

THE
WORD
IS
ART

The WORD is Art

MICHAEL PETRY

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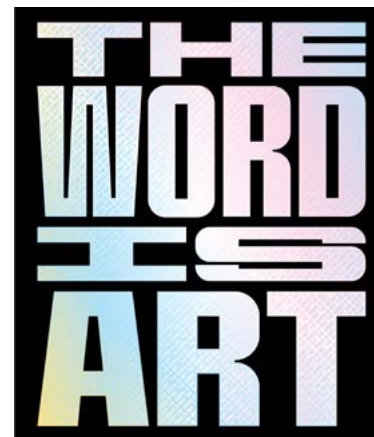
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A fascinating global overview of how contemporary artists incorporate text and language into work that speaks to some of the most pressing issues of the 21st century.

There has been much scaremongering about the 'death of the book' and how, as words find new ways and means of transmission, people might gradually begin to shun writing. In the digital age, text becomes information, and information strives to become free. But what value can text hold in the sphere of visual art? How is such text different to poetry? Can the poetic itself be visual art, or is text in this context consigned to the realms of gimmick and catchphrase?

Looking at the work of a broad range of artists including, Ghada Amer, Fiona Banner, Tania Bruguera, Chun Kwang Young, Martin Creed, eL Seed, Jenny Holzer, Roni Horn, Joseph Kosuth, Barbara Kruger, Christian Marclay, Annette Messager, Harland Miller, Raymond Pettibon, Laure Prouvost, Kay Rosen, Rachel Whiteread, Christopher Wool, Cerith Wyn Evans, Zhang Huan and many more, *The WORD is Art* examines each of these questions, contending above all that in the digital and online age, words have become more important than ever. With the advent of texting and social media, many predicted the debasement of language, and some have pointed to evidence of this in our 'post-truth' culture. Michael Petry demonstrates that, on the contrary, words remain critical, powerful and central to art practice.

Digital communication has seen the word as text permeate life in ways that the poets and artists of yesterday could never have imagined. Presenting a brief history of word- and book-based art, and examining major areas where the word has dominated artistic practice – **Installed Words, Three-Dimensional Words, Light, New Media, The Conceptual Word, Social Comment, The Drawn Word, Books** – *The WORD is Art* takes us on a fascinating and richly illustrated global tour of diverse contemporary art forms.

Michael Petry is an artist, author and Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), London. The *Trouble with Michael*, a monograph of his practice, was published in 2001, and his 2012 one-man show, 'The Touch of the Oracle' at the Palm Springs Art Museum, was accompanied by a ten-year career retrospective publication. Petry was the first artist-in-residence at Sir John Soane's Museum. He has written a number of books, including *Installation Art*, *The Art of Not Making: the new artist / artisan relationship*, and *Nature Morte: Contemporary Artists Reinvent the Still-Life Tradition*, all published by Thames & Hudson.



In 2017 the British artist Ralph Dunn participated in a two-person show, 'I Want to Be Your Dog' (with Ryan Riddington), at MOCA London. He presented three works, including *Doormat* (2009/17), which welcomed visitors to the museum. The mat read: 'COME IN / I SUCK N / SWALLOW YOU / YOU GO'. Also exhibited was *Aroma* (above), which featured three columns of names in seven rows. Words such as 'THROB', 'VOLTAGE' and 'RUSH' could together be read as concrete poetry; they are, however, brand names of poppers (amyl nitrate), which many gay men use to increase sexual pleasure.

The Swedish artist Roberto Ekholm has created his own language, merging medical, spiritual and art references with the jargon of pseudoscience. For *CASE STUDY #34 (PRANA)* (opposite), he placed a sealed, silvered scientific glass flask alongside a word of his own making. The new word is 'a fusion of the Om sign and Duchamp's *Air de Paris* bottle neck', and refers to inedia, or breatharianism, which is the belief that it is possible to live off air alone. In Hinduism, *prana* is the life-giving force, said to originate from the sun, and relates to the energy on which inedia relies and which Ekholm contrasts with the modern idea of air as a commodity.

ABOVE · Ralph Dunn
Aroma, 2017 · Vinyl on glass
300 × 459 cm (118¼ × 180¾ in.)

OPPOSITE · Roberto Ekholm
CASE STUDY #34 (PRANA), 2014
Found lab glass, aluminium oxide,
cork, steel and vinyl
25 × 25 × 11 cm (9⅞ × 9⅞ × 4⅜ in.)



THE

Ghiora Aharoni · Doug Aitken · Meriç Algün · Ghada Amer · Shimon Attie · Fabienne Audéoud · Lisa Anne Auerbach · Tim Ayres · Maja Bajevic · James Balmforth · Fiona Banner · Adam Bateman · Sebastian Bieniek · Beni Bischof · Mel Bochner · Monica Bonvicini · Colin Booth · Julien Breton · Tania Bruguera · Stefan Brüggemann · Ildikó Buckley and Jane Palmer · Bill Burns · Tania Candiani · Mircea Cantor · Ben Carrick · Olivier Castel · Jake and Dinos Chapman · Jack Cheetham · Aristarkh Chernyshev · Maria Chevska · Maya Chowdhry · Chun Kwang Young · Bill Claps · William Cobbing · Dan Colen · Nathan Coley · Paul Coombs · Martin Creed · Elizabeth Croft · Thedra Cullar-Ledford · David Cunningham · Hubert Czerepok · Anka Dabrowska · Jeremy Deller · Alex Dipple · Ralph Dunn · Aleksandar Duravcevic · Mark Dutcher · Fred Eerdekens · Gardar Eide Einarsson · Roberto Ekholm · Zena El Khalil · eL Seed · Ryan Everson and Jason Garcia · Tom Fecht ·

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WRITTEN WORD

IN

Nicky Hirst · Jenny Holzer · Roni Horn · Jonathan Horowitz · Joseph Imhauser · Hristina Ivanoska · Nick Jeffrey · Enrique Ježik · So Kanno and Takahiro Yamaguchi · Deborah Kass · Anatol Knotek · Terence Koh · Jukka Korkeila · Joseph Kosuth · Anouk Kruithof · Mischa Kuball · Darryl Lauster · Sofia Leitão · Massa Lemu · Kurtis Lesick and Travis Kirton · Simon Lewty · Micah Lexier · Liliane Lijn · Glenn Ligon · Simon Linke · Liu Ye · Zachari Logan · George Henry Longly · William Mackrell · Alan Magee · Christian Marclay · Edgar Martins · Shinichi Maruyama · Hassan Massoudy · Andrea Mastrovito · Josep Maynou · Jorge Méndez Blake · Niels Meulman · Annette Messenger · Mil M2 · Harland Miller · Marta Minujín · Christina Mitrentse · Robert Montgomery · Lisa Z. Morgan · Simon Morley · Bryan Mulvihill · Kate Murdoch · Shirin Neshat · Tim Noble and Sue Webster · Alexandre Ouairy · Harvey Opgenorth · Michelle Angela Ortiz · Carl Ostendarp · Joe Ovelman · Eddie Peake · Michael Petry · Raymond Pettibon · Jack Pierson · Nicola Polonsky ·

Elizabeth Price · Laure Prouvost · Ishmael Randall Weeks · Rosana Ricalde · Antonio Riello · John Robertson · Kay Rosen · Luca Rossi · Ed Ruscha · Jason Salavon · Sheldon Scott · Miri Segal · Michael Shaowanasai ·

CONTEMPORARY

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