

**Artsy:** ‘Non-Performance Art: Ugo Rondinone Fills the Rockbund Art Museum with Sleeping Clowns’, October 22th, 2014

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## Non-Performance Art: Ugo Rondinone Fills the Rockbund Art Museum with Sleeping Clowns

ARTSY EDITORIAL  
3 DAYS AGO

Ugo Rondinone’s exhibition “Breathe, Walk, Die” is very much informed by the unusual structure it inhabits. Set near Shanghai’s Huangpu River, the Rockbund Art Museum is a six-story, art deco building, originally constructed for the Royal Asiatic Society in the 1930s. It’s tall and narrow, with galleries separated by a steep staircase that is best climbed with the help of the wrought iron railings. But instead of treating the museum’s floors as distinct spaces, the Swiss-born, New York-based artist has used the building’s verticality to create one coherent installation—what could be summed up as a museum-sized core sample extracted from a rainbow.

The interior walls of the museum are painted in super-smooth gradient tones of spray paint—created using just three colors per floor, transitioning from cool to warm like the progression from the center to the outside of a rainbow. Colored plastic sheets take the place of windowpanes, tinting the light that enters the gallery to match the wall color. A full spectrum of light is also seen in the circular target paintings on the walls, composed of blurred rings of color, as well as in the outfits of 40 live clowns that inhabit the exhibition. Rondinone took inspiration for their glorious costumes from a Google image search, resulting in a chaotic combination of hues, tones, and textures. Each dons a mask, custom-made to fit his or her face, completely covering their eyes to prevent them from inadvertently making eye contact. This is non-performance art; Rondinone has instructed the clowns not to interact with visitors. Instead, they sleep or quietly meditate. Padding is built into the clowns’ outfits to keep them



Reading is sent into the clown's hands to keep them comfortable, an important detail given that they will inhabit the museum, working in shifts, from open to close for the four-month duration of the exhibition.

“Breathe, Walk, Die” is partly inspired by Rondinone’s relationship with the beat poet John Giorno, but not because of the rainbow’s place in the gay rights movement. Giorno is a Buddhist, and Rondinone has said the exhibition title is a description of life excised of worldly anxieties and ambitions.

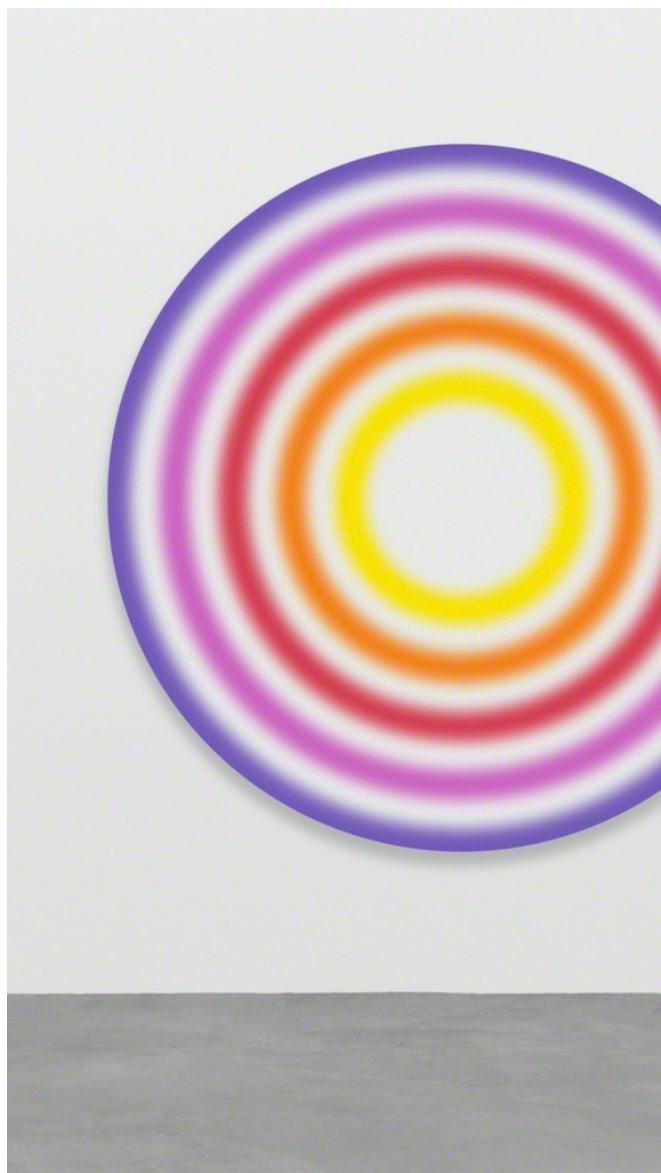
In a period optimistically described as “late capitalism,” we tend to ask each other what we do, not who we are. In this show, the emphasis is on being, instead of doing. For the clowns, most of whom were found through local talent agents, doing nothing—not even checking their cell phones—may prove very difficult indeed.

—[Sam Gaskin](#)

*“Ugo Rondinone: Breathe, Walk, Die” is on view at the Rockbund Art Museum in Shanghai through January 4, 2015.*

[Explore the Rockbund Art Museum on Artsy.](#)

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Ugo Rondinone  
*fünfzehn hntermärz zweitausendunddreizehn*, 2013  
Rockbund Art Museum



Ugo Rondinone  
*vocabulary of solitude*, 2014  
 Rockbund Art Museum



Ugo Rondinone  
*no one's voice*, 2006  
 Rockbund Art Museum



Ugo Rondinone  
*sunset i-v*, 2014  
Rockbund Art Museum