



FRAMEWORK

#12 | FORM . TEXT . LANGUAGE



'Density 1-6' by Liu Wei
photo courtesy of White Rabbit Gallery

EDITORIAL

To quote Claire Macdonald "...writing is not merely about something, it is something." This issue of Framework 'Form . Language . Text' is exactly that, an exploration of writing as practice. She goes on to say "... it acts, it engages, it changes. It has visual, material qualities, it is temporal, it opens, it re-members, it produces subjects – it is not inert materially or conceptually". As a critical art journal, the relationship between contemporary art, writing and the ways ideas can flow between the languages of both acts as a motivating force behind Framework. We constantly seek out texts in which emanate the originality and creativeness that characterises contemporary art, or reflect on art in innovative and imaginative ways. As such we hope Framework acts as a forum for critical dialog on current artistic practices and as a platform for experimental exploration of these practices.

In this issue of Framework 'Form . Language . Text' we explore writing as practice. Navigating how writing and artistic process is integrally linked, whether in the formative phases of creation, spurring on progress, or in the final product. This issue aims to present a small window into the diversity of forms and the significance of words, text, writing and reading in contemporary artistic practices.

Writers within this issues have extrapolated on writing as practice, whether writing-about-art-that-is-writing or writing-about-writing-that-is-art. They have unearthed the problematic nature of the writer to reader relationship. Bringing to attention that reading is never a simple unproblematic transfer of information. Rather an embodied practice heavily influenced by the context of reader, writer and content.

Thank you to the contributors of this issue for your inspiring and to the team at Arc for words of encouragement, constructive critique and nonsense.

If you would like to contribute to the next issue of Framework please get in contact:

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- Anna May Kirk

TEXT

FORM

LANGUAGE

THE NEW UNIVERSAL
LANGUAGE & YOUR FRIEND
GOOGLE TRANSLATE

LAURA KEVAN



BETH DILLON

BY KIERAN BRYANT



HEAVY ARTILLARY

ELEANOR ZUROWSKI



ASTRID LORANGE
IN DIALOGUE WITH
ANNA MAY KIRK



INVESTIGATION INTO ART
& TEXT IN RELATIONSHIP TO
LANGUAGE

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FRAMEWORK

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Polit-Sheer-Form Office

Library,

2008, shelves, books, 447 x 732 x
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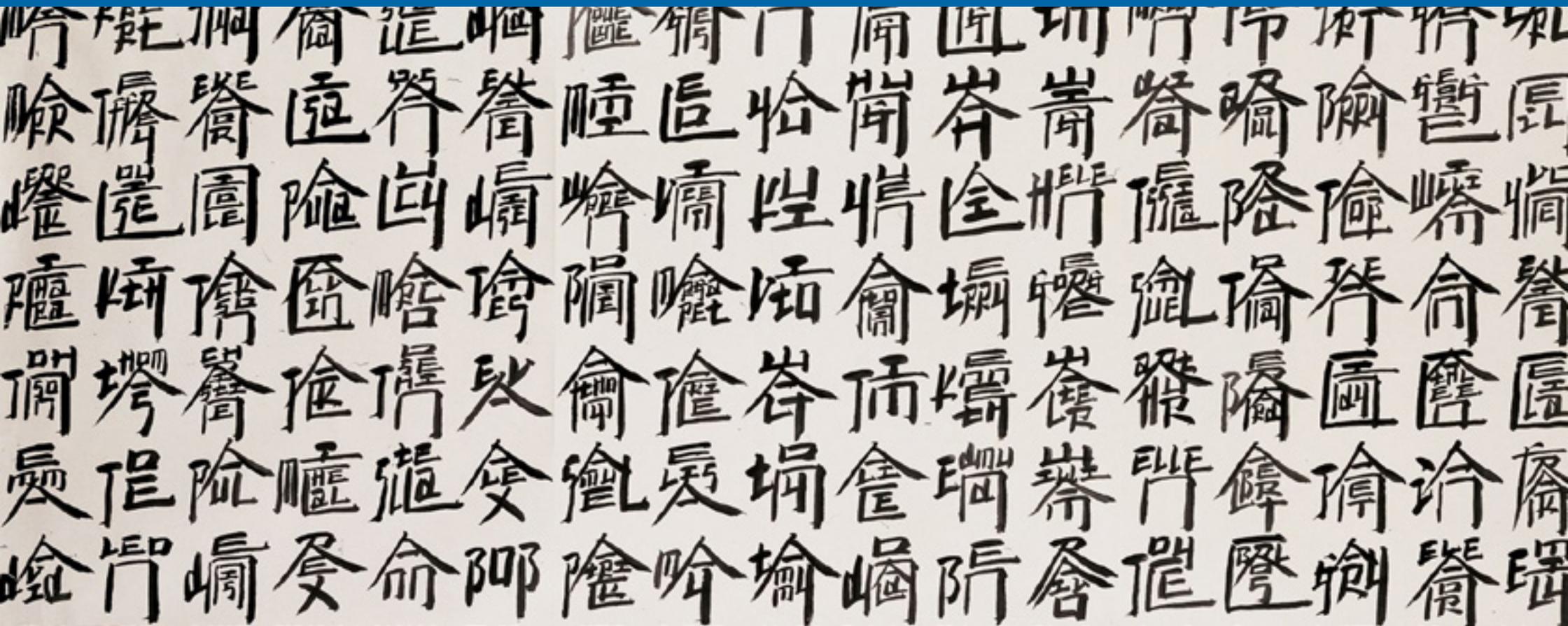
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THE NEW UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE AND YOUR FRIEND GOOGLE TRANSLATE

By Laura Kevan

Xu Bing, Art for the people, 2011. Square Word Calligraphy, 1994.



“HERE WE HAVE RACIAL NOTIONS OF DIFFERENCE CRUMBLING UNDER THE COMPLEXITY OF THE SPOKEN WORD, AND SO LANGUAGE BECOMES AN INNATELY HUMAN UNITING FEATURE”

Anyone who has ever been lost in a foreign country without knowing the local language can attest to the difficulty of communicating without a shared verbal base. The second you meet a person, the relations ahead are shaped by how and if you can communicate. A shared language allows progress between people on all levels, be it buying flowers at a market, or organising a peace treaty between nations. Through it all communication is key, and language has the possibility to both divide and bring people together.

The nature of language is one of the world’s greatest dichotomies. On one hand it is the equaliser, the thing that allows people to communicate, facilitates group sharing, togetherness, and the growth of civilisation. On the other hand language separates, it divided cultures and ages, halts progress and causes conflict. Language itself is at the heart of what it means to be human; a unique development of the human brain found nowhere else in nature. In this language can be the ultimate unifying feature of humanity. When ethnographic notions of primitivism spawned from warped visions of Darwinian theory, it was the biological nature of language that intervened and evened the scales again. How could other cultures, races, civilisations, and all women in general, be evolutionary inferior when all people share such an innate feature?

First developed in early hominids, the human brain has evolved the ability to learn any language. Children form language skills at the same pace worldwide, picking up any language that exists in the environment they grow up in. The language you learned from your peers and elders in the first years of your life is known as First Language, and the acquisition of it progresses in a fairly regular sequence until the age of five, when a child’s ability to speak or sign is refined to the point of adult language. How can colonial notions of race or gender continue when so called ‘primitive’ cultures and peoples had developed languages with complex linguistic systems that could convey multifaceted notions and ideas? Here we have racial notions of difference crumbling under the complexity of the



Shirin Neshat, Speechless, 1996.

Women of Allah, 1993-1997.

While language connects at a fundamentally biological scale, it still stands that when you meet someone on the street and you both speak a language foreign to the other, you are marked instantly as someone alien. Language can isolate, and in the absence of comprehension, understanding can be lost. In the 1993-1997 series by Iranian visual artist Shirin Neshat *Women of Allah*, the women photographed are overlaid in Persian calligraphy. To a western audience the Farsi is nothing more than an added aesthetic quality, but it is in the understanding of the text that the real heart of the work is revealed. The calligraphy in her works is often poems or writings by Iranian women exploring the personal views and histories from the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The text reveals more to a viewer with a shared language, it ties the artworks to a time and place, and deepens the perception of the images. The women are no longer docile, becoming instead warriors, connected to a long history of tattooing in Middle Eastern culture. Neshat describes the use of poetry as being particularly 'apt', as "literature has historically played a major part in the struggle against political repression. The poetry is the literal and symbolic voice of women whose sexuality and individualism have been obliterated by the chador or the veil."

The use of language in Neshat's artworks makes the full extent of meaning available to select people, inclusive to those only upon viewing. It is in the translation of text that understanding is found. And yet in translation and sharing of language there is a new and completely different opportunity for art. Historically across the globe, multilingualism as being the norm, with monolingualism as a characteristic of isolated islands. The diffusion of linguistic traits often results in change and developments within languages, as well as other phenomenon such as language convergence, borrowing, relexification, and in extreme cases mixed languages such as Tok Pisin, the official language of Papua New-Guinea.

Playing with the notion of mixed languages, Chinese born artist Xu Bing created the nonsense writing of *Square Word Calligraphy*, a mixture of English words and the square formatting of Chinese characters. The combination of these two



written forms of language challenges the viewer's recognition of what should be familiar patterns. Estranging the audience from their own language through combining them to make something new, Xu Bing calls into question systems of language and current ideas about how language evolves or stays preserved. The inclusion of new terms to dictionaries officiates the development of language, and yet people still scoff and scorn the new when we have words like *twerk* and *vlog* being added to the Oxford English dictionary.

Many contemporary emerging artists use language and the written word in their own work to explore visual and symbolic meaning of cultural separation and connection. Art provides a space for the blending of ideas and form through the use of language, a place to convey new understanding as well as personal stories. Sydney based artist Leila Elrayes uses a combination of Arabic and English writing in her 2015 work *No Direction To Home* to discuss her cultural background and experiences. Nails spelling out an Arabic prayer at the top of the work, a common Australian children's mnemonic to remember compass direction, and the inclusion of the saying "There's no place like home" from 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*, combine together with familiar visual elements to create connections between cultures. The inclusion of language provides distinction and facilitates shared relations, and yet with current global tensions many would find the inclusion of both of these languages in one artwork uncomfortable.

Whether artworks like those of Elrayes eventually become a comforting standpoint in a world of instant communication, or continue to present cultural exchange through the great divide of language, one thing is for certain. When you're lost in a city and you don't speak the local language, Google translate is still your friend.

Beth Dillon

By Kieran Bryant



Beth Dillon, Dogwoman and Hundebaby, intergenerational dialogue (2016)

“DO YOU NEED WORDS? OR DO WORDS NEED YOU? YES. VERY”

Some people have a natural flair with language. Whiz with words. Textual talents. Beth Dillon is one of those people. She uses text [in many forms] throughout her practice, often focusing on the everyday; the humorous, the poetic. Kneading nouns and vibrating verbs Beth utilises words to describe her everyday. Whether that be the evacuation of her bowels, as in *Shit Poetry* - a series of poems and prose written on the toilet during the Berlin spring of 2014 - or the contemplation of time both past and present. Her recent work *The younger generation communicates with Dogwoman* [2016] was composed while in Berlin winter and speaks of a conversation with Bonita Ely's 1981 work *Dogwoman Communicates with the Younger Generation*, which was itself created when Ely was living in Berlin. The writing is funny, wryly observational and achingly true. Framed as a letter to an old friend it reads like an email sent sporadically. Questions in between the lines. Giving enough information to reminisce both sweet and sour.

On the 15th April, Beth presented a solo exhibition at 55 Sydenham Rd. *Should I have stayed home, and thought of here?* The exhibition is a performance and video installation that takes the wet weather poncho as a motif of the tourist experience, of contemporary cultures of wandering and nomadism, as an anti-fashion icon of shelter, and of the poncho wearer as both spectator and spectacle. On opening night, Beth performed as a wandering forest hermit, Poncho, constructing a wilderness scene in the gallery through interactions with object, sound and image.

The show is accompanied by a publication of the same name, featuring contributions from 12 friends met and made through time spent living between Berlin and Sydney. Offerings of thoughts, images and words form a constellation of travel memoirs and speculative wanders. They speak of experiences of dislocation and disappointment, long-distance longings, precipice moments and dead time in dull places.



How to describe Beth Dillon —

Beth can stem from Bethany, meaning house of figs, and Beth itself can have meaning as either house or

family.

Dillon can stem from Welsh Dillyn, meaning handsome, gallant, brave and/or fine¹.

[all true]

Yes or No — [answered by Beth herself]

Beth is a woman of yes words.

Beth is no woman of sentences. Yes.

Beth is a woman of no paragraphs

Yes, Beth is a woman of text

Beth is a woman of language ja si yep oui

Beth is a woman of form like emoticon

What is your favourite word? Ooft.

Please use in a sentence

Ooft, tough question.

Do you need words? Or do words need you? Yes. Very.

When writing a private thought, and then letting others read it, does it cease to be private? Yesshhh

Or does it split into two Y/N

Do you keep a journal? YES

Is it private? ...

Beth is —

Beautiful

Elegant

Talented

Humorous

Determined

Imaginative

Luculent

Levelheaded

Observant

Natural



Heavy Artillery

By Eleanor Zurowski

“ONE THING THAT THIS EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTS FOR CERTAIN IS THAT IN THE CONTEMPORARY ART WORLD, ART HAS BECOME THE WEAPON.”

Along a small Chippendale alleyway, amongst Sydney’s terraces, there is an utter disturbance of expectation where traditional Greek statues form Buddhist deities, ceramic tables appear wooden and a life sized artillery tank is formed out of leather. *Heavy Artillery*, White Rabbit Gallery’s new exhibition curated by David Williams, is a conversation spanning over three levels of China’s past, present and future.

Mao Zedong’s declaration in 1942 that artworks must “operate as powerful weapons for uniting and educating the people and for attacking and destroying the enemy”¹, acts as the central inspiration for the exhibition’s theme, as Williams selected works that did just this, though not exactly in the way that Mao had intended. Liu Wei’s work, *Density 1-6* (2013) presents a commentary on his own artistic education through four sizeable geometrical shapes seemingly made out of a concrete like material. In reality, the forms are created from tightly packed textbooks, weighing around 1.4 tons despite the shapes being hollow. Through the pieces, Liu disrupts the role of the textbook, as they become intelligible, presenting only an aesthetic front. This is perhaps a commentary on the censorship in China; how Mao in his time and still today, literature and education has been carefully curated in order to present a single image. As the language becomes condensed, the artist represents this form of ‘artillery’ as being under pressure, both in a metaphorical and literal sense.

Despite the exhibition’s use of the word ‘artillery’, He Xiangyu’s leather work, *Tank Project* (2011-13) is the only ‘weapon’ in sight, as artists such as Polit Sheer-Form-Office an art collective from Beijing (members including, Song Dong, Xiao Yu, Liu Jianhua, Hong Hao and Leng Lin) meet the theme in a more figurative way. Their work, *Library* (2008) is large structure centred in the room, painted a bright almost cornflower blue, the colour is one of a kind, crafted by the artists and a shade ubiquitous in their works. Inside the cube like structure the walls are lined with books, in that very same shade of blue, unreadable and unable to be borrowed. Here, the artists similarly to Liu have

subverted Mao’s intentions, taking a library, a place of education and making it unusable. The 8000 books lining the shelves are completely blue and completely blank, a somewhat ironic modern day version of Mao’s Little Red Book, the only text with which the artists grew up and which Mao used, weapon like, to gain control. Power through the written word is further found in the exhibition through Wang Lei’s *Armour of Triumph* (2013) where the armour of emperor Kangxi (ruled from 1661-1722) of the Qing Dynasty has been carefully knitted out of newspaper. Wang’s choice to transform the newspaper into a symbol of status, the armour, indicates his viewing of the media and written word as being a dominant force over the public, with paper cutouts of news stories trailing at the feet of the woven suit suggesting the long reaching effects of these words. The materiality of newspaper is also of note, as its lack of durability could perhaps represent the idea of this omnipotence of the media as being ephemeral.

As the different works present a spectrum of ideas on the concept of *Heavy Artillery*, throughout the exhibition the boundaries of expectation and reality become blurred and questions surrounding power and control are raised. One thing that this exhibition highlights for certain is that in the contemporary world, art has become a weapon.

1. Jefferson, Dee. “Heavy Artillery.” Time Out. N.p., 09 Mar. 2016. Web. 17 Mar. 2016. <<http://www.au.timeout.com/sydney/art/events/44577/>



**“A BODY WRITES, A BODY READS, THE PUBLIC IS A BODY
AND IS CONSTITUTIVE OF BODIES”**

Astrid Lorange is a Sydney based artist, curator, poet, teacher, writer and profound ‘tweeter’. She is currently involved with the collaborative writing program *Bureau of Writing* for the 20th Biennale of Sydney *The Future is Already Here - It’s Just Not Evenly Distributed*. Recently Astrid co-curated *Hell Broth* with Vaughan O’Connor at Firstdraft and is a current teacher at UNSW Art & Design. Framework Editor Anna May Kirk had a digital chat to Astrid Lorange about the nuances of writing and reading.

Anna May Kirk: Reading and writing is not simply an unproblematic transfer of knowledge, but an embodied, affective practice. As Clare MacDonald stated “writing is not simply about something, it is something”. Could you extrapolate on this in terms of your artistic practice?

Astrid Lorange: Yes! This idea of writing as not merely, or not only, or even not at all, the transfer or representation of that which already exists but the production (occasioning is a word I like for its temporal sense) of something new is very central to my practice. I like to think of writing as an historical, social, material practice that is productive of knowledge; this means I’m interested in writing and reading as interrelated and dependent but also different and differentiating processes. I also think of writing as knowledge in excess of its writer—in other words, while a writer is responsible for what they write, they are also not in possession of what is written, nor are they ever fully able to account for the possibility of meaningfulness in the writing.

Writing is of course embodied—a body writes, a body reads, the public is a body and is constitutive of bodies. But I like to also think of the strangeness of writing, as of bodies. Writing is also a way of perceiving the strangeness of one’s self to one’s self, one’s body to one’s world, one’s language to the scene of meaning. This is really important, I think, because it emphasises not only that which can come to be known through writing, but also that which remains unknown and unknowable. As such, writing is also about an ethics of alienation/alienness as well as an ethics of encounter/togetherness.

In my own work I try to consider writing as something that I take up only partially aware of what I am doing while also being willing to be responsible for whatever happens. I try to work out ways of engaging my writing with the conditions in which it is possible; its material and spatial contexts. I think of my practice as a kind of expanded indexing, finding ways to register the act of writing in relation to its emergence in a particular moment or occasion.

AMK: *This idea of writing as simultaneously, yet independently method and form with consequences that are subjective dependent on the reader/ writer interrelationship is really interesting. Written forms such as lists are produced by, and in turn produce material effects. You explored the list in your recently curated exhibition Hell Broth at FirstDraft. Could you talk about your interest in lists?*

AL: Lists have long interested me, as a textual form. They bring things together in a relation which is both intimate and arbitrary. The list implies proximity and

difference, togetherness and distinctness. And lists have long been used as a literary device and as a formal structure for a poem – an almost-incantation of what is and what it means as a relation. I find that lists often, once begun, take on a rhythm and intensity on their own. Who hasn’t begun a list of things-to-do, or a shopping list, and found themselves scrounging for things to add, ways to keep composing. Lists also betray internal logics and sub-groupings that are sometimes to do with the one who has written the list, and sometimes the result of chance or random order.

When Vaughan and I first talked about lists, he was really interested in Umberto Eco’s historiographic work to do with lists as they are found in cultural artefacts like plays, novels, art works, inscriptions, and so on. I was really interested in the way the so-called object-oriented ontologists, a group of self-styled philosophers, had begun to write these ecstatic lists in their theory. I was far more interested in their poetic compulsion than in what they were arguing; their compulsive list-making became the signal aesthetic gesture of an ontology trying to argue that literally everything in the world is a species of objects and that no philosophical difference can be found between this or that phenomena. Our discussion of these readerly interests became a discussion about the possibility of engaging list-making in curatorial projects. Not just finding works “about” or using lists, but thinking about the very act of curating as a kind of conceptual-material listing. This meant choosing artists who believed would work well, without thematic or formal overlap necessarily, in a space in which our curatorial effort would be to tune ourselves to the emergent and

contingent resonances and logics occasioned by the works in the same space. Practically, this meant that after we got the work into the space, we shifted and wriggled it around – even adding two new pieces – until we found the right order. This was an experiment, to be sure, but it was a really interesting experience.

AMK: *What do you envision one can achieve or learn from reorientating the process of reading and writing?*

AL: I think one can achieve and/or learn a huge amount from reorienting reading and writing. Let’s start with reading: reading and being conscious of the process of reading can help us to understand, and therefore challenge or change, the way that language functions and the way that many language-based things – law, the media, etc. – settle themselves into meanings that act like natural facts. So reading is a huge part of participating in and resisting against the world in which one finds one’s self. Writing, which is an extension of reading, is a way of exploring the possibilities of language in the activity of making or arranging new propositions, reflections, concepts and images. I’m not one who thinks that there is nothing outside of language; language is one thing in a very complex world. But I do think that because language is so social, indeed, because language describes and regulates our social realities, reading and writing (broad categories that include non-literary things, of course!) are vital.

Investigations into Art and text in relation to Language.

By Emma-Kate Wilson

“NOT WORDS, BUT THE TEXTUAL EXPRESSION OF EXPERIENCE”

A recent visit to the Museum of Old and New Art began a personal investigation into art and text. The Museum hold three pieces that stood out to me as being a pure form of text causing art, either with its overwhelming repetition of words or devoid of any text at all. Going to MONA without ‘O’ on, a museum without wall text, you are instead looking for your own interpretations of the art’s meaning instead of relying on the curator or artists words. This lead me to think about the use of text with effect to the art industry and the language used to describe and summarise.

Our own language is something we don’t think about on a day to day basis. Instead we rely on a personal bank of words collected in our language memory through the cognitive psychology and cognitive neuroscience parts of our brains; something that is developed as soon as we start hearing words. A memory started organically from hearing our mothers voice; evolving through babbling to words. However in this fast paced digital world, do we rely on other people to develop our language for us, from art reviews; bloggers; and social media?

bit.fall (2001-2006) by Julius Popp lets you create your own pieces of text from singular words. Words are formed from water jets, suspended from the ceiling, shooting water words into your eye line. The words are generated at random from the internet and act as a metaphor for the incessant flood of information we are exposed to. Elizabeth Pearce draws on the fact that the work holds its powers over the audience with “not words, but the textual expression of experience.” By using a single word, you can become relatable to every person. Each member of the audience can recall a personal story inside their head, the continual repetition of words acting as their news feed.

There is an innate irony as artists are creating works for an audience, yet these works are to become documented with text and language at the scrutiny of the critic. Trained or amateur the text that describes art, for example in exhibition reviews or personal blogs, acts as activator or barrier to understanding the work. Our own opinion can become formed from a piece of text from someone completely independent of our selves. A perfect example of this being John McDonald’s review on the 20th Sydney Biennale idea to present the Embassies with words to relate to the artworks. “When ideas can be presented as a shopping list we are being fed too much information,” yet this ‘shopping list’ can introduce ideas to the average Biennale goer that they may not have thought about².

Encyclopedia (2005) from Charles Sandison plays on this point of the single entity of a word. His art is a computer generated data projection of words. This piece asks the meaning of simple one-word, or “a bacterium of meaning.” Displayed on the sandstone wall of the inner depths of MONA, this piece of text is projected into a mass of words to finally conclude as the artwork you see before you.



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