

Radenko Milak,  
*Zang Tumb Tumb*,  
2018, watercolor,  
48.5 x 35 cm.  
Courtesy of Gallery  
PRISKA PASQUER,  
Cologne.

*Zang Tumb Tumb* is  
the title of a sound  
poem and concrete  
poem written by  
the Italian futurist  
Filippo Tommaso  
Marinetti.



Bosnian artist Radenko Milak interrogates the notion of private and public memory through the medium of painting, using watercolors to translate photographs of “planetary events”. In his *365 (Images of Time)* project from 2014 — the title refers to 365 watercolors, one each for every day of the calendar year — Milak questions the visual presentation of, amongst other things, the wars which have dominated his country’s history. In the same expansive series, Milak also included numerous watercolors that reference historic musical events. Picking up on that, *Hyper!* curator Max Dax commissioned Milak Radenko to paint new works that specifically feature images relating to the music world. The result is a series of 31 watercolors — its number referencing the 31 possible days of a fictional month — entitled *Musical Transcendences*. As is the case with the artist portraits by Andrea Stappert, for the *Hyper!* exhibition, many of Milak’s motifs explicitly show events and musicians that would otherwise have marked a gap in the show’s narrative.

This page and following pages:  
Radenko Milak, *Musical Transcendences*,  
2018, 31 watercolors, variable dimensions.  
Courtesy of Gallery PRISKA PASQUER,  
Cologne.

# Events, which led to big changes

**Max Dax:** You exhibited your project *365 (Images of Time)*, which consists of 365 watercolor paintings of “planetary events”, at Kunsthalle Darmstadt in 2014. For each day of the year, you painted a calendar sheet that referenced a historical — or planetary — moment. I noticed that next to war, science and politics you also included many events linked to music.

**Radenko Milak:** That’s why I painted 31 musical moments for the *Hyper!* exhibition. I immediately had some motifs ready in my head: The jazz band from the *Star Wars* movies, or Sun Ra. But I soon noticed that I needed some help. Knowing that you come from the music world, I felt free to ask for your input. Then I was positively surprised by the amount of suggestions that came from you ...

**Well, that wasn’t too difficult. I could have sent you many more suggestions. But tell me: Since it played such a significant role in your *365* project, what does music mean to you?**

When I started *365* I didn’t have a clear plan for which kinds of events I wanted to choose. It really was an adventure for me to browse through the 2013 years since anno Domini to find out what has actually happened. A lot of times I felt more connected to musical events that had taken place on a specific day than to events from politics or whatever. I noticed that particularly in the 20th century, music started to play a much more important role in our lives than ever before. Music, and especially popular music, really became a significant part of all our lives. Of course, this varies from country to country, and I can only speak for my generation, but music was essential in the sense that it defined our lifestyle. Music was more important than film or art in that sense. It was and remains omnipresent.

**One of the great music paintings from your *365* series was your July 1, 1979 entry, highlighting the launch of the first Sony Walkman. I found that remarkable: You did not only pick birthdays or obituaries, but also technological innovations as motifs.**

The Sony Walkman was a milestone, a real game changer for everyone. There is a time before and after the Walkman. Before its launch you were bound to listen to music at home. Since its introduction to the consumer market, you could listen to your music literally everywhere. The Walkman changed our approach to music and thus also to our lives. For the exhibition I painted the Technics MK2. This record player was the instrument that allowed a whole new generation of DJs to spin records in a new way. It was the beginning of DJ culture. But the majority of my music-related paintings for *365* featured portraits of composers or musicians. I especially liked my take on Annie Leibovitz’ iconic portrait of John Lennon and Yoko Ono for the cover of *Rolling Stone* magazine. They both are not only essential musicians of the 20th century. But the tragedy of John Lennon’s assassination on December 8, 1980 somehow even made him larger than life, I mean: even larger than he had been before.

**For your new series, you painted a watercolor of the Spotify logo. Even though music streaming existed before, this start-up seems to symbolize the change.**

You have to find iconic images for what you want to express, otherwise the pictures are pointless. Even though we have new products every year that somehow alter the way we listen to music, Spotify is different. With the rise of flat-rate streaming services, we have entered the age of dematerialized music



consumption. The compact disc, another invention from the 1980s, is disappearing at light speed. Musicians and music companies have also changed their release habits since then. We seem to be going back to an age where musicians released one single after another. The idea of the album seems to become a concept of the past. My *Musical Transcendences* somehow try to reflect such events, which led to big changes.

**Among those *Musical Transcendences*, I especially like the painting of the ceremony in October 2012 when Bob Dylan was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Barack Obama.**

That was one of your suggestions and I remember how I immediately started to paint this one. I have never worked like that before and I really enjoyed your input. I researched and checked each and



Radenko Milak, Berlin, 2014.  
Photo: Luci Lux.

every of your suggestions and every single time I learned a lot of things that broadened my musical horizon. But let me add a few words about the Dylan and Obama watercolor. To me, the agency photo that this watercolor is based on is a tell tale sign. It says a lot about the sometimes visible, sometimes invisible connection between art and politics. Through the centuries, politicians of all kinds have always tried to endorse artists and musicians. They either commissioned representative works by composers or sculptors, or they tried to rub off onto themselves some of the glamor that superstar musicians emanate. In moments like these you can sense the importance of music. And Bob Dylan in particular is a unique auteur, composer and singer who transcended the second half of the 20th century.

**You also painted counter examples like the dis-**



**ingenuous handshake between Elvis Presley and Richard Nixon, as well as the infamous meeting between Kanye West and the President-elect, Donald Trump, in December 2016.**

I cheer the world of social mass media. These photos exist because the politician wants to have a picture taken with the music idol. I am pretty sure that Andy Warhol also would have processed the images of Kanye West and Donald Trump into works of his own. But in the specific case of West and Trump, I still cannot figure out how such a musician with such an avant-garde catalog of music allows himself to be endorsed by a politician like Donald Trump, who has such an obviously anti-avant-garde agenda. The connection between these two personalities — I still cannot understand it.

**When you painted the series of *Musical Tran-***

***scendences*, did you listen to the music that you were currently dealing with?**

Yes, definitely. It repeatedly helped me to get into the right mood. But apart from that: After having done all my homework and research, I usually need maybe two hours to finally start and finish one watercolor. That's a perfect timeframe to listen to one album once or twice. These painting sessions with music have often been very intense. Also because some of the musical moments that you had suggested confronted me with inspiring new music and new artists.

**Is there a watercolor that you would like to comment on?**

I really like the felt-wrapped grand piano by Joseph Beuys, because it reminded me of the installation of his that I had seen at Centre Pompidou in Paris a couple of years ago. It was a different installation,

1 | 2

**1** Radenko Milak, *LA GUERRE EST FINIE (SI VOUS LE VOULEZ)* aka *WAR IS OVER (IF YOU WANT IT)*, 2018, watercolor, 35 x 48.5 cm. Courtesy of Gallery PRISKA PASQUER, Cologne.

*WAR IS OVER (IF YOU WANT IT)* was an international campaign for world peace, launched by Yoko Ono and John Lennon during Christmas 1969.

**2** Radenko Milak, *Edward Snowden*, 2018, watercolor, 35 x 48.5 cm. Courtesy of Gallery PRISKA PASQUER, Cologne.

The exiled whistle-blower Edward Snowden stars in the music video *Exit* by Jean Michel Jarre, 2016.



1  
2

Radenko Milak **1** *Richard Nixon and Elvis Presley* (President Nixon and Elvis Presley meet at the White House, December 21, 1970.) **2** *Laibach in North Korea* (As the first rock band from a Western country, Laibach perform a live concert in Pyongyang, North Korea, in August 19, 2015.), each 2018, watercolor, 35 x 48.5 cm.  
Courtesy of Gallery PRISKA PASQUER, Cologne.





1 2  
3

Radenko Milak **1** *Bob Dylan and Barack Obama* (Bob Dylan gets awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by Barack Obama on May 29, 2012.) **2** *Donald Trump and Kanye West* (Donald Trump endorses Kanye West at the Trump Tower in New York on December 13, 2016.) **3** *The Alien Band* (based on a scene from the *Star Wars IV* movie), each 2018, watercolor, 48.5 x 35 cm (1+2) and 35 x 48.5 cm (3). Courtesy of Gallery PRISKA PASQUER, Cologne.





but I remember a very specific feeling I had in that room. I was impressed by how Beuys had taken the grand piano out of its typical context — either the concert hall or a bourgeois apartment. And in my watercolor I tried to reflect and emulate that feeling of focalization. I also like it because it's so different from the others.

#### What makes it so different?

Joseph Beuys' grand piano is not primarily connected to a moment in music history. It's more connected to the art world. But I also understood that the *Hyper!* exhibition is exactly about this: the cross-connections and the convergence between art and music. What happens if Joseph Beuys decides to place a grand piano out of context and to thus extend our perception of both worlds, the art world and the music world? As opposed to my watercolor of Pete Townshend destroying his guitar during a

1 2  
3

Radenko Milak **1** *The Act of Destroying a Piano* (Friedrich Achleitner, Konrad Bayer, Gerhard Rühm and Oswald Wiener of the Wiener Gruppe destroy a grand piano on April 15, 1959.) **2** *Madonna Kisses Britney* (Britney Spears and Madonna kiss on stage during a performance at the 2003 MTV Video Music Awards in New York City.) **3** *The Beatles Rooftop Concert* (The Beatles play their last concert as a band on January 30, 1969, on a rooftop in Savile Row, London.), each 2018, watercolor, 35 x 48.5 cm (1+3) and 48.5 x 35 cm (2). Courtesy of Gallery PRISKA PASQUER, Cologne.

live concert with The Who. Pete Townshend might possibly indeed be quoting fluxus art happenings on a rock music stage, but he also might not have been aware of the art historical context at all. Either way, both watercolors describe strong tensions and thus important moments of musical transcendence.

**So let us talk about your portrait of Robert Johnson. I could imagine that this one must have been a difficult one to paint.**

The problem with Robert Johnson is that only two photographs of him exist at all. It is very difficult to find the character in either one. Listening to his *King of the Delta Blues* record did help a lot. I somehow found a connection.

**Robert Johnson represents the essence of the blues. Some say he even sold his soul to the**





**Devil to really learn how to play the guitar. Those are really the kind of stories that legends are made of. What's your take on modern myths such as the landmark music club Ratinger Hof in Dusseldorf?**

I really liked to paint that one. I had never heard of the place until you suggested it to me to paint. I then started to read everything about that place and I learned about Imi Knoebel painting the walls of the Ratinger Hof white, just like in a gallery white cube. I would have loved to have been there when it happened. I then found this elegant photograph of the Ratinger Hof on the Internet and painted it in one go.

**“In one go ...” — let me ask you one last question: How did you learn to paint such precise watercolors? From the distance they look like photographs.**

I would probably say that I have the eye to keep reality in my paintings. The necessary techniques and methods I learned in art school. But the moment it all changed was when Internet research became easily accessible. Suddenly I had all these images just a mouse click away. It was as if the museums had come to my living room via that little interface, the computer. My work is based on the availability of images, and the Internet is the biggest archive of images imaginable. I am constantly online. I browse through the world of images on a daily basis. And to then paint some of these images was just going a step further. The black and white photo-realistic mode I am painting in is in fact the perfect frame for every watercolor. Regardless of what kind of image or event I am reproducing, it always looks the same, yet different. And that to me is the rule of the series. ~

1 2  
3 4

Radenko Milak **1** *Maria Callas Rome Walkout* (Maria Callas rehearses Bellini's *Norma* in Rome on May 4, 1958, before she breaks off the evening performance at the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma after the first act, causing a huge scandal in the opera world.) **2** *Michael Jackson* (Michael Jackson performs his never before seen "anti-gravity lean" in his spectacular video to his song *Smooth Criminal* in 1987.) **3** *Technics 1210 MK2* (The invention of the Technics 1210 MK2 turntable in 1978 led to the rise of DJ culture as we know it today.) **4** *Pete Townshend Destroys a Guitar* (Pete Townshend smashes a guitar during a concert performance with The Who.), each 2018, watercolor, 35 x 48.5 cm. Courtesy of Gallery PRISKA PASQUER, Cologne.



Radenko Milak, 4'33",  
2018, watercolor,  
48.5 x 35 cm.  
Courtesy of Gallery  
PRISKA PASQUER,  
Cologne.

On August 29,  
1952, David Tudor  
performed John  
Cage's legendary  
composition 4'33" —  
for the three silent  
movements totaling  
4 minutes and 33 sec-  
onds — for the first  
time in Woodstock,  
New York, causing a  
scandal in the music  
world.

# 4'33"

*for any instrument or combination of instruments*

John Cage

**I**

60 J =  $\longleftrightarrow$   
4/4

14

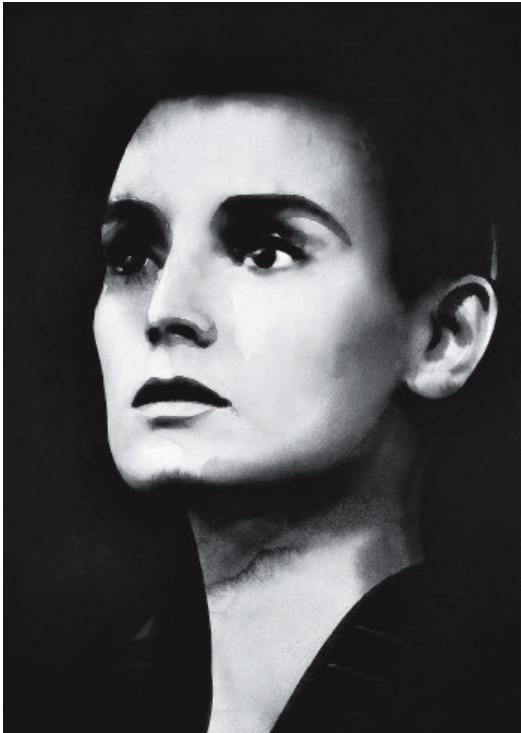
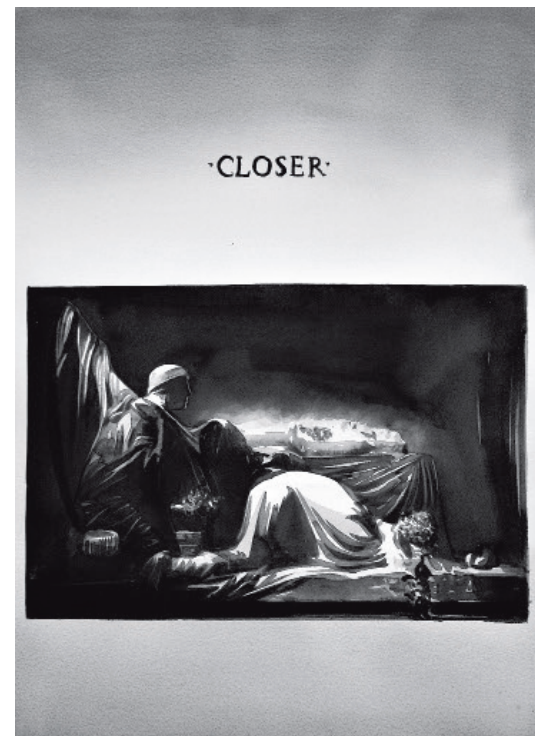
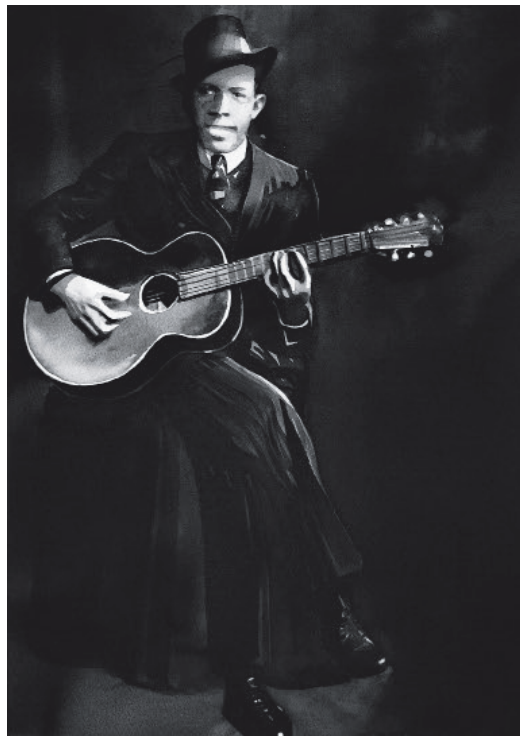
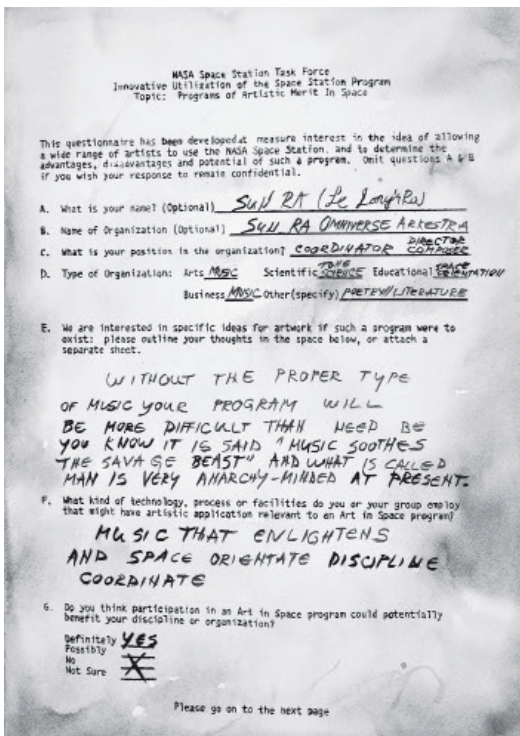
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**II**

60 J =  $\longleftrightarrow$   
4/4

16

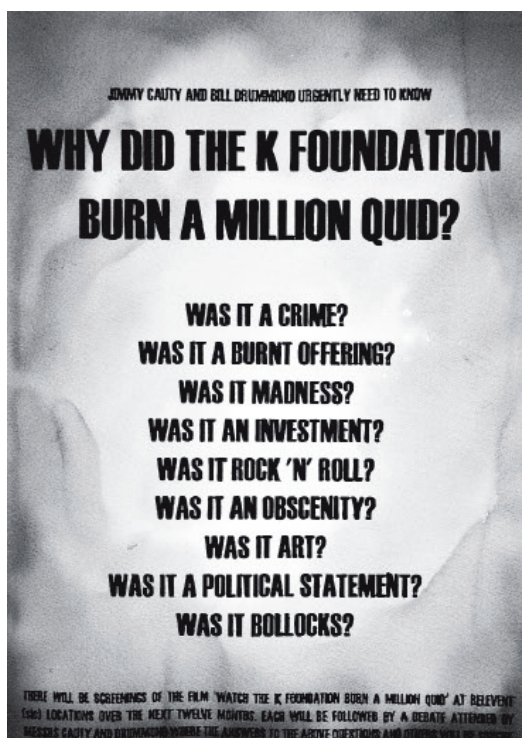
The image shows a watercolor reproduction of a musical score for John Cage's 4'33". The score is divided into two main sections, I and II. Section I consists of five staves of music, each with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The first staff has a tempo marking of 60 J (beats per minute) with a double-headed arrow indicating a range, and a 4/4 time signature. The first staff is numbered 14 and the second staff is numbered 33. Section II also consists of two staves of music, each with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The first staff of section II has a tempo marking of 60 J with a double-headed arrow and a 4/4 time signature, and is numbered 16. The background of the score is a light, textured watercolor wash.



1 2 3  
4 5 6

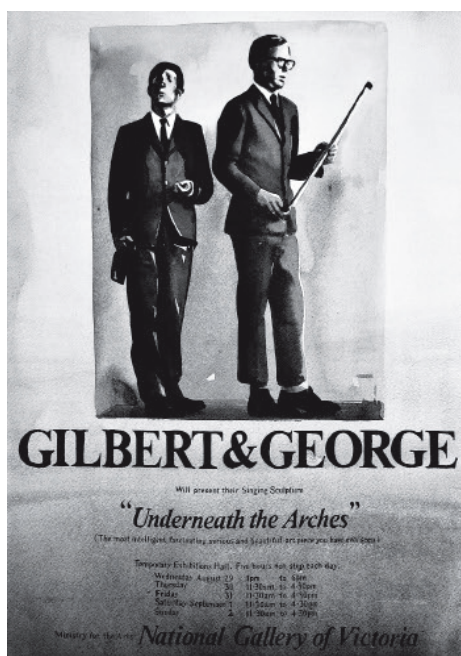
Radenko Milak **1** *Sun Ra* (In 1973, the legendary avant-garde jazz musician and big band leader Sun Ra wanted to become an astronaut and applied at NASA.) **2** *Portrait of Robert Johnson* (Only two known photographs exist of Robert Johnson, the single most influential blues musician of all times. The legend goes that Johnson sold his soul to the devil to acquire his incredible guitar picking skills.) **3** *Joy Division's Closer Album* (Joy Division's album *Closer* was released on July 18, 1980, exactly two months after the suicide of singer Ian Curtis on May 18, 1980. The album cover by Peter Saville features a photograph of the Appiani family tomb in Genoa's Monumental Cemetery of Staglieno.) **4** *Sinéad O'Connor* (In 1992, less than two weeks after tearing up a photo of the Pope on *Saturday Night Live*, Sinéad O'Connor took the stage at Bob Dylan's 30th Anniversary concert at Madison Square Garden, New York, and was met with an overwhelming barrage of boos.) **5** *Portrait of Billie Holiday* (Billie Holiday was an African-American superstar during the segregation era in the USA.) **6** *Valeska Gert* (Almost three decades before John Cage composed his seminal piece *4'33"*, Valeska Gert (1892–1978) invented the dance performance *Pause*, during which she froze her movements to a standstill for three minutes.), each 2018, watercolor, 48.5 x 35 cm.  
Courtesy of Gallery PRISKA PASQUER, Cologne.





1 2  
3 4 5 | 7  
6 8

Radenko Milak, each  
2018, watercolor,  
48.5 x 35 cm  
(1, 4, 5, 6 and 7)  
and 35 x 48.5 cm  
(2, 3 and 8).  
Courtesy of Gallery  
PRISKA PASQUER,  
Cologne.







Spotify®

1 2  
3 4 5 | 7  
6 8

**1** *K Foundation* (Flyer announcing the screening of the film *Watch the K Foundation Burn a Million Quid*.) **2** *Ratinger Hof* (During the 1980s, the Dusseldorf art and music scene met at Ratinger Hof, a bar that was run by Carmen Knoebel, the wife of the painter Imi Knoebel.) **3** *Beuys* (For his installation *Infiltration Homogen für Konzertflügel, der größte Komponist der Gegenwart ist das Contergankind*, Joseph Beuys wrapped a grand piano in a felt cover.) **4** *Justice* (The French electronic music duo Justice uses the Christian cross as its corporate identity.) **5** *Notorious B.I.G.* (Biggie Smalls aka Notorious B.I.G., who was murdered by an unknown assailant in a drive-by shooting in Los Angeles on March 9, 1997, was one of the greatest rappers of all time.) **6** *Gilbert and George* (In 1969, Gilbert and George painted themselves in bronze and dressed in suits to sing and dance as *Singing Sculptures* to a 1930s song titled *Underneath the Arches*.) **7** *Kraftwerk and Alexander Gerst* (On July 20, 2018, ESA astronaut Alexander Gerst is the surprise guest at a Kraftwerk concert in Stuttgart, Germany. Via a live satellite transmission, Gerst and Kraftwerk perform the song *Spacelab* together.) **8** *Spotify* (Since its launch in October 2006, the streaming service Spotify has changed our music listening habits completely.)