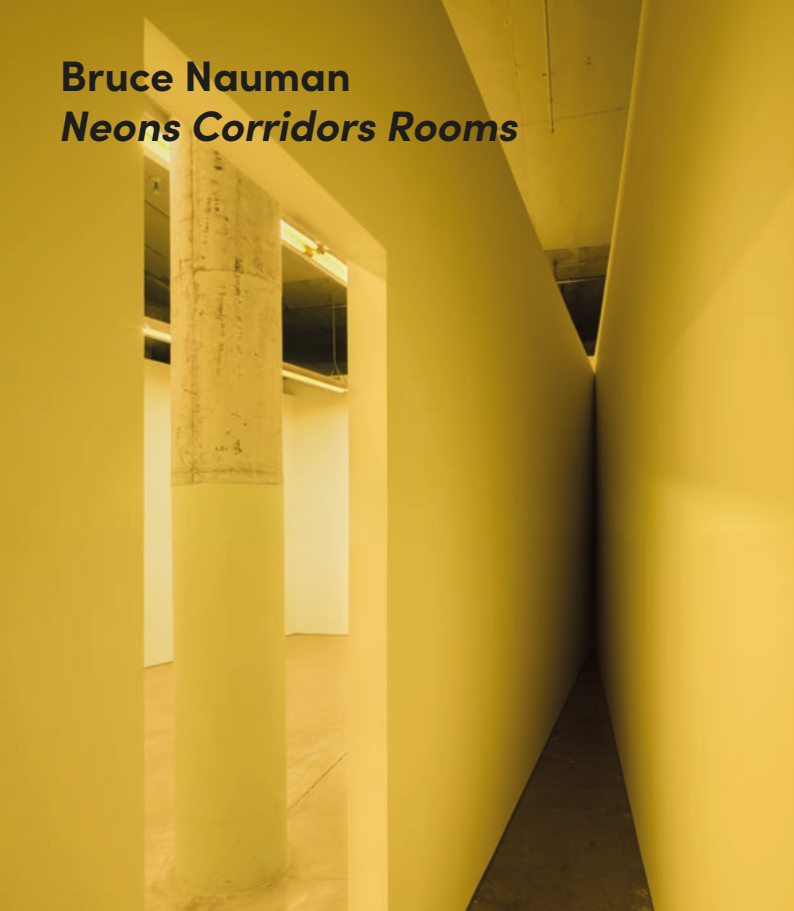


**Bruce Nauman**  
*Neons Corridors Rooms*



**Pirelli HangarBicocca**

**EN**

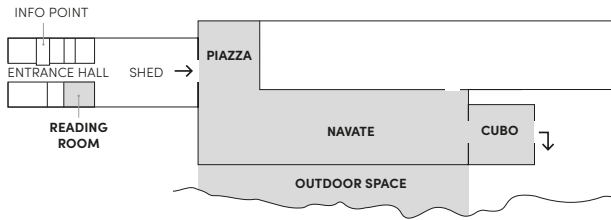
# Bruce Nauman

## Neons Corridors Rooms

15 September 2022 – 26 February 2023

Curated by Roberta Tenconi and Vicente Todolí  
with Andrea Lissoni, Nicholas Serota, Leontine Coelwijn,  
Martijn van Nieuwenhuyzen and Katy Wan

Exhibition organized by Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan,  
Tate Modern, London, and Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam



### Access to the artwork *Kassel Corridor: Elliptical Space*, 1972 [9]

To enter the corridor please ask the Info Point at the Entrance Hall for daily availability of one-hour slots and for key and guidelines.

### Cultural Mediation

Cultural mediators are present in the exhibition spaces to answer questions from the public, give information and context elements that can deepen the fruition of the artworks. The dialogue between mediator and visitor should take place in compliance with social distancing policies and the norms on the protection of personal health.

### Public Program

The exhibition is accompanied by a series of events that allow visitors to learn more about some of the themes of the show and of Bruce Nauman's work. Discover more on our website.

# Bruce Nauman

Bruce Nauman (Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1941; lives and works in New Mexico) is one of the most influential figures in international contemporary art. Since the 1960s, he has conducted a personal investigation into the potential and meaning of creating art, exploring a variety of media, including installation, video, sculpture, performance, photography, drawing, and sound, with a radical, cross-cutting approach. His work often aims to disrupt established parameters and references—spatial and temporal as well as conceptual—putting the viewer in a destabilizing condition. Drawing on artists and intellectuals such as Samuel Beckett, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Man Ray, and Ludwig Wittgenstein, Nauman addresses complex universal themes of the human condition, dealing with language, body, control, and identity.

His early studies in mathematics at the University of Wisconsin, which he undertook before moving on to art courses at the same university, were an important formative moment of knowledge and analysis of logical thought and the structures underlying reality. Nauman himself recalls, «I started out as a mathematician. I didn't become one, but I think there was a certain thinking process which was very similar and which carried over into art. This investigative activity is necessary. I think that we trust too much in accepting traditional validations.» After having transferred to the University of California in 1965 to follow the new, more open program of the Davis campus, near Sacramento, Nauman broadened his artistic path. He abandoned abstract painting and began to employ media that went beyond the two-dimensionality of the pictorial surface, coming into contact with the

demands and experimentations of the time. During those years, visual arts, as well as dance, music, and performance, searched for a shared ground and a language capable of dissolving all boundaries between artistic disciplines. Examples include the minimalist explorations of the sculptures and spatial installations of Richard Serra, Robert Morris, and Carl Andre, who reduced art to abstract forms in direct connection with the visitor's experience; the reflections on the body in the post-modern dance developed by Merce Cunningham and the Judson Dance Theater in New York (with figures such as Trisha Brown and Yvonne Rainer); the concept of the subjective duration of time in John Cage's musical compositions, as well as the use of silence as a sound element; and the experiments with the moving image in which the device of film is a means of probing the inner condition by artists such as Joan Jonas and Vito Acconci.

At the same time, Nauman has used the body as a research tool, a collector of physical and metaphorical experiences. Through the technique of casting, he has explored the scale and proportions of his own body in works such as *Wax Impressions of the Knees of Five Famous Artists* (1966)—a fiberglass and resin surface in which he impressed the cast of his knees five times—or *Henry Moore Bound to Fail* (1967/1970)—that shows Nauman's back with his arms tight with rope. This research has made the body itself object and subject: in *Neon Templates of the Left Half of My Body Taken at Ten-Inch Intervals* (1966) Nauman transposed his own figure three-dimensionally by arranging neon tubes vertically about 25 centimeters apart.

In addition to being conceived as a sculptural medium in motion, the artist's body became the focus of experimental



Bruce Nauman in his studio in Pasadena, California, c. 1970, inside his mock-up for *Green Light Corridor*, 1970  
Courtesy Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego and Frank J. Thomas Archives  
Photo Frank J. Thomas

performances that were also made in the absence of an audience and filmed with a 16mm camera or a fixed video camera. Nauman started adopting repeated movements, positions, and basic actions like walking—often evoked in the title of the works—to delineate the physical and mental space of his studio, and documented them to be played in a continuous loop, as in the case of *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner Around the Perimeter of a Square* (1967–68). In this sense, the studio took on the meaning of a place that, as a field of investigation, gives any activity—even the most basic—the status of art: «I didn't know what to do with all that time. There was nothing in the studio because I didn't have much money for materials.

So I was forced to examine myself and what I was doing there.» In this context, the artist created the seminal piece **Walk with Contrapposto** (1968), that would spark the reflections of many artworks made over the following years. The video shows the artist walking slowly back and forth along a corridor only 50 centimeters wide, specially constructed in his studio. From this moment onwards, the architectural structure of the corridor would become a recurrent theme in his artistic production and was developed into increasingly complex works and installations from the late 1960s. In fact, thanks to the suggestions of the critic and historian Marcia Tucker during a studio visit, the following year Nauman presented the narrow wooden corridor as an installation itself titled **Performance Corridor** (1969). In a letter to the curators James Monte and Marcia Tucker, he wrote, «The piece I explained is less a sculpture than a prop for the performance of a dance or studio exercise which I video-taped. In the museum situation it serves to severely restrict and then re-enforce the available audio, visual, and kinesthetic response of anyone who walks in or around the walls—probably the function of any artwork.» In this installation it is no longer just the artist's body, but that of the audience that becomes the potential performance subject, user, and at the same time activator of the work.

Over the following decades, Nauman extended his spatial and architectural investigation by creating numerous corridors and rooms, spaces designed to generate physical and mental experiences, such as **Corridor Installation (Nick Wilder Installation)** (1970) and **Kassel Corridor: Elliptical Space** (1972). Conceived for a solo show at the Nicholas Wilder Gallery in Los Angeles and for the fifth edition of documenta in Kassel respectively, these installations

expand on his observations on the perception of space and time (*Kassel Corridor*, for instance, is accessible to one person at a time for the duration of an hour) and of the self-image mediated by electronic and recording devices that often distort what we tend to define as “real.”

In the 1960s language already played an essential role in Nauman's artistic practice based on simple actions, particularly the use of the written word, voice and puns, which he sometimes even used as titles, often with ironic or ambiguous tones. These aspects are also widely present in the installations made with neon lights, which often appear as statements or exhortations in textual form, as in the iconic spiral entitled **The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths (Window or Wall Sign)** (1967) or in *Eat Death* (1972), in which the two terms—eat and death—overlap, creating a visual and conceptual short circuit. The exploration of linguistic processes also recalls the theories of the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), particularly his reflections on the relationship between thought and language in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) and *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). Nauman's sensitivity towards the potential of the word and its multiple meanings emerges in works that reflect on identity both in personal terms, as in the neon sign *My Last Name Exaggerated Fourteen Times Vertically* (1967), in which he wryly deforms the calligraphy of his own surname, and in a more universal and collective sense, as in the print on Mylar entitled *The True Artist Is an Amazing Luminous Fountain (Window or Wall Shade)* (1966).

Moreover, in some installations the analysis of how space can generate unsettling sensory experiences progressively

- leads the artist towards dematerialization: artworks are no longer necessarily physical structures, but it is sound—particularly the artist’s words and voice—that creates intangible architectures. Examples include **Raw Materials** (2004), that provides an insight into the sources of some of Nauman’s best-known works, **Get Out of My Mind, Get Out of This Room** (1968) and the so-called *Tunnels* developed in the 1970s and early 1980s. This series of imaginary underground architectures is an opportunity for Nauman to focus on empty, permeable, and unstable spaces with respect to the relationship between the idea and its formal embodiment. Even in his production from the 1980s onwards, which feature more explicit references to politics, the violence of human relations, sexuality, and death, the artist maintains that ability to shift continuously from one medium to another—such as in the neons **One Hundred Live and Die** (1984) and **Hanged Man** (1985), or the video installation *Clown Torture* (1987), a metaphor for the disturbing and controversial logics that regulate the society in which we live.

For over fifty years, Nauman has been expanding the definitions of sculpture and art, eschewing unambiguous interpretations. His production is featured in important collections, and his artistic career is marked by a series of solo exhibitions and prestigious awards, including the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement at the Venice Biennale in 1999 and the award for Best National Participation with the United States Pavilion in 2009. His pioneering research has influenced entire generations of artists, and his attention to the complexity of the everyday experience has kept him at the center of artistic debate to this day.

## The Exhibition

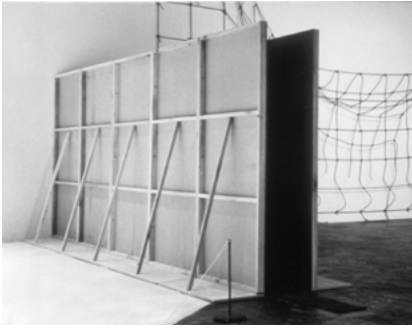
“Neons Corridors Rooms” features thirty works created since the second half of the 1960s with a focus on Nauman’s spatial research, bringing together for the first time in a single exhibition his various types of corridors and rooms, along with six neon works, five video and sound pieces, and a selection of *Tunnels*—his sculptural models for underground architecture. Realized from 1968, the corridors are structures designed to manipulate, record and challenge the visitors’ experience and movements within a space, forcing them to take a path that is both physical and emotional.

Spread throughout the more than 5,000 square meters of Pirelli HangarBicocca’s Navate and also in the Reading Room and the area outside the building, the exhibition narrative retraces almost forty years of Nauman’s research. Without following a strictly chronological order, the show highlights the artist’s developments, thematic connections, and continual investigations on architecture, the use of light, sound, language, and video, as well as the relevance of his work in the current debate.

### PIAZZA/ENTRANCE

- [1] The exhibition opens with an installation emblematic of Nauman’s experiments with space and light: **Dream Passage with Four Corridors** (1984), a structure with a cross-shaped plan consisting of four corridors, only two of which are open and accessible, converging at the center in a square room. Two tables, with two chairs each, are arranged in the intersecting area. One table





*Performance Corridor*,  
1969  
Solomon R.  
Guggenheim Museum,  
New York. Panza  
Collection, Gift, 1992  
Installation view,  
Whitney Museum, New  
York, 1969

merges sound and architecture. Two loudspeakers hidden inside the walls of a cramped room spread the artist's voice obsessively repeating in different intonations the imperative of the title "get out of my mind, get out of this room." The phrase resonates within the totally empty space, bare except for a light bulb hanging from the ceiling, also evoking a mental place.

- Developments and variations on the form of the first corridor emerge in subsequent works. Nauman introduces many proportions, floor plans, objects, sound or recording devices, lighting, and access modes on every occasion, so as to offer a different sensory and psychological condition for each visitor. From the narrow, elongated space of **Green Light Corridor** (1970), saturated with green fluorescent light, the show continues with the installation made of an elliptical plan entitled **Kassel Corridor: Elliptical Space** (1972) that, allowing only one visitor to enter at a time for a maximum of an hour, investigates both subjectivity in the perception of time and the relationship between public and private. Conceived by Nauman for the Galleria Françoise Lambert in Milan and exhibited at Pirelli HangarBicocca for the first time since then, **Funnel Piece (Françoise Lambert Installation)** (1971) features a wedge-shaped structure in which natural light concurs to the experience of the work. The distinctive wedge shape is, moreover, a device that the artist also adopted in other works to convey a sense of constriction. Similarly, **Corridor Installation with Mirror** –

**San Jose Installation (Double Wedge Corridor with Mirror)** (1970) is characterized by a V-shaped plan: the progressively shrinking space creates a growing sense of physical oppression in those who walk along it, causing a feeling of disorientation amplified by the presence of a mirror at the end, which only reflects the person close to the adjacent opening instead of the person in front of it.

- [11] The installation entitled **Wall with Two Fans** (1970), consisting of two fans positioned at the opposite ends of a wall to create an environment of sound and air, is characterized by the investigation of the dematerialization of architectural volumes and the "extremely tactile quality without having to be touched." A further variation of the typology of "U-shaped corridor" can be found in **Going Around the Corner Piece with Live and Taped Monitors** (1970), consisting of a system of a closed-circuit camera and of two monitors installed on either side of a wall, offering the visitor a distorted and unsettling experience of reality: on one side, the video camera seems to record what is seen on the first monitor, which instead reproduces a pre-registered image of the empty space; around the corner, on a second monitor positioned at the opposite end, the fleeting image of the visitor seen from behind appears, transmitted by the circuit system with a slight delay. One of the earliest—and most complex—corridors in which Nauman uses the video camera as a means to record an activity and let the viewer visually "enter" the work is **Corridor Installation (Nick Wilder Installation)** (1970). Composed of six corridors of different widths, not all accessible, it features a complicated system of closed-circuit cameras connected to four monitors and is designed to create spatial and temporal disorientation. Indeed, the viewers' perception of themselves is constantly

distorted by the perspective from which they see through the monitors their own image or the one recorded in a corridor ending in an otherwise inaccessible empty room. The footage in some cases undergoes alterations in terms of speed, or is rotated by 90 degrees.

## NAVATE/CENTRAL AREA

The central area of the exhibition features a series of installations that explore the sensory dimension and our emotional response to elements such as sound, light, movement, and the sense of touch in an increasingly complex way. This draws to research in the field of the psychology of perception and Gestalt psychology, a school that originated in Germany around the 1930s, also known as the “Psychology of form.” Transcending the idea of the artwork as an element to be enjoyed exclusively through

- [14] sight, ***Left or Standing, Standing or Left Standing*** (1971/1999) consists of a rectangular outer body encompassing a trapezoidal one, pervaded by an intense yellow light. Since its first presentation at the Leo Castelli Gallery in New York in 1971, the work has been accompanied by a short text: «In a way it's a poem that stands by itself, next to the space, without describing it. The writing is about language; it includes a kind of anxiety that the space seemed to generate.» While in *Left or Standing, Standing or Left Standing* it is the fluorescent light that generates
- [17] a residual, falsified image, in ***Corridor with a Parallax*** (1974) it is the rectangular bars applied to the inside of the walls at eye level that create an optical effect in the viewer who, when staring at them, has the illusion of perceiving a third square shape in correspondence with the empty space between them.

Referring back to his own oneiric activity and the recurring dream of a hotel corridor with a series of rooms, Nauman highlights the tension between public and private space in *False Silence* (1975) and *Changing Light Corridor with Rooms* (1971). Both installations consist of a narrow corridor onto which are grafted, approximately halfway down, two triangular rooms in the first case and a triangular and a rectangular room in the second.

- [19] Whereas in ***False Silence*** it is the recorded voice of the artist, intent on reading the verses of one of his poetic texts (“I don't sweat/I have no odor/I inhale, don't exhale/no urine...”) that calls into question the physical experience, in ***Changing Light Corridor with Rooms*** it is the two flashing lights with staggered timing located in each environment, that create a sense of bewilderment. A similar luminous rhythm returns as a destabilizing device in the adjacent neon entitled ***One Hundred Live and Die*** (1984). One of the artist's most famous and iconic installations, it consists of a monolith composed of four columns of neon tube text, each made up of 25 dichotomous pairs of verbs, forming 100 phrases associated with the concept of life and death: in the first and third columns, the sentences end with “die,” while in the second and fourth they end with “live.” By switching these antithetical moments on and off, the work metaphorically represents an (impossible) attempt to synthesize human existence through language.

## NAVATE/THIRD AREA

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the concept of inaccessibility, already explored in various previous corridors and rooms, converges in works that represent



spaces that are intangible or accessible to visitors only via mental and cognitive processes. In particular, Nauman designs a series of sculptures as utopian and virtual models of underground tunnels, architectures that have never been constructed. The imposing fiber-glass structure of **Untitled (Model for Trench, Shaft, and Tunnel)** (1978), formed by three partially suspended rings tangent to each other, seems to defy the laws of gravity and conveys an idea of instability and impermanence. Similarly, the three elements that form the sculpture **Three Dead-End Adjacent Tunnels, Not Connected** (1981), although contiguous, never intersect and they lead nowhere; whereas in **Model for Tunnels: Half Square, Half Triangle, and Half Circle with Double False Perspective** (1981) Nauman combines different forms and materials to create an indeterminate space charged with tension. As the artist underscores, «I find triangular spaces really uncomfortable, disorientating kinds of spaces, not like a circle or a square that give you security.» **Black Marble Under Yellow Light** (1981/1988) on the other hand, deals with the idea of the distorted perception of reality: while at first glance the thirty-five black marble cubes, arranged in an “X” in a room flooded with yellow fluorescent light, appear identical, there is a discrepancy between them. Half of the cubes are in fact slightly smaller, so that the whole displays an imperceptible dynamism and imbalance.

Although Nauman has never been openly associated with any political movement, themes like the sense of injustice, cruelty, and the awkwardness of social relations are central to his practice. In **Musical Chairs** (1983), for example, both the title and the suspended composition evoke the typical children’s party game. However,

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*Double Steel Cage Piece*, 1974  
Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam  
Installation view,  
Sperone Westwater  
Fischer, New York, 1976

in the artist’s words, the work is also a reflection on the underlying violence: «The chair becomes a symbol for a figure—a stand-in for the figure. A chair is used, it is functional; but it is also symbolic. Think of the electric chair, or that chair they put you in when the police shine the lights on you.» A sense of frustration and oppression can also be perceived in other installations: in

[22]

[21]

[20]

**Double Steel Cage Piece** (1974) two metal cages placed one inside the other form a narrow corridor that is difficult to traverse and that leads nowhere (the inner room is inaccessible), subjecting the visitor who decides to enter to the inquisitorial gaze of those outside. Similar observations recur in the neon works displayed along the left wall of the Navate, with which the artist probes the formal and psychological nature of language and the transformative potential of the written text. In **Run from Fear, Fun from Rear** (1972), Nauman exploits the ambiguities of language and plays with double entendre, while in **Human Nature/Knows Doesn’t Know** (1983/1986) it is the words themselves that create an

- [16] emotional tension, and in *Hanged Man* (1985) the game of hangman tauntingly recalls the disturbing aspects of childhood and the multiple facets of human existence.

## CUBO AND OUTDOOR SPACE

- [28] The installation displayed in the Cubo, *Mapping the Studio II with color shift, flip, flop, & flip/flop (Fat Chance John Cage)* (2001), resumes the key role of the studio in Nauman's creative practice. Here Nauman virtually transposes his work space in New Mexico to another physical location through seven large projections that simultaneously portray the "activities" that take place there at night. On the basis of forty-two hours of footage shot over seven months, the images were edited into a sequence of almost six hours, then chromatically altered or reversed, creating a rarefied atmosphere in which nothing (apparently) happens for most of the time, except for the occasional passage of a cat, mouse or a moth, or the howl of a few coyotes in the distance. The title's explicit reference to the artist John Cage (1912–1992) is linked to the work's element of chance and indeterminacy: while Cage based the creation of his sound and musical compositions on these concepts, Nauman transposes them here visually, leaving room for uncontrollable external factors, and using the generally overlooked and seemingly irrelevant aspects of the world around us as artistic material.

- [29] *Raw Materials* (2004) creates a mere soundscape. Commissioned for Tate Modern's Turbine Hall in 2004 and displayed outdoors for the first time at Pirelli

HangarBicocca, it reproduces an audio loop of twenty-one recordings associated with the same number of works previously made by the artist, some of which are featured in the exhibition—*One Hundred Live and Die; False Silence; Get Out of My Mind, Get Out of This Room; Left or Standing, Standing or Left Standing; Anthro/Socio (Rinde Spinning)*. Through the creation of a kind of intangible corridor formed solely by sound, Nauman stages a complex allegory about the deeper meaning of communication. Finally, the video installation *Anthro/Socio (Rinde Spinning)* (1992)—featured in the Reading Room and accessible from the museum's entrance hall as an epilogue or prologue to the exhibition narrative—presents the image of the rotating head of performer Rinde Eckert obsessively repeating "Feed Me/Eat Me/Anthropology," "Help Me/Hurt Me/Sociology," and "Feed Me/Help Me/Eat Me/Hurt Me." Expanding on his research into the deconstruction of language and the use of the disembodied voice, even the title evokes Nauman's perpetual interest in the observation of human nature.

[30]

## Selected Exhibitions

Many internationally renowned institutions have presented Bruce Nauman's personal exhibitions and projects, including M Woods, Beijing (2022); Punta della Dogana/ Pinault Collection, Venice (2021–22); Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (2021); Tate Modern, London (2020–21); Museo Picasso Malaga (2019); Schaulager, Basel, MoMA Museum of Modern Art, and MoMA PS1, New York (2018–19); Philadelphia Museum of Art (2016); Fondation Cartier, Paris (2015); Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego (2008); Berkeley Art Museum, Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Turin, and Menil Collection, Houston (2007–08); Tate Modern, London (2004), as well as the great retrospective held in 1993–95 at Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, and Hirshhorn Museum, Washington D.C. His first retrospective was presented at Los Angeles County Museum of Art and traveled to Whitney Museum of American Art, New York as well as other international institutions (1972–74). Nauman also took part in many group shows and biennials, including Venice Biennale (2015, 2013, 2007, 1999, 1987, 1980, 1978) and documenta, Kassel (1992, 1982, 1977, 1972, 1968). He has been the recipient of numerous awards and honors, such as Frederick Kiesler Prize for Architecture and the Arts, Austria (2014); Centennial Medal Laureates, American Academy, Rome (2009); Beaux-Arts Magazine Art Awards: Best International Artist, Paris, Praemium Imperiale Prize for Visual Arts, Japan (2004); Honorary Doctor of Arts, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia (2000); and Wolf Foundation Prize in Arts (Sculpture), Israel (1993). In 2009 he represented the United States at the 53. Venice Biennale winning the Golden Lion for best international participation, while in 1999 he won the Golden Lion for career achievement at the 48. Venice Biennale.

This publication accompanies the exhibition "Neons Corridors Rooms" by Bruce Nauman

### Lenders

ARTIST ROOMS: Tate and National Galleries of Scotland; Centre Pompidou, Paris, Musée national d'art moderne-Centre de création industrielle; Collection Benesse Holdings, Inc./Benesse House Museum, Naoshima; Collection of Jack and Nell Wendler, Courtesy of Wendler Family LLC and Sperone Westwater, New York; Contemporary Art Collection "la Caixa" Foundation; D.Daskalopoulos Collection; Dia Art Foundation; Electronic Arts Intermix; Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation, permanent loan to the Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel; Froehlich Collection, Stuttgart; Hamburger Kunsthalle; Herbert Foundation, Ghent; IVAM, Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Generalitat; Kunstmuseum Basel; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam; Bruce Nauman Studio; Sammlung FER Collection; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Panza Collection; Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam; Tate, London, and all those who prefer to remain anonymous

### Acknowledgments

Vincent Baby, Francesco Barcella, Laura Bechter, Massimo Berardini, Anna Bernardini, Aurora Bertoli, Nimfa Bisbe, Katrien Blanchaert, Elena Bonanno di Linguaglossa, Achim Borchardt-Hume, Ben Borthwick, Francesco Bussi, Francesca Caccia, Rebecca Cleman, Leontine Coelewij, Giorgio Colombo, Nicole Colombo, Raffaella Cortese, Andrea Crapanzano, Federico Dalla Pozza, Anny de Decker, Hamilcar Di Carlo, Domenica Di Paola, Roberto Dipasquale, Teodora di Robilant, Federico Elia, James Elliot, Ursula Engler, Joelle Griesmaier, Matilde Guidelli-Guidi, Charlotte Gutzwiller, Laura Hanssens, Megumi Hiraiwa, Antonio Hornem, Jette Hoog Antink, Hai Kazusa, Rachel Kent, Iyavly Kitanov, Alice Labor, Françoise Lambert, Marco Lanata, Laurine Le Balan, Andrea Lissoni, Jane Livingston, Greg Lofthouse, Stella Lohaus, Gemma Lopez, Alexis Lowry, Michele Maddalo, Deborah Maggioletto, Céline Makragic, Paolo Bruno Malaspina, Elisabeth Manchester, Davide Memeo, Maria Miranda, Frances Morris, Gregor Muir, Carol Neseemann Klebanoff, Giuseppina Panza, Elizabeth Peck, Giulia Pellegrini, Elena Perugi, Patrick Petemader, Iolanda Ratti, Brad Sagona, Hong Sang Hee, Dieter Schwarz, Clara Scola, Marco Secondin, Nicholas Serota, Joan Simon, Gian Enzo Sperone, Francesco Stocchi, Gloria Sutton, Liang Tian, Francesca Trovalusci, Maya Ulrich, Martijn van Nieuwenhuyzen, Ioanna Vryzaki, Taylor Walsh, Katy Wan, Rein Wolfs

**Special thanks** to Bruce Nauman Studio, especially Juliet Myers, Chelsea Weathers, and Jenn Shapland, to Angela Westwater and Katherine Borkowski of Sperone Westwater gallery and to Panza Collection Initiative (Guggenheim Museum), in particular to Francesca Esmay and Ted Mann, that were essential for the research for the exhibition and the catalogue

"Neons Corridors Rooms" has been supported also by TERRA Foundation for American Art

**TERRA**  
FOUNDATION FOR AMERICAN ART

Texts by  
Mariagiulia Leuzzi

Graphic Design  
Leftloft

Editing and Translation  
Malerba Editorial & Partners, Milan

Printed: September 2022

Cover: *Left or Standing, Standing or Left Standing*, 1971/1999 (detail)  
Dia Art Foundation; Partial gift, Lannan Foundation, 2013  
Installation view, Dia Art Foundation, Beacon, New York, 2016. Courtesy Dia Art Foundation, New York Photo Bill Jacobson Studio, New York

For all images: © Bruce Nauman, by SIAE 2022  
Courtesy the artist and Sperone Westwater, New York, unless otherwise stated

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Pirelli HangarBicocca is a non-profit foundation, established in 2004, which has converted a former industrial plant in Milan into an institution for producing and promoting contemporary art.

This dynamic center for experimentation and research covers 15,000 square meters, making it one of the largest contiguous exhibition spaces in Europe. It presents major solo shows every year by Italian and international artists, with each project conceived to work in close relation to the architecture of the complex, and explored in depth through a calendar of parallel events. Admission to the space and the shows is completely free of charge, and cultural mediators are on hand to help the public connect with the art. Since 2012, Vicente Todoli has been the foundation's Artistic Director.

The complex, which once housed a locomotive factory, includes an area for public services and educational activities, and three exhibition spaces whose original twentieth-century architectural features have been left clearly visible: Shed, Navate, and Cubo.

As well as its exhibitions program and cultural events, Pirelli HangarBicocca also permanently houses one of Anselm Kiefer's most important site-specific works, *The Seven Heavenly Palaces 2004-2015*, commissioned for the opening of Pirelli HangarBicocca, while the exterior area hosts *La Sequenza* (1971-81) by Fausto Melotti.



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