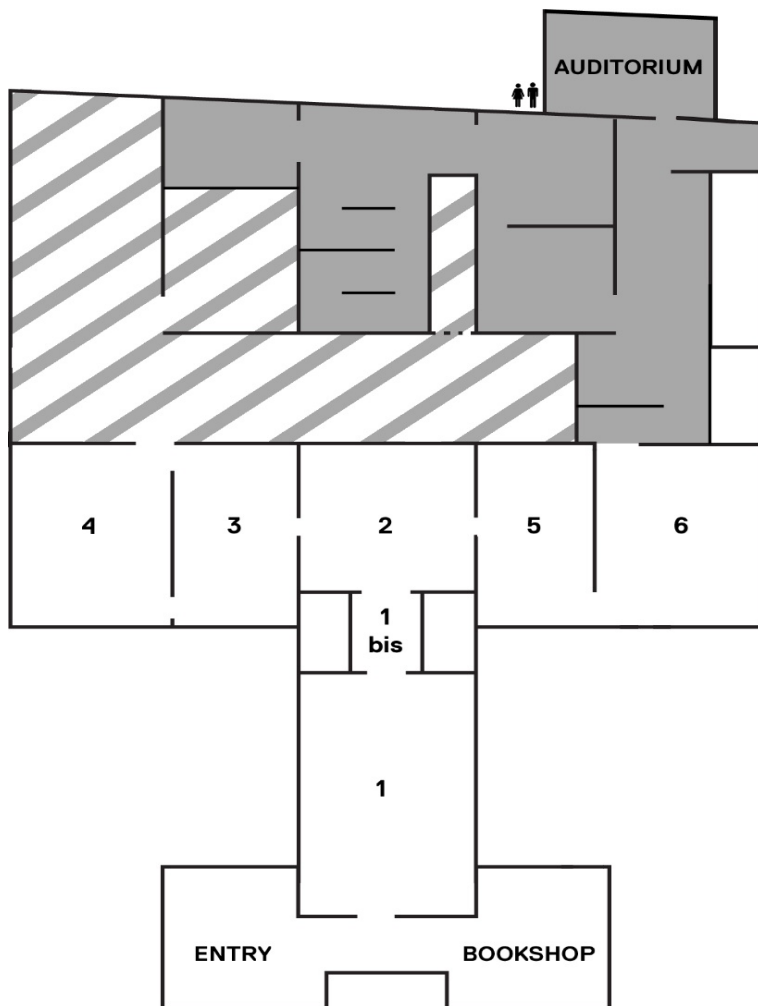
This reassessment of Gysin's all-but-forgotten body of artwork is an exercise not only of recuperation into art history, but equally importantly, of recontextualization into the discourse of contemporary art. Twenty years after his death, the depths of Gysin's discoveries, and the strangeness of the journey that led to them, have found new significance among contemporary artists who are seeking multidisciplinary models of inquiry, and roadmaps out of the merely everyday and into a more metaphysical realm. The *Dreamachine*, with its promise to make all who use it visionaries, and the *Cut-Up*, a perfect visualization of the remixing and re-presentation of information on the Web, are as provocative and relevant now as they were when they were created fifty years ago.

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# Exhibition rooms

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# ROOM 1

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## SLIDE INSTALLATION

This slide installation is composed by series of 110, 35mm color slides, scratched, some with ink.

Gysin's myriad artistic practices came together in his supremely theatrical performances, which combined painted slides and sound poetry permuted by a randomizing computer program. Beginning in 1960 and extending, with modifications, throughout his career, these multi-medium performances were works of "total theatre," meant to encourage what William S. Burroughs called "the anxiety of bewilderment."

Although no film or video footage exists of his earliest performances, still photos, scripts, and Gysin's own observations describe evenings that featured Gysin reading his own work (including poems as well as artist's statements) accompanied by soundtracks of permuted poems. Color slides, which had been altered by Gysin with scratches as well as with paint, were projected on the walls as backdrops as well as on Gysin himself, who sometimes would wear white to encourage their visibility. Other performances featured Burroughs as a kind of ominous prop; installed behind a desk at the corner of the stage or performance area; in his coat and fedora he would sit quietly and observe the sound and light cacophony that surrounded him.

Utilizing Gysin's original slides and recordings, this installation recreates the atmosphere of a Gysin performance.

# ROOM 1 bis

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## EARLY YEARS

Gysin began his artistic career at age eighteen in 1934, when he moved to Paris and fell in with André Breton, Max Ernst, and the Surrealist circle. His Surrealist-inspired drawings from that period feature a kind of biomorphic abstraction reminiscent of the work of Joan Miró and particularly Yves Tanguy. He also experimented with the technique of decalomania, a method favored by Tanguy, as well as Ernst, in which wet ink is pressed between two pieces of paper to produce a motif created by chance.

Gysin left Paris for New York when the Second World War began, and although his mature work has echoes of Surrealist automatic writing experiments, his break with the group was bitter and definitive. Beginning in 1950, Gysin was in Tangier, Morocco, learning to read and write Arabic, listening to the indigenous music of the mountain tribes of Jajouka, and from 1954 to 1957, running a successful restaurant called *The 1001 Nights*.

After Paris, Tangier would become Gysin's second home; he would visit that city for significant amounts of time until 1973. An international zone from the 1920s until its reattachment to an autonomous Morocco in 1956, the city of Tangier in the 1950s did not fall under the jurisdiction of any single nation-state, and thus was a magnet for an international group of itinerates looking to lead alternative lifestyles free of governmental or societal harassment.

During the 1950s, Gysin produced paintings and drawings of desert landscapes that hover between abstraction and figuration. In these rather conventional works, many of which

are executed in ink, Gysin used quasi-calligraphic strokes to indicate figures or objects against flat horizontal washes of color that convey the subtle desert atmospherics. These black ink marks would develop, in the second half of the 1950s, into the calligraphic glyphs that are the hallmark of Gysin's mature style of painting and drawing.

### ***Three drawings from a sketchbook, 1952***

Gysin's interest in the music of the hill village of Jajouka began in the early '50s, when the writer and longtime Tangier resident Paul Bowles first took him there to observe a unique ritual that occurs at the end of Ramadan. Subsequently, Gysin visited often, recording the music on his portable tape recorder. These watercolors depict a dancer from the village of Jajouka dressed as the spirit Bou Jeloud. Covered in goatskin and dancing to pipe and drum music around a bonfire, Bou Jelou is a fertility figure who chases young women with a switch. If they are touched, legend has it, they will become pregnant.

### ***René Bertelé with Brian Gysin Le Jugement du vent, 1936***

Gysin arrived in Paris in 1934, and through an acquaintance with Marie-Berthe Aurenche, Max Ernst's wife at the time, he was quickly absorbed into André Breton's circle of Surrealists. He was invited to participate in a group exhibition of drawings at the Galerie Au Quatre Chemins in December 1935, but was abruptly excommunicated from the group on the morning of the opening of the exhibition. He would go on to have a solo exhibition of his work at the same gallery in 1939 and left Paris soon after.

Gysin's given name was Brian with an "a." He subsequently changed the "a" to an "o," adopting a more unique spelling of "Brion."

### ***Carl Van Vechten Brion Gysin, March 26, 1957***

Carl Van Vechten was an American writer and photographer who took portrait photos of movie stars, writers, artists, and other cultural figures of the first half of the twentieth century. His subjects included Marlon Brando, Tallulah Bankhead, Truman Capote, Salvador Dalí, Paul Cadmus, Gore Vidal, and Jane Bowles, with whom Gysin was friendly. This photo depicts Gysin in a Moroccan robe called a djellaba. Gysin's attraction to North African culture was made evident not only in his interest in its written language and music, but also by the fact that he incorporated elements of the Moroccan costume in his mode of dress from the 1950s until his death in 1986.

"Certain traumatic experiences have made me conclude that at the moment of birth I was delivered to the wrong address...." Gysin confessed towards the end of his life. "I have done what I could to make up for this."

### ***Master Musicians of Jajouka Brian Jones Presents the Pipes of Pan at Joujouka, 1971***

Gysin first heard the musicians of Jajouka in the early 1950s and became a devoted fan, opening a restaurant in Tangier, he claimed, to create a venue for the musicians. In 1967 Gysin brought Brian Jones and the rest of the Rolling Stones to the village of Jajouka. The same year he also brought the jazz musician Ornette Coleman. The contemporary musicians were impressed by the Jajouka sound, hearing in it a trance-inducing quality that had implications for both rock music and jazz, and both returned to Morocco to record the Jajouka musicians.

*Brian Jones Presents the Master Musicians of Jajouka* is a result of recordings made in 1968, when Gysin and Jones visited Jajouka. It was released in 1971, two years after Jones's death, and was an international success. In the village of Jajouka, Jones is

remembered by a ditty: “Ah Brahim Jones/ Jajouka Rolling Stones/Ah Brahim Jones/ Jajouka really stoned.”

## **Untitled, 1958**

This drawing, in which calligraphic marks seem to morph from figures to script, illustrates the merging of painting and writing that Gysin strove to achieve in his visual art experiments. Part landscape, part text, it is a transitional work between the more traditional desert landscapes Gysin painted in the 1950s and his full-blown calligraphic abstractions, which began at the end of the decade.

## **ROOM 2**

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### **THE DREAMACHINE**

In 1958, on a bus traveling under some trees in the south of France on a sunny day, Gysin closed his eyes and experienced a burst of brightly colored hallucinations brought on, he found out later, by the *flicker* effect.

First described by William Grey Walter in his book *The Living Brain* (1952), *flicker* is a phenomenon that occurs when a person is exposed to light interruptions between eight and thirteen flashes per second. Synching up with the brain’s alpha rhythms, *flicker* can cause individuals to “see” colors, shapes, or even entire, three-dimensional landscapes, with their eyes closed.

At Gysin’s request, Ian Sommerville, a student of mathematics with an interest in computers and electronics, built a crude apparatus involving a light bulb, a slotted shade, and a turntable that revolved at seventy-eight revolutions per minute. The result was dubbed the *Dream Machine* (later elided into the single word *Dreamachine*), and in 1961 Gysin took

out a patent for an “apparatus for the production of artistic visual sensations.” Gysin claimed that the imagery from “all of ancient and modern art” could be seen using the Dreamachine, supplying in his view, new answers to “old questions” as fundamental as “What is art?”; “What is color?”; “What is vision?”

Believing it to be a replacement not only for painting, but also for television, Gysin spent a number of years trying, unsuccessfully, to have the apparatus mass-produced and made available to a wide audience. Today, templates for the *Dreamachine* are available for free on numerous sites online.

## **Dreamachine, 1961/1979**

This version of the *Dreamachine* was one of nine fabricated in Basel, Switzerland by Carl Laszlo in 1979, to Gysin’s specifications.

In order to experience the *Dreamachine* properly, sit six to eight inches from the cylinder and close your eyes, allowing the flickering light to play across your eyelids. According to Gysin, pipe music from the Moroccan hill tribe of Jajouka is the aural equivalent of the visual experience of the Dreamachine, and listening to it enhances the experience. Later in his life, Gysin also suggested the B-side of *Heathen Earth* by the band Throbbing Gristle as a proper accompaniment.

According to the instructions of the *Dreamachine Plans created by Brion Gysin* (Temple Press Ltd, Brighton, 1994), two *Dreamachines*, created by the IAC, are shown in this room.

# ROOM 3

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## THE DREAMACHINE

**Untitled, 1960 - 1962**  
**Untitled (*Dreamachine interior*), 1961 - 1979**

Gysin experimented with hallucinogenic substances over his entire adult life, and during his time in Morocco, where such substances were readily available, he became a committed smoker of hashish, and kif, a finely ground marijuana mixed with tobacco.

In 1954, Gysin's recipe for hashish fudge was included in Alice B. Toklas's legendary memoir/cookbook.

Beginning either in 1960 or early 1961 Gysin experimented with psilocybin pills courtesy of then Harvard professor Timothy Leary, who sent batches of them to William S. Burroughs at the "Beat Hotel". The numerous small drawings produced under the effects of psilocybin have a visual correlation with Gysin's descriptions of the images produced by the *Dreamachine*. Featuring starbursts, crosses, halos, cross-hatch patterns, and other archetypal symbols, these drawings are rendered with lacquer-based inks in hot pinks, greens, and electric blues—colors identified with visions induced by the *Dreamachine*.

Gysin's interest in hallucinogenic drugs can be linked to his interest in trance music like that of the *Master Musicians of Jajouka*, as well as the *flicker* effect, as both were of a piece with his goal of deranging the senses with the goal of breaking the bonds of what he perceived as a culture of pervasive control. Enforced by language and by image, "Control," according to Gysin's thinking, was to be subverted in order to open the way to new psychic vistas, even a new consciousness.

## Kif Notes, 1950-1957

This notebook, which contains observations of Gysin's travels and experiences in Morocco, contains descriptions of his first experiments with kif, the tobacco and marijuana mix widely used at the time. It also includes his famous recipe for "Hashish Fudge" that he submitted to The Alice B. Toklas Cookbook, a hybrid memoir and recipe book published by Toklas in 1954.

Gysin's early experimentation with hallucinogenic substances had a deep impact on his life and work. *The Heavenly Grass* Gysin wrote on the penultimate page of this book, "a feeling almost too pleasurable to believe."

## PHOTO-COLLAGE

By 1973, Gysin had settled permanently in Paris and installed himself in a small apartment directly across from the construction site that was rapidly becoming the Richard Rogers-designed Centre Georges Pompidou. The unique exoskeletal structure of the building immediately reminded Gysin of his early grid compositions and spurred him to experiment with photo-collage used in combination with them. Taking his inspiration from the building outside his window, Gysin used his roller grid not as a compositional page organizer akin to a series of print columns, but as architecture, with the added dimension that it implies.

Simultaneous with the combination photo-collages, Gysin reported that he had a revelation about his newly discovered medium. Noticing with delight that contact sheets resembled all-photographic versions of his grid paintings, he made a connection between the processes of rolling out grid forms and taking photos.

"It took me years to realize that the spool



of film in my camera is a roller,” he wrote in 1977. Roller photo-collages soon were superseded by experiments with contact sheets; composition—the juxtaposition of photographic images in a grid formation to make a complete work—happened in the camera. Gysin, slowed down by cancer as well as the beginnings of emphysema, concentrated on photographing details of the Pompidou, and his works from the second half of the 1970s can be seen as *Cut-Up* interpretations of its famous façade.

To many of these works he gave the title *The Last Museum*, the name of a book of reminiscences about his time at the “Beat Hotel” that he was writing during that period. The manuscript would go through several versions, and finally be published in full, posthumously, in 1986.

### ***The Last Museum, 1974 - 1977* *Beaubourg, 1975***

When this work and others like it were made, Gysin was living in an apartment directly across from the building site of the Richard Rogers-designed Centre Georges Pompidou. The innovative exoskeletal skin of the building mimicked a grid, reminding Gysin of the underlying structure his own paintings, drawings, collages, and photo-montages. “When I first saw the project for the Centre Georges Pompidou in 1973 it gave me one of those old goose-pimple flashes of déjà vu,” he wrote. “It looked so like my first roller drawings in color, that I abandoned my self-effacing spurious Zen pose long enough to exclaim: ‘This is the Last Museum, what else? And who designed it but me!’

### ***Heavy Metal Kid, 1974* *Naked Lunch—Byzantine Golden* *Boys (Cut-Ups), 1974***

In 1971, William S. Burroughs published a novel entitled *The Wild Boys: A Book of the Dead*. Gysin produced a number of collages

called *Wild Boys*, which incorporated photos cut from gay pornographic magazines. Although its title is different, these works can be considered a part of the *Wild Boys* series.

### ***Adapted paint roller, 1961***

Gysin bought this wallpaper roller, or brayer, when he was in Rome preparing for an exhibition at the Galleria Trastevere di Topazia Alliata. Inspired by the form of a computer printout, he incised the roller with a spidery grid pattern that he proceeded to use in his two-dimensional work until his death.

“When Ian Sommerville put ‘I Am That I Am’ and other poems like ‘Junk Is No Good Baby’ and ‘Kick That Habit Man’ through the computer, the printouts looked like word-grids rolled out by a roller,” Gysin remembered. “Intrigued, I cast about for some way to put this dimension into my painting and in Rome in 1960, a house-decoration paint-roller presented itself. This roller was already commercially cast in a cellular patten which I altered, merely adapting it to print out a permutative grid which I could roll on out towards infinity”.

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## **ROOM 4**

### **CALLIGRAPHIES**

Gysin’s mature style manifested itself in a series of calligraphic paintings and drawings that he began producing in Morocco in the late 1950s. These were attempts to fuse writing and painting into a single complex system of mark-making. A linguist who was knowledgeable in written Japanese as well as Arabic, Gysin’s script-like marks show the influence of both styles of calligraphy. Also called “écritures,” because of their marriage of the written word with the brushstroke, these works feature a personal glyph that the artist created using a fusion of

his initials, “BG,” repeated in cursive lines that run across the surface of canvas, paper, or notebook. Basing many of his compositions on a grid formation adopted from the writing of magic spells, Gysin’s marks run from top to bottom as well as right to left, creating dense patterns.

In 1961, during a trip to Rome, Gysin bought a rubber wallpaper roller, or brayer, and incised a delicate grid pattern into its surface. He used this spidery scaffolding made by the brayer, as a background in paintings, drawings, prints, and photo-collages, for the rest of his life. By the mid-1960s, Gysin’s interests focused on collage more than painting, and the brayer’s graph motif had all but superseded the artist’s calligraphic mark. Gysin returned to that mark in works like the artist’s book *Alarme* (1977), and in his final work, the heroically scaled *Calligraphiti of Fire*, completed in 1985, several months before his death.

### **Untitled, 1960**

“I write across the picture space from right to left and, then, I turn the space and write across again to make a multi-dimensional grid,” wrote Gysin at the time of this painting. Works like this one, with its decorative border framing its central motif, resemble a page of an illuminated manuscript, and have a distinctly Levantine quality. Gysin spent the decade of the 1950s in Morocco and during that time learned to speak and write Arabic. Gysin also famously cited a “Kabbalistic spell” with invocations scrawled across as well as top to bottom on a small piece of paper, in Tangier in the late ’50s as an inspiration for his calligraphic compositions.

### **Untitled (Le Domaine Poétique), Paris, 1961**

This is a still from a performance done in conjunction with the Parisian poets’ group known as the *Domaine Poétique*. The *Domaine*’s core group included Bernard Heidsieck, Henri Chopin, and Jean-Claude Lambert, but other poets and artists like Emmett Williams, Robert Filliou, and François Dufrêne performed “animated readings” under the *Domaine*’s rubric as well.

In the work depicted, Gysin painted a picture while permuted poems recorded on tape were played. In a letter to William S. Burroughs from 1963, Gysin described a performance that incorporated the painting of a picture thusly: “Jean-Clarence appeared onstage with me and dictated my poem to me as I ‘wrote’ it out from right to left on a 6’ x 6’ paper stretched over a picture of David [Budd]’s called *Picture Poem For David Budd*. First version in Yellow. Turn the page and a little man behind the canvas rolled it counter-clockwise one turn. Wrote the next dictated verse in blue. Turn the page. ‘Down with the image’ and I attacked it with a sponge. ‘Attack the Verb with Number’ and I ran a roller over it. ‘Let’s tear the veil between me and thee’ and I ripped the big picture down the middle, tearing it off the Budd. ‘But poem is an act in which the poet loses himself. One image gone and more appear, permutating out in all the possible permutations of the fragments. Who am I? I am that I am...” Applause.

### **Eight Units of a Permuted Picture, 1961**

*Word Burst in Numbered World, Unit I*  
*Word-flow in the Theatre of Numbered Space, Unit II*  
*Golden Chariot of Ordered Word, Unit III*  
*Words Seeded Over Cities in the Sand, Unit IV*  
*Permutation I Am That I Am, Unit V*  
*Jade Mirror of Magnetic Memory, Unit VI*  
*Word Made Grass-Machine, Unit VII*  
*Star of the Dreamachine, Unit VIII*

Gysin created this suite of eight acrylic paintings for a solo exhibition at the Galleria Trastevere di Topazia Alliata in Rome that opened in February 1962. They are the first examples of compositions that incorporate a readymade grid pattern that has been rolled onto the canvas using a wallpaper roller or brayer. Gysin bought the brayer in Rome while he was preparing the Topazia exhibition, and modified it by incising a grid pattern in to it. The roller-grid motif, which Gysin called “the bright jungle-gym of mathematics; an exercise for controlling matter and knowing space” became a signature component of his two-dimensional work. After Gysin’s death, William S. Burroughs commandeered Gysin’s brayer, using it for some of his own compositions as an homage to his friend. “Brion’s roller,” Burroughs wrote, is “like some ancient seal cut in time with a coded message.”

### ***Calligraffiti of Fire, 1985***

This ten-panel painting was Gysin’s final work, completed less than a year before his death. A reworking of an idea first explored in *A Trip From Here to There* (1961), a small accordion notebook in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and displayed in this exhibition, *Calligraffiti* features a script, in the words of the artist, that “rushes across the picture space from right to left like an army with banners.” Keith Haring, who met Gysin in 1978 and admired him as a mentor, saw in *Calligraffiti* a “historical precedent” for his own work, and for graffiti artists who, in the ’80s, were transferring their street work to portable canvases.

### ***A Trip From Here to There, 1958***

In a letter to William S. Burroughs from January, 1959, Gysin describes this work as “a visual trip” made with “...a Japanese folding book that follows a colored drawing some 30 feet long that plays like a roll put into the *Olde Celestial Nickelodeon*.

” The work was bought by the curator Alfred Barr for the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Barr met Gysin when both were staying with Peggy Guggenheim in Venice in 1962.

### ***Ivy, 1959***

In a 1960 transcript of an interview between William S. Burroughs and Gysin, Gysin asked Burroughs to “read” one of his calligraphic paintings. Burroughs did without hesitation, mentioning that he could see repeated phrases like “yes, crying” and “not crying.” Although to eyes other than Burroughs’s, Gysin’s paintings and drawings do not seem particularly readable, in some, like this work, his initials “BG” can be fairly easily discerned.

### **CUT-UPS AND PERMUTATIONS**

In 1959, while cutting a mat for a drawing, Gysin accidentally cut through a stack of newspapers. To amuse himself, he rearranged the strips of type and found that entirely new meanings sprang from well-worn words and phrases. Manipulating them, he found himself using writing “in a plastic manner” like painting. “Writing is fifty years behind painting,” he pronounced. The *Cut-Up Method*, he imagined, could perhaps bring literature up to speed. Gysin immediately shared his discovery with his friend and downstairs neighbor William S. Burroughs, who, after numerous collage experiments with words and images, adopted the *Cut-Up* as a literary method for a trilogy of novels. Burroughs wrote at the time: “Cutting and rearranging a page of written words introduces a new dimension into writing, enabling the writer to turn images in cinematic variation. Images shift sense under the scissors smell images to sound sight to sound sound to kinesthetic. This is where Rimbaud was going with his color of vowels and his ‘systematic derangement of the senses.’... seeing colors,

tasting sounds, smelling forms.”

For Gysin, the *Cut-Up Method* manifested itself in multiple projects. Most notably, his first experience with newspaper bits inspired him to write a series of poems whose words were first permuted by hand, and subsequently permuted by a computer algorithm furnished by Ian Somerville. Gysin performed these permuted poems at gatherings organized by the *Domaine Poétique*, a circle of concrete and sound poets as well as artists affiliated with Fluxus.

An early adopter of magnetic tape technology, Gysin also used two tape recorders to cut up and permute recordings of already permuted poetry. The *Cut-Up* was also evident in the systematic randomization of edited segments of film, in works like the 1964 *Cut-Ups*, created in collaboration with Burroughs and the filmmaker Anthony Balch, in books like *Minutes To Go* (1960), a collaboration with Burroughs, Gregory Corso, and Sinclair Beiles that explained the *Cut-Up Method* by means of a *Cut-Up* essay, and even in a suite of eight paintings numbered and designed to be re-hung daily according to the random permutation of their order.

The *Cut-Up Method*, coupled with Gysin's deep interest in technological innovation, also resulted in live performances that featured multiple slide projections, and live and recorded recitations of his Permutation poems.

Beginning in 1960, and aided by the know-how of the redoubtable Somerville, Gysin created and performed increasingly complicated, multi-sensory events at venues that included the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, the American Center in Paris, and, in 1965, the Biennial de Paris. Gysin's most elaborate performances featured two slide projectors timed so that the image from one faded into that of the other. Phrases excised from permuted poems were then projected over these images, via an overhead projector. A soundtrack—the

*Pistol Poem* (Gysin's only poem that utilized sound but no words) or other Permutation poems—would be played. On several occasions, Burroughs, in a suit and fedora, would sit quietly at a desk off to the side of the stage for the duration of the performance. Gysin himself would perform from a script, reading declarations that sounded like a shamanic invocation or the casting of a spell.

### ***Who Runs May Read, 1963***

“I am a poor Singer but I can write out all of the Song I know in two ways and on both sides of this paper” wrote Gysin in the essay *Cut Me Up \* Brion Gysin \* Cut Me Up \* Brion Gysin \* Cut Me Up \* Brion Gysin \* Cut Me Up* published in *Minutes to Go* (1960), a book dedicated to demonstrating the *Cut-Up Method*. “Who runs may read. Learn to read by improving your running.”

Gysin often repurposed his written material; in this case, he has appropriated one allusive phrase from an earlier essay to serve as the title of a 1963 performance. This card was used as a memory aid or a prop for that performance.

### ***Announcement for a Le Domaine Poétique performance, 1961***

As the poet Bernard Heidsieck remembers, evenings sponsored by the *Domaine Poétique* were ecumenical, including Fluxus artists like Emmett Williams and Robert Fil-liou, and concrete, sound, and action poetry.

### ***Emmett Williams Anthology of Concrete Poetry, 1967***

In Gysin's desire to use words and sounds like painters use paint strokes, he revealed an affinity with the tradition of concrete poetry, beginning with the word/images of Lewis Carroll, Guillaume Apollinaire, and the Futurists, as well as the recorded sounds, utterances, phonemes, and fragments of speech used by pioneers of sound

poetry like Bernard Heidsieck, Henri Chopin, and others.

### **Notes in the Beat Hotel, 1963**

“The Permutation poems set the words spinning off on their own; echoing out as the words of a potent phrase are permuted into an expanding ripple of meaning which they did not seem to be capable of when they were stuck into that phrase,” wrote Gysin. “The poets are supposed to liberate the words—not to chain them in phrases.... Writers don’t own their words.”

### **Notebook, 1964–65**

According to Gysin, the Biblical phrase “I Am That I Am,” called the “divine tautology,” was the first phrase to become a permuted poem, because, as Gysin recounts, he manually manipulated the word order of the phrase to create a more pleasing “architectural balance around that big THAT.” This caused a revelation. “My ear ran away down the first one hundred and twenty simple permutations,” Gysin wrote in 1964, “and I heard, I think, what Newton said he heard: a sort of wild pealing inside my head, like an ether experience, and I fell down.”

Other permuted poems followed, using enigmatic profundities like “Rub Out The Word,” chosen as a contradictory retort to the biblical “In the Beginning there was the Word,” and short, rhythmic phrases that resembled song lyrics: “Kick That Habit Man,” “Poets Don’t Own Words,” “I Don’t Work You Dig,” and “Junk Is No Good Baby.”

### **Untitled, n.d.**

Gysin has annotated this performance script with the following description: “[A] poem recorded and projected at ICA London in 1963. The underlined words were written across the screen on which the images were projected; forming finally, an image—a temporary defeat.”

### **Pistol Poem, 1960**

In a 1982 interview Gysin described his magnetic tape experiments thusly: “I wanted to make language work in a new way, to surprise its secrets by using it as the material one passed through the available electronics to amplify the voices of poetry.” The tapes, multi-medium performances, and experiments with *flicker*, were accomplished in collaboration with Ian Sommerville, an electronics technician and computer programmer who studied at Cambridge, and was close with William S. Burroughs. Sommerville programmed a random sequence generator that permuted Gysin’s poems. He also synched Gysin’s multiple slide projections with a soundtrack of Gysin’s permutation poems during his performances.

Describing the sound of these first audio experiments, Sommerville said “It sounded like the future talking.”

*Pistol Poem* is the only work by Gysin that features sound exclusively, not words. Recorded in 1960 at the BBC studios in London as part of the twenty-three-minute radio program “The Permuted Poems of Brion Gysin,” the poem consists of shots from a starter pistol recorded at distances from one to five meters, and subsequently, permuted.

### **Joseph Moore Permutation program running eight poems by Brion Gysin, 2010**

In 1960, Gysin asked the mathematician and computer science student Ian Sommerville to write a computer program that would cut up and rearrange the words of simple declarative sentence. The resulting permutations were then arranged by Gysin to create a poem. Once the program was written, Gysin and Sommerville used it to create a number of poems, including all of those playing in the exhibition. The program running on this computer is a contemporary one created by artist and

## ROOM 5

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### **Antony Balch with William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin *Towers Open Fire*, 1963**

The script for this film was based in part on William S. Burroughs's *Cut-Up* novel *The Soft Machine* (1966). The title of the film is taken from another Burroughs novel, *Nova Express* (1964) in which a character exclaims "Storm the Reality Studio. And retake the universe...Towers open fire!"

### **Antony Balch with William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin *Cut-Ups*, 1963**

*Cut-Ups* incorporates some of the same footage as *Towers Open Fire*, but its editing technique is slightly different. The film was itself cut up in the editing, with random editing breaks creating sequences the length of which was determined by an arbitrary designation of a length of film on a reel. In a letter to Gysin, William S. Burroughs described the London premiere of *Cut-Ups*, in January of 1968 as "a tumultuous success marked by apoplectic rage and quite a number of equally emphatic complaints. The most interesting testimonial to confusion was the large number of articles left in the theatre after each performance: purses, gloves, scarves, umbrellas, even overcoats."

computer programmer Joseph Moore. It runs in real time without a graphic user interface like Windows, and although the language is different, the program runs in essentially the same manner as Sommerville's did. The eight Permutation poems running are (in order of their appearance):

"No Poets Don't Own Words"  
"I Am That I Am"  
"Junk Is No Good Baby"  
"I Don't Work You Dig"  
"Kick That Habit Man"  
"Come Free The Words"  
"Rub Out The Word"  
"Calling All Re Active Agents"

### **John Giorno *Sound and voice by Brion Gysin Subway Sound*, 1965**

The poet John Giorno met Gysin in 1964 when Gysin was in New York to collaborate with William S. Burroughs on the collage project *The Third Mind*. According to Giorno, Gysin was the first person to expose him to sound poetry, playing him his own permuted tape experiments, as well as works by poets from the French poésie sonore (sound poetry) group of Bernard Heidsieck, Henri Chopin, and François Dufrêne.

*Subway Sound* is a collaboration between Giorno and Gysin. Giorno's poem, originally entitled *Subway*, is read by Gysin and recorded over random sounds taken from the famously noisy New York subway. Giorno recalls that the mixture of Gysin's voice with the found noises "worked wonderfully, like a *Cut-Up*, with the images, voice, and subway sounds connecting in amazing ways." At Gysin's initiative, *Subway Sound* was included in the Biental de Paris held at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la ville de Paris in October 1965, and simultaneously published in *OU*, Chopin's well-respected magazine of new poetry. For Giorno, the collaboration was his introduction to the world of sound poetry, a genre in which his work would play a crucial role over the next twenty years.

# ROOM 6

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## THE THIRD MIND

Gysin and William S. Burroughs's experiments with *Cut Ups* of both texts and images convinced Burroughs of the urgency of collaborating with Gysin on "an illustrated book with words breaking over illustrations," in which, "...the pictures are not illustrative of the text. They are the pictographs from which the text derives." The idea was to create a "book of methods" that gathered together all of Gysin's and Burroughs's research to date on *Cut-Ups* and *Permutations* as a way to disseminate these revolutionary ideas to a wider public. Burroughs fervently believed that he and Gysin had what Gysin called "a psychic symbiosis" and that Gysin's visual art and his prose shared precisely the same goal, to liberate words and create new modes of expression. He envisioned a publication that would illustrate a "progression; words; glyphs, drawing or painting; expansion of the glyphs into a Gysin picture. ...My words," he added, [will] "just disintegrate in Gysin."

After a sustained period of back and forth, as well as the securing of a publisher by Burroughs, the two met in New York to begin work on the book called *The Third Mind*. Originally 207 pages in length, divided in to nineteen chapters, *The Third Mind* features a densely interwoven combination of typeset text excerpted from Burroughs's and Gysin's published writings, newspaper clippings, photographs, drawings, and hieroglyphic glyphs organized on pages that feature Gysin's signature grid structure. Burroughs tersely summed up Gysin's contribution in his short vignette *Klinker Squadron*, reprinted in *The Third Mind*: "Gysin is in charge of the mapping department."

After its completion, it took more than five years for *The Third Mind* to be laid out and readied for publication by Grove Press. Because of its unique mixture of illustrations and texts, the book was subsequently deemed too expensive to print and the project was killed. An abbreviated version, paperback, small scale, and featuring only twenty-six collages was printed in France in 1976 with the title *Oeuvre Croisée*. An English version, published by Viking Press in 1978, followed. The manuscript in its entirety remains unpublished.

*The Third Mind*, which takes its title from an obscure self-help book from the '50s entitled *Think and Grow Rich*, is a manual of sorts for the merging of images and words through the vehicle of the *Cut-Up*. It is, equally importantly, a documentation of Gysin and Burroughs's singular collaboration. "No two minds ever come together without, thereby, creating a third, invisible, intangible force which may be likened to a 'third mind,'" explains the introduction. Whether or not the original version of *The Third Mind* is a clear statement of intentions, or a useful how-to book, it is no doubt a work of art, unusual in its ambition to conflate words with objects, and to encourage the simultaneous act of reading and looking.

This room features both a selection of layout boards for page spreads for the book as it was originally intended to be printed, as well as individual collages that were excised from layout boards and framed separately.

## **William S. Burroughs** **Untitled, 1965**

After Gysin had shared the essentials behind the *Cut-Up method* with him in 1959, William S. Burroughs enthusiastically began to experiment with it. He inundated Gysin with ideas for how to employ *Cut-Ups* suggesting that Gysin take *Cut-Up* color journeys through city streets, make collages of collages, and permutate poems in a multiplicity of languages. Burroughs also began cutting up texts, and over a three-year period, he produced a trilogy of Cut-Up novels: *The Soft Machine* (1961), *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962), and *Dead Finger Talk* (1963). He also began to take photographs and cut them up, producing collages as well as collage notebooks, four of which are displayed.

Gysin agreed with William S. Burroughs's conviction that *Cut-Ups* were useful tools for subversive purposes. Still, he expressed reservations about what was to him, in essence, merely the use of collage. "I dig what you are doing just fine," wrote Gysin in response to one of Burroughs's effusive letters around 1961. "Always had a thing against collage... I like what I see just fine... it looks like an immense revolutionary demonstration in a backward country with my stuff up as street barriers..." Burroughs however was convinced that collage was a powerful strategy, calling it "navigational writing." "[T]hat is," he explained in the spring of 1964, "we start from present with the landmarks and chart a route to space, as all good writing does sooner or later, but that intersection point must also be drawn, painted and photographed." This group of collages was created with photos taken by Burroughs in Tangier.

## **Sinclair Beiles, William S. Burroughs,** **Gregory Corso, and Brion Gysin** **Minutes to Go, 1960**

Published in March 1960 by Two Cities Editions in San Francisco, this book is a collab-

oration with William S. Burroughs and Beat poets Gregory Corso and Sinclair Beiles. It represents the earliest collaboration between Gysin and Burroughs and occurred when both were in residence at the Beat Hotel in Paris. Corso and Beiles, as well as Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, were residents of the "Beat Hotel" for periods of time during the course of the 1950s, and Gysin was acquainted with them all. Whether or not Gysin can be considered a Beat artist though is open to question. Although during his time at the "Beat Hotel" he was enmeshed in the Beat milieu, his most important discovery, the *Cut-Up*, was flatly rejected by Beat poets like Ginsberg and Corso, despite the enthusiastic endorsement of their scion Burroughs.

## **William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin** **The Exterminator, 1960**

Gysin provided the art for the dust jacket of this book, which also reproduces the permutated poem "Junk Is No Good Baby." He described this collaboration with William S. Burroughs as a book that links images with words and with sounds. "In it are some permutated Poems, faced by a page of symbols which are immediately legible as are, in a fashion, the drawings which follow," he commented in a recorded interview, "who runs may read my drawing. Run faster to read better. I will show you this again when I make a picture with the words as they come back to me out of the tape recorder. After all, if you could look at the magnetic particles inside this plastic tape, you would see that my voice has translated them into a series of repetitive patterns. Word symbols turn back into visual symbols—titled back and forth through this 'me' my very own machine."

The name of this book is similar to William S. Burroughs's novel *Exterminator!* published in 1973 and is often confused with it.



**François Lagarde**  
**The Three Minds, 1978**

Developed during their collaboration on the collage volume *The Third Mind* in 1964–65, the idea that through psychic symbiosis between two minds, a third mind emerges, symbolically described Gysin and William S. Burroughs's relationship from 1958 until Gysin's death in 1986.

Although during the last two decades of their friendship they rarely lived in the same city, they remained close friends in constant correspondence, and performed readings together whenever possible. Even as Burroughs's fame as an author and a cult figure grew, he worked tirelessly to credit Gysin for his discoveries, and for his constant inspiration. Wrote Burroughs: "Brion Gysin is the only man that I've ever respected in my life. I've admired people, I've liked them, but he's the only man I've ever respected."

This photomontage is part of a portfolio of images of Gysin and Burroughs published in a deluxe edition in France by the photographer François Lagarde.

**William S. Burroughs with projections by Brion Gysin**

In a letter to Gysin, William S. Burroughs observed that "...looking at these paintings of yours is often like focusing an optical instrument... what you actually see at any given moment becomes only a part of a visual operation which includes an infinite series of images... a series of neural patterns which already exist in the human brain."

This photo-collage, probably made by Burroughs, features two photographs that might have captured a moment from one of Gysin's slide projection performances, in which Burroughs often participated by passively sitting at a desk in a corner like a kind of prop.

**Untitled (the virus board), ca. 1962**

This photograph has been identified by James Grauerholz, William S. Burroughs's archivist, as a still from the film *Towers Open Fire* (1963), a collaboration between Gysin, Burroughs, Ian Sommerville, Michael Portman, and the British underground filmmaker Anthony Balch. The scene, shot at the British Film Institute, depicts the meeting of an apocryphal "virus board." (In *The Third Mind* Burroughs observes that both words and images are viruses). Gysin has superimposed his own glyph in ink on top of posters of hieroglyphics that appear behind Burroughs.

**William S. Burroughs with Brion Gysin**  
**Notebook, 1962–67**

After Gysin shared the *Cut-Up Method* with him, William S. Burroughs began constructing collage scrapbooks that featured snippets from newspapers, his own photos, and photo-collages, as well as bits of his own texts, printed and written. Burroughs described his notebooks as "exercises to expand consciousness, to teach me to think in association blocks rather than words," and this body of work, to which Gysin also contributed by supplying drawings, and roller-grid backgrounds to lend order to the individual pages, would amount to at least ten notebooks of varying lengths created over a period of a decade. These notebooks would also serve as compositional models for *The Third Mind*, the 207-page collage book that Gysin and Burroughs created in 1964–65.

**William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin**  
***The Third Mind*, 1978**

Originally envisioned as a 207-page collage book, fourteen years after its conception *The Third Mind* appeared in a much more modest form. This Viking edition reprinted only twenty-six collages (not in the order of the original) and a selection of the original chapters.

**Brion Gysin and Keith Haring**  
***Fault Lines*, 1986**

The artist Keith Haring met Gysin in New York in 1978, and immediately perceived a connection between his graphic line and Gysin's calligraphic work.

This collaboration from 1986 represents a role reversal for Gysin. This book features excerpts from *The Last Museum*, a prose work by Gysin based on reminiscences from the "Beat Hotel" days, illustrated by erotic drawings by Haring.

**Brion Gysin and Ramuntcho Matta**  
***Kick*, 1982**

In 1982, Gysin met Ramuntcho Matta, son of the painter Roberto Matta, with whom Gysin had shared a studio in New York in the 1940s. The younger Matta and Gysin began a collaboration that produced a record in 1983 and several performances from 1982 through 1984.



## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

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### **Brion Gysin** *Dream Machine*

Exhibition from 16 october to 28 november 2010

#### OPENING TIMES

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wednesday to sunday - 1pm to 7pm

Free group tours  
saturday an sunday at 3pm  
or with advance booking

#### HOW TO GET THERE

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Bus C3 to Institut d'art contemporain  
Bus 99 to Ferrandière  
Métro ligne A to République  
Station vélo'v à 1 minute à pied  
The Institut d'art contemporain is near  
Lyon Part-Dieu station and a minute's  
walk from a Vélo'v bike-hire station

#### ADMISSION

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• full price : 4€ • reduce price : 2,50€

#### LIBRARY

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with advance booking

#### BOOKSHOP SPECIALIZED IN CONTEMPORARY ART

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Accessible during opening hours of the exhibitions

All the texts of this notebook were written by the New Museum, New York

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