



THE THINKER
Hans Ulrich Obrist in his office at the Serpentine Galleries in London. The artwork is by Douglas Coupland.

TRACKED

HANS ULRICH OBRIST

After 25 years in the art world, the Serpentine Galleries' maverick director is more prolific than ever.

BY HARRIET QUICK PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROBBIE LAWRENCE

THE MIND OF SWISS CURATOR Hans Ulrich Obrist twists and turns as he teases out and threads together observations, theories and opinions into an infinite web. “I believe in embracing chance in the process—serendipitous moments happen every day,” he says. Obrist, 48, is the director of London’s Serpentine Galleries, and true to his word, he always leaves time in his packed schedule for drop-in meetings. On this particular blustery day in June, unplanned visits from American neurologist Israel Rosenfeld and Italian architect Stefano Boeri are interspersed between meetings on upcoming events such as exhibits on interdisciplinary artists Marc Camille Chaimowicz and Helen Marten and the annual Marathon, a nonstop 24-hour creative symposium held every October in the Serpentine Pavilion.

He uses his frequent bucolic walks between the two Serpentine galleries, on either side of Serpentine Lake, to squeeze in numerous phone calls.

Obrist developed his obsession with art as a precocious teenager in Zurich, collecting postcards from Swiss galleries and museums and politely imploring artists he admired, like duo Peter Fischli and David Weiss, to let him visit them in their studios. After studying social science and economics at the University of St. Gallen, he made his official foray into the art world in 1991 with his first curatorial endeavor. Staged in the kitchen of his student apartment, the show caught the attention of the Fondation Cartier in Paris, which offered him a fellowship, and that in turn led the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris to offer him the position of “head of migratory

curation.” In 2006, Julia Peyton-Jones brought Obrist to Serpentine Galleries as her co-director (she recently stepped down).

Throughout his career, Obrist has always taken positions created specifically for him, rather than applying for preset jobs. And his engagement with the art world extends beyond the exhibition hall. Since 1996, for example, he has amassed an estimated 2,700 hours of recorded interviews with creative legends like Zaha Hadid and Gerhard Richter. Ever questioning, he continues to push the boundaries of his role. “The term *curator* has become overused,” he says. “I prefer the German word *Ausstellungsmacher* (“maker of exhibitions”) or [J.G.] Ballard’s notion of ‘junction maker’—making connections between objects, non-objects, hyper objects and people.” >

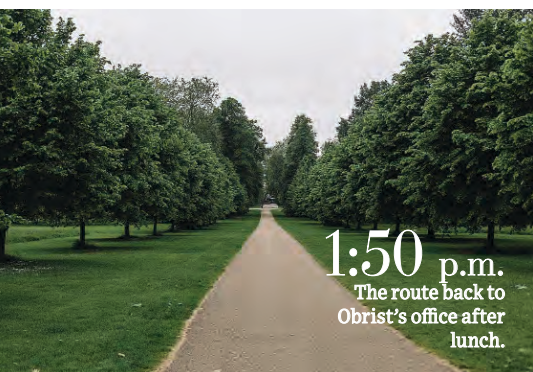


12:00 p.m.
Obrist in conversation with poet Robert Grenier.



9:45 a.m.
The 2016 Serpentine Pavilion construction is by Danish architect Bjarke Ingels—Obrist is involved in the Pavilion selection and creation each year.

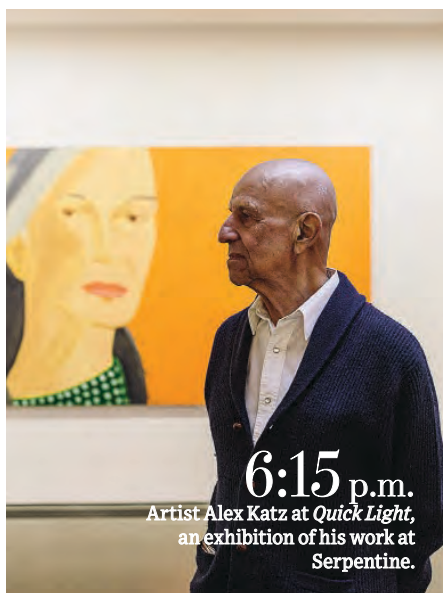
12:50 p.m.
Obrist crosses the bridge on his way to a meeting at the Serpentine Sackler Gallery. He makes this 10-minute journey at least three times a day.



1:50 p.m.
The route back to Obrist's office after lunch.



1:00 p.m.
Obrist meets with his staff at the Serpentine Sackler Gallery's restaurant, The Magazine.



6:15 p.m.
Artist Alex Katz at *Quick Light*, an exhibition of his work at Serpentine.

8:00 p.m.
Obrist hosts a poetry reading in collaboration with poet Vincent Katz, son of the artist.



52
weekends a year

The amount of time Obrist regularly spends away from London.

32,240
shows

The number of exhibits Obrist estimates he has attended in his lifetime.

3
quotes

The tally of phrases and fragments, written mostly on sticky notes, the curator posts to his Instagram nearly every day.

320
exhibitions

The number of shows Obrist has staged, including his first, a group presentation in the kitchen of his student apartment in 1991.

1
night assistant

The person Obrist employs to handle his correspondence overnight. "It means I can wake up more or less rested," he says.

40,000
books

The number of volumes Obrist owns between homes in London, Berlin and Paris. He orders at least one a day.

2,700
hours

The total duration of the interviews Obrist has recorded to date. He has published 40 volumes of these conversations.

12,000
email addresses

The number saved in Obrist's contacts.

120
countries

The global stops of Obrist's ongoing exhibition *Do It*, which has been running since 1994.●