

Art + Text Introduction

Slide show with notes...

Hi everyone. I have put together a 2-part introduction to the world of Text in Contemporary Art. This is the first of several slide lectures / presentations through which I will begin to show you a diverse range of art practices that engage with text and/or language in one way or another.

Part one (this slide show) is a recent historical look at Art + Text, mostly focusing on Conceptual Artists and their predecessors. The legacy of Conceptualism is a strong precursor to a lot of the artwork being made today, so this focus is in part an attempt to lay down the groundwork for an understanding of the history and context of the use of text/words/language in contemporary art...

Part two moves into more contemporary work, from the 1990's on, so please stay tuned for that lecture which will appear soon...

Ed Ruscha, *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations*, 1962



I'll start with a few images by Ed Ruscha (pronounced Roo-shay). Based in LA, Ruscha came from a commercial art background, and was a pop artist earlier in his career, but later moved into photography and became better known for his work as a Conceptualist...

Ed Ruscha, a selection of art books



He transformed the idea of the artist book, as he started working with vernacular photography, working in a methodical, quantitative fashion, documenting banal aspects of his surroundings (*Some Los Angeles Apartments*, *Thirty Four Parking Lots*, etc.)

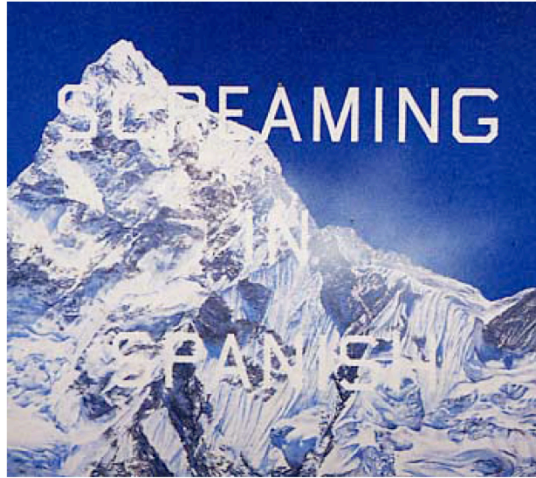
At the time he made these books (starting in the 60's and 70's) they were sort of the antithesis of what the old guard of artists working at the end of the High Modernist era were striving for (large object-based exhibitions, and precious, unique art objects, etc.) which is why they aligned with the spirit of Conceptual Art that was forming at the time. The books could act as cheap, reproduceable and portable art works (or mini-exhibitions). (Now of course they are worth a mint, and need to be protected, so they are mostly in special collections). We are lucky to have a few of these in our Artist Book collection at the ECU library (see Larissa Beringer at the library to look at them!)

Ed Ruscha, *Standard Station*, 1966



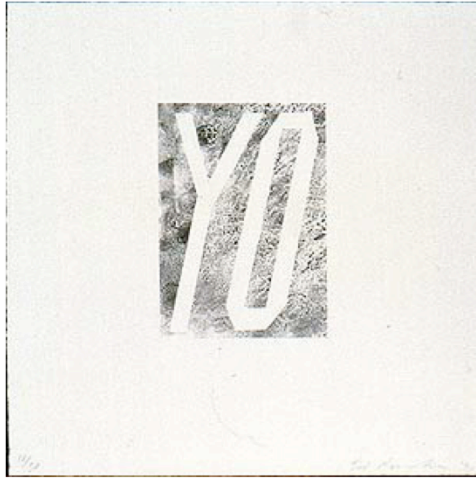
More Ed Ruscha – This is one of his many paintings involving text. Much of his work focused on what surrounded him, in particular an 'LA' sensibility. You will often see that what he depicts in his work - the signage, colour palette, slang terms, etc. Has some resonance with the idea of Los Angeles, Hollywood, or California in general.

Ed Ruscha, *Screaming in Spanish*, 2001



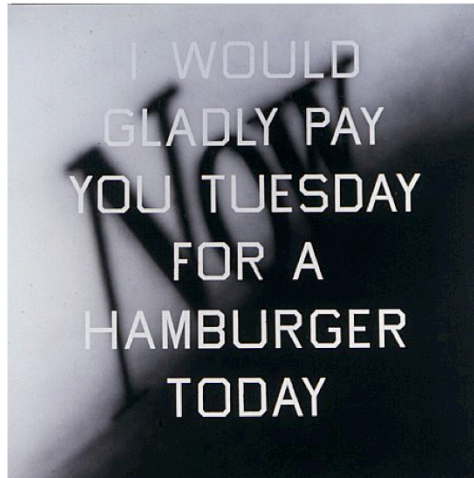
Ruscha is still making paintings involving text to this day...

Ed Ruscha, Yo, 1991



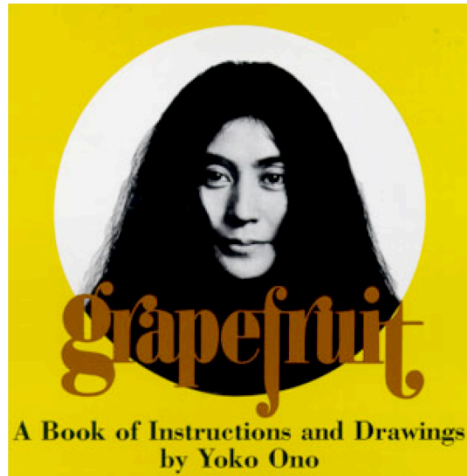
Another Ruscha (a print edition)

Ed Ruscha



More Ruscha...

Yoko Ono, *Instruction Pieces and Grapefruit* (1960's)



(Well before she became famous for her relationship with John Lennon) Yoko Ono was already a well known artist. She was part of the Fluxus group, and she worked in performance (*Cut Piece*, etc.) and created many dematerialized works that were precursors to Conceptual Art.

Her *Instruction Pieces* are a good example of her text-based works – they have taken many forms over the years and many were published in *Grapefruit*, as well as several other publications. They can even be found online in another iteration of the work (see <http://www.a-i-u.net/instructions.html> for a selection of some of the *Instruction Pieces*). For example:

PAINTING FOR THE SKIES (1961)

Drill a hole in the sky. Cut out a paper the same size as the hole. Burn the paper. The sky should be pure blue.

SNOW PIECE (1963)

Think that snow is falling. Think that snow is falling everywhere all the time. When you talk with a person, think that snow is falling between you and on the person. Stop conversing when you think the person is covered by snow.

Joseph Kosuth, 1965-67



Joseph Kosuth was one of the founding members of the Conceptual Art movement that began in the mid-60's. He is famous not only for his art, but his writing as well ("Art After Philosophy" 1969, for example). He worked extensively with text and language. He was interested in semiotics, and breaking down the idea of art into language. The idea that an image could be 'replaced' by text was radical at this time. His dictionary definitions were prime examples of this rupture which opened up the use of text for the whole Conceptual Art movement, and for many contemporary artists coming after him...

Joseph Kosuth, *Colour Sentence*, 1980's



More Kosuth...

Joseph Kosuth, *One and Three Chairs*, 1965



This is probably Kosuth's most famous work. It exemplifies his interest in semiotics, and his questioning of what makes 'Art' 'Art'. In this work the three components would always be exhibited together, but the chair would be selected by the curator or whomever was installing the work, and a photograph of the same size would be produced – this sort of reconstruction of a work each time it was shown became a trope of Conceptual Art (to undermine the idea of the hand of the artist and the value of the art object).

Joseph Kosuth. (American, born 1945). *One and Three Chairs*. 1965. Wood folding chair, mounted photograph of a chair, and mounted photographic enlargement of the dictionary definition of "chair". Chair 32 3/8 x 14 7/8 x 20 7/8" (82 x 37.8 x 53 cm), photographic panel 36 x 24 1/8" (91.5 x 61.1 cm), text panel 24 x 24 1/8" (61 x 61.3 cm). Larry Aldrich Foundation Fund. © 2011 Joseph Kosuth / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, Courtesy of the artist and Sean Kelly Gallery, New York (http://www.moma.org/modernteachers/large_image.php?id=207)

On Kawara, *Date Paintings*, Installation View



On Kawara is another early Conceptual Artist, who is still working today. Much of his work has involved repetition and endurance, often involving a daily task that would be repeated sometimes for years or even decades, such as the 'date paintings' or the telex work *I Am Still Alive*. He is known for taking the conventions and discipline of early Conceptualism to almost an absurd extreme, and as a result asking us to think about art as a residue of our existence, or some sort of impossible documentation of our lives.

This image shows an installation of some of his 'date paintings' (*Today*) which he began in 1965 shortly after moving to NY from Tokyo, and which he plans to continue until his death. Every day he paints the date, and takes a page from the newspaper with the date on it to make a box for each painting...

On Kawara, *Date Painting*, 1967



MAR.11.1967

Here is a close-up of one of the date paintings.

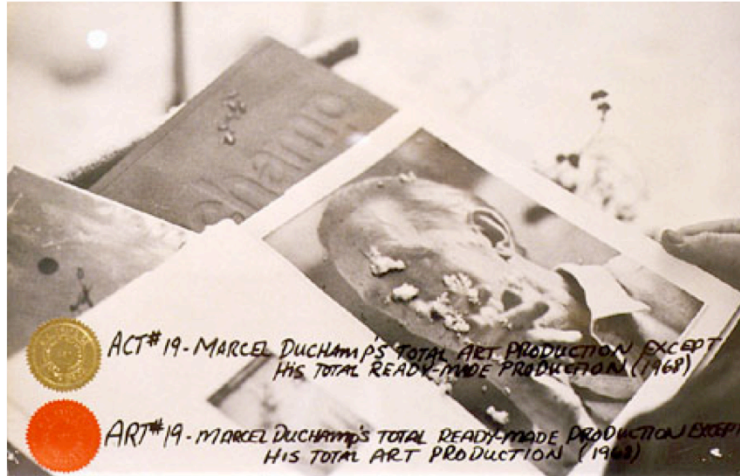
NE Thing Company, ACT #68... 1968



NE Thing Company was a collaborative comprised of Ingrid and Iain Baxter that existed from 1967-78. Based in Vancouver, they were a sort of 'Canadian' branch of Conceptual Art. They were incorporated as a company and they used the aesthetics of the office, and bureaucracy in their work. (Iain Baxter is still practicing as an artist in Windsor Ontario and Ingrid went on to do other things.)

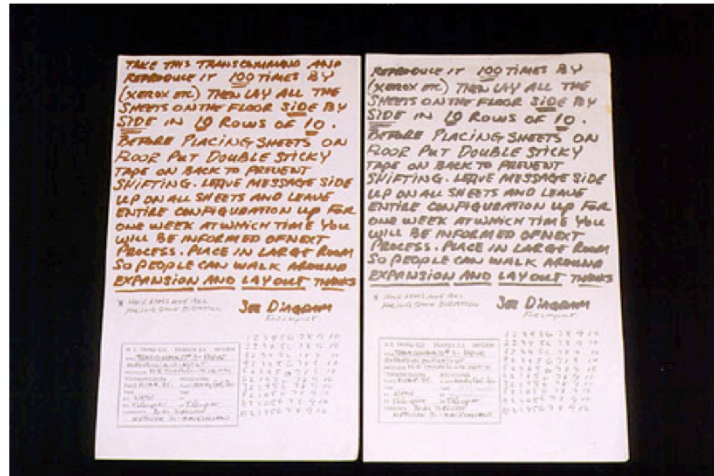
This is from their 'ACT' series (Aesthetically Claimed Things)...

NE Thing Company, ACT #19...ART #19... 1968



And this is both an ACT and ART (Aesthetically Rejected Things).

N.E. Thing Co. Telecopier: Take this command and reproduce it 100 times Trans Command



NETCO played around with technology – this is an early Telecopier work (a precursor to the Fax machine)...

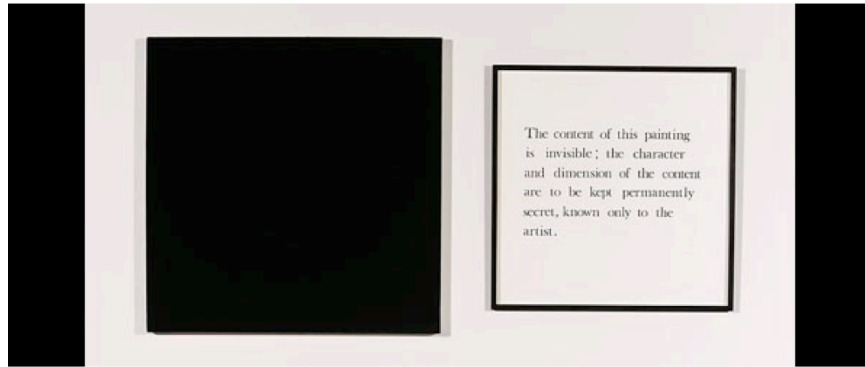
Art & Language

VOLUME 3 NUMBER 2		MAY 1975
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ART-LANGUAGE		
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PUBLISHED BY ART AND LANGUAGE		

Art & Language was first started as a UK collective in 1967 (Terry Atkinson, Michael Baldwin, Harold Hurrell, David Bainbridge, then later Mel Ramsden and Charles Harrison (two of the better known members) but there were many more members at various times up to the early 80's. A New York chapter was started (The Society for Theoretical Art and Analysis), and other members of one chapter or another included the likes of Kosuth, Christine Koslov, and Mayo Thompson (and his band Red Crayola).

Art & Language took its name from the publication Art-Language, (a journal the group started when they were teaching together in Coventry in 1966.) Their mission was to challenge the prevailing ideas about art at the time (coming from the likes of Clement Greenburg and Michael Fried). They wanted to create space for theoretical and linguistic forms of art as a counterpoint to the art object and the pictorial, etc.

Mel Ramsden (England, b.1944)
Secret painting 1967-68
Painting, oil on canvas and photostat



Mel Ramsden (part of Art & Language)

Mel Ramsden, *Language is not Transparent*, 1970



More Ramsden...

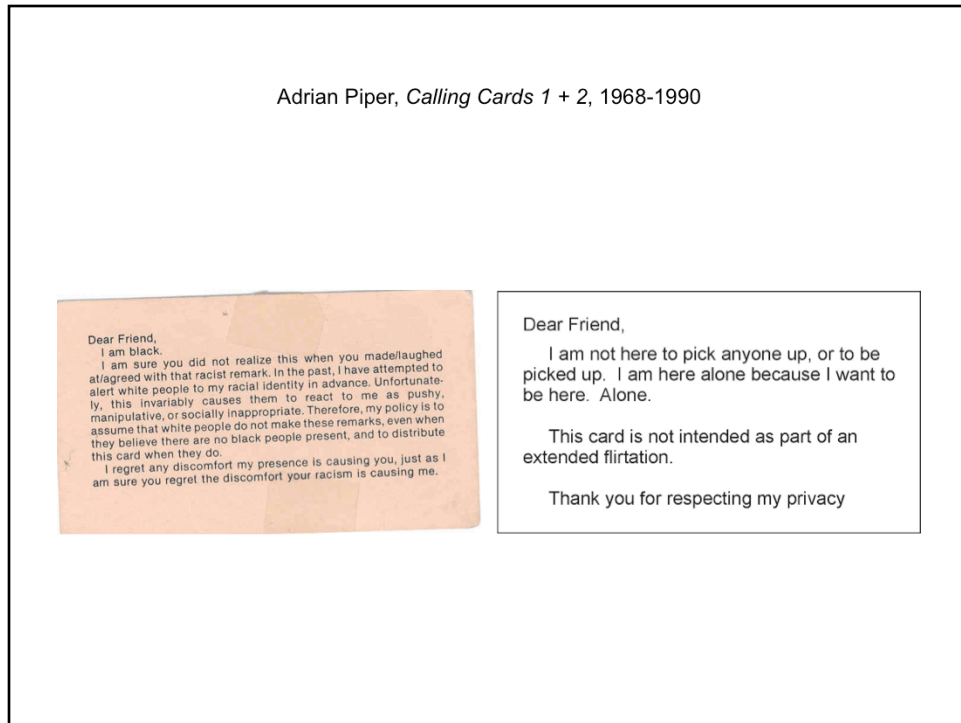
Vito Acconci, *Room Situation*, 1970



Vito Acconci works mostly with performance and video. He was another prominent Conceptual Artist of the 1970's (he is still working in New York). He would use language (often in a creepy or menacing way – you will know what I mean if you have seen videos of his work. If you have not, here is a link to a series of video clips: <http://www.ubu.com/film/acconci.html>)

There was often photo documentation displayed along with descriptive text of his work – something many performance artists worked with at the time (and still do!)

Adrian Piper, *Calling Cards 1 + 2*, 1968-1990



Adrian Piper is an artist I personally admire. She is not only a prolific and influential artist, she has also written volumes of theory and criticism (there is a double volume book called *Out of Sight* comprised of her work, if you are interested you should look it up). Working with performance, video, and text among other things, Piper introduced and pushed the discussion of issues of gender and race into the Conceptual Art realm in the late 1960's.

Calling Card was an ongoing text/performance piece in which Piper would create 'calling cards' to hand to someone engaging in what she considered to be offensive behaviour, often when she was mistaken for a white woman, or when someone was attempting to pick her up. Piper is an African American woman with fairly light skin who was often mistaken for white – her identity, and mistaken identity, became a basis for a lot of her work.

A video work of Piper's is on Youtube here, if you are interested in watching:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yUJ8MhXTwtI>

Adrian Piper, *Mythic Being I You Her*, 1974



More Adrian Piper work involving text...

Adrian Piper, *Everything #21*, Installed 2010 (Cairn, Fife, Scotland)



A newer installation of a text-based work by Piper

Lawrence Weiner, Installation View



Lawrence Weiner is considered one of the ‘grandfathers’ of text-based art. He also comes from the Conceptual Art movement of the 60’s/70’s, as one of the core members of that group working with text. He took the use of text a step further and made the text itself into the work – the text becomes the image.

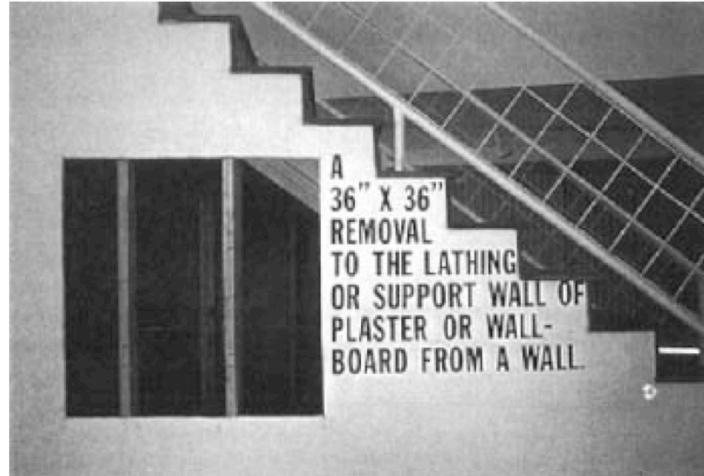
He worked a lot with the visual pun, and with instructions (and instructions becoming the work). He is famous for the work depicted on the left here, called *Declaration of Intent* (1968):

- 1. The artist may construct the piece.**
- 2. The piece may be fabricated.**
- 3. The piece need not be built.**

Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership.

This was right after Sol LeWitt came up with his *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art* (as well as *Sentences on Conceptual Art*) which you can read here: http://www.ddooss.org/articulos/idiomas/Sol_Lewitt.htm

Lawrence Weiner, *A 36" x 36" Removal to the Lathing or Support Wall of Plaster or Wallboard From a Wall*, 1968



Another famous early work by Lawrence Weiner in which the instructions, the text describing the making of, and the gesture of making the work become intentionally confused.

Hamish Fulton, *To Worcester 8 Miles England* 1972



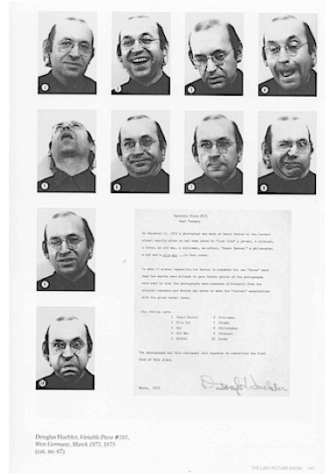
Hamish Fulton is a London-based artist who also rose to some prominence during the 1960's as a Conceptual Artist. His work has always focused on various ways of documenting and articulating extensive walks that the artist takes, often combining text with other forms (photography, charts, graphs, maps etc.)

Hamish Fulton



A more recent Fulton work, also documenting a walk...

Douglas Huebler, Huebler 1974, variable piece #101 — Huebler asked Becher to pose, in the following order, as: “a priest, a criminal, a lover, an old man, a police-man, an artist, Bernd Becher, a philosopher, a spy, and a nice guy.” After two months, Huebler sent the ten photographs back to Becher, asking him to “make the ‘correct’ associations between words and photographs.” Becher’s reordered list of character types is listed on the statement as: “1. Bernd Becher; 2. Nice Guy; 3. Spy; 4. Old man; 5. Artist; 6. Policeman; 7. Priest; 8. Philosopher; 9. Criminal; 10. Lover.”



Douglas Huebler was one of the core members of the LA group of Conceptual Artists. He is best known for his *Duration Pieces* and *Variable Pieces* which include a photograph and a text-based statement usually ending with a declaration that the photograph and document/ text (and sometimes another thing) make up the artwork.

He is famous for making the statement: “The world is full of objects, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add more.”

This work is a series of portraits of the artist Berndt Becher posing in various roles, which he later asked Becher to identify.

Douglas Huebler, *Variable Piece #70*, 1971 – ongoing

Variable Piece #70 (in Process)
Global

Throughout the remainder of the artist's lifetime he will photographically document, to the extent of his capacity, the existence of everyone alive in order to produce the most authentic and inclusive representation of the human species that may be assembled in that manner.

Editions of this work will be periodically issued in a variety of topical modes: '100,000 people', '1,000,000 people', '10,000,000 people', 'people personally known by the artist', 'look-alikes', 'over-laps', etc.

November, 1971 Douglas Huebler

In November, 1971 a number of photographs were made in New York City to document various aspects of "everyone alive"; from those one was selected to represent:

AT LEAST ONE PERSON WHO MAY NOW BE DEAD

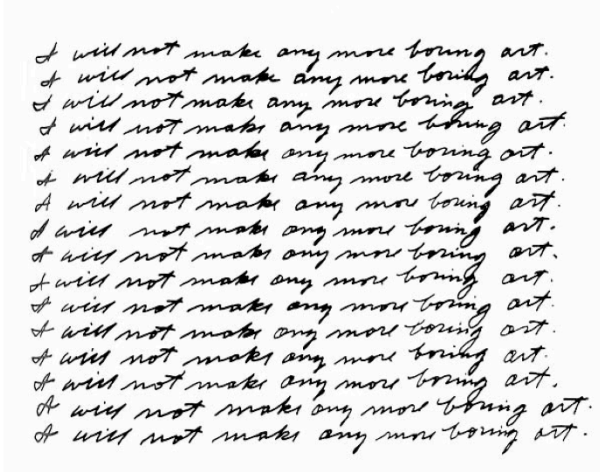
That photograph and a contact proof print join with this statement to constitute the form of this work: 1/ Variable Piece #70:1971

November, 1971
Douglas Huebler



This is an ambitious conceptual work of Huebler's in which he claims he will attempt to document "the existence of everyone alive"...

John Baldessari, *I will not make any more boring art*, 1971



*I will not make any more boring art.
I will not make any more boring art.
I will not make any more boring art.
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I will not make any more boring art.
I will not make any more boring art.*

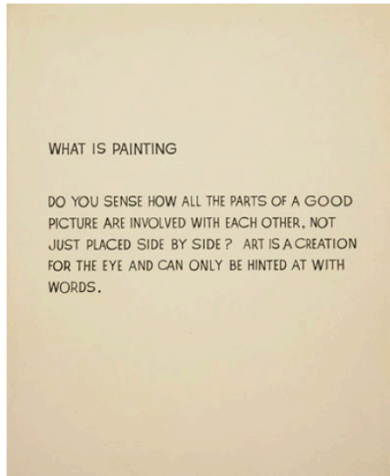
Another LA-based Conceptual Artist, John Baldessari had a keen sense of humour which came through in all of his work. He is most famous for this work which exists in many different forms, but was first created during a teaching stint at the Nova Scotia College of Art in 1971. During that era, under the Direction of Garry Neill Kennedy (who we are lucky to have teaching at Emily Carr this term), NSCAD became a hub for Conceptual Art in North America.

Ian Breakwell, *Bored*, 1998-99



A contemporary artist riffing off of Baldessari...

John Baldessari, *Painting*



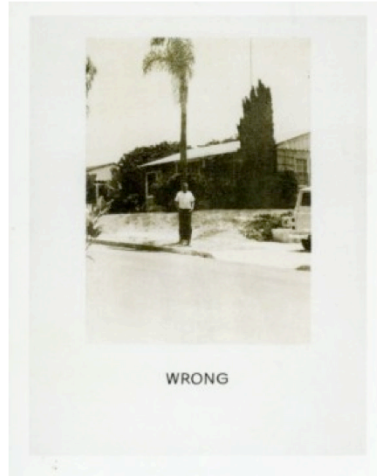
John Baldessari, *Tips for Artists* 1966-68

**TIPS FOR ARTISTS
WHO WANT TO SELL**

- GENERALLY SPEAKING, PAINTINGS WITH LIGHT COLORS SELL MORE QUICKLY THAN PAINTINGS WITH DARK COLORS.
- SUBJECTS THAT SELL WELL: MADONNA AND CHILD, LANDSCAPES, FLOWER PAINTINGS, STILL LIVES (FREE OF MORBID PROPS --- DEAD BIRDS, ETC.), NUDES, MARINE PICTURES, ABSTRACTS AND SURREALISM.
- SUBJECT MATTER IS IMPORTANT: IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT PAINTINGS WITH COWS AND HENS IN THEM COLLECT DUST --- WHILE THE SAME PAINTINGS WITH BULLS AND ROOSTERS SELL.

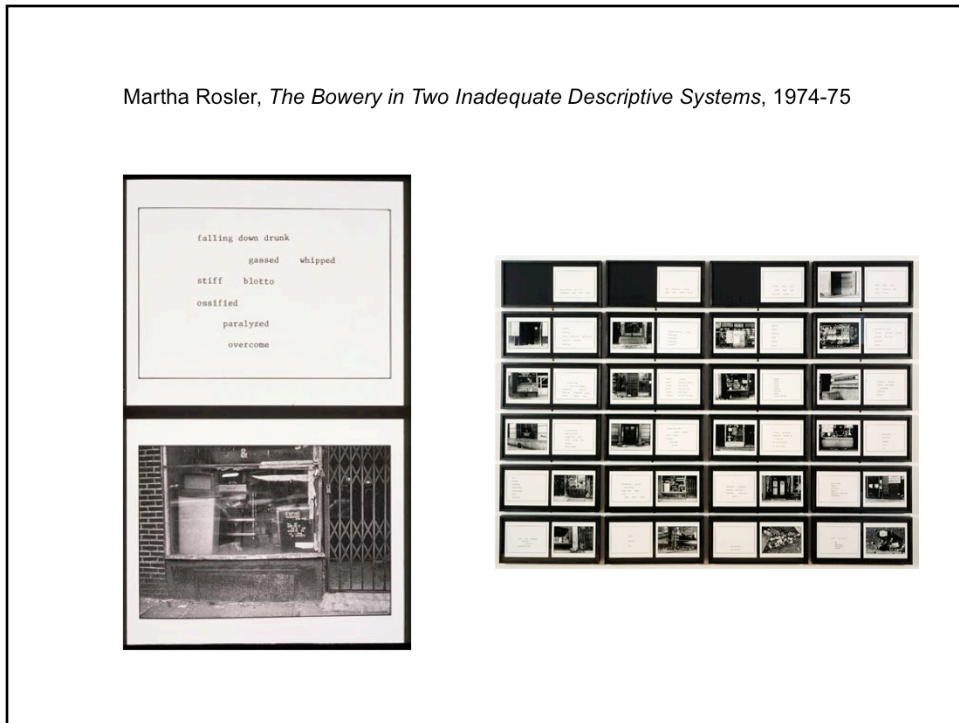
An early Baldessari work. During this time he worked with a sign painter to produce humorous and subversive text-based paintings about the idea of painting.

John Baldessari, "Wrong," photoemulsion and acrylic on canvas, 1966-68.



This work takes the rules of composing a good photograph and takes the idea of making a work in the 'wrong' way as the subject of the work – turning the 'wrong' photograph into a painting... He also produced one called *Right*, which has the tree a little over to one side as not to look like it is growing out of the subject's head.

Martha Rosler, *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems*, 1974-75



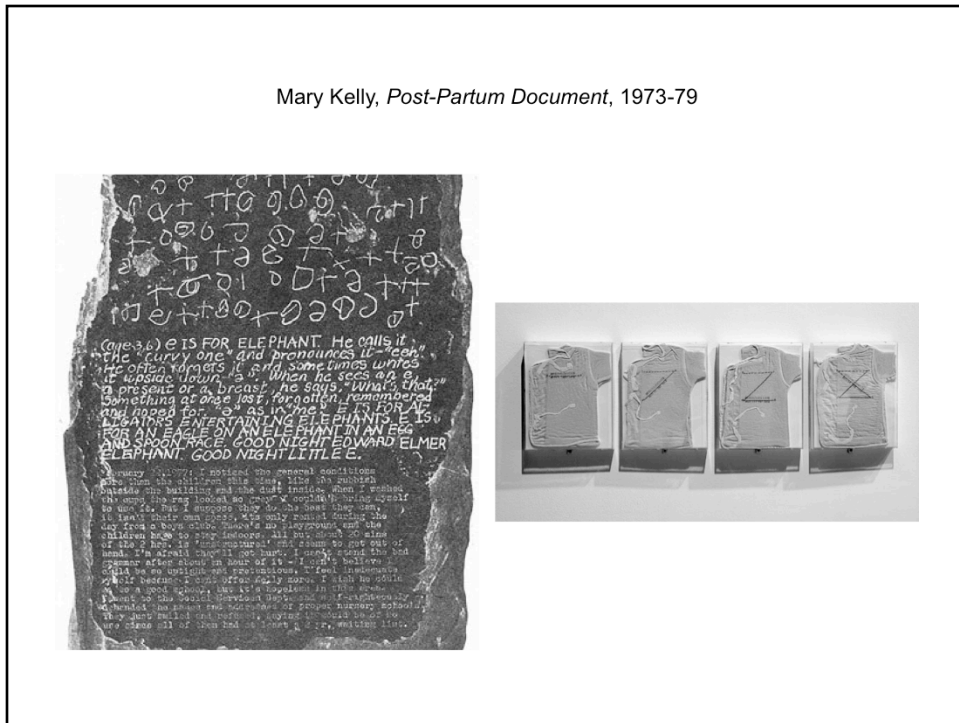
Martha Rosler came out of a certain political moment in the 1970's, and she started writing and working with photography. She was critical of the objectifying gaze of the photo-documentarian's camera. She wrote an essay titled "In, Around, and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography)" in 1981 in which she makes a vehement case against documentary photography and its problematic history.

This work, *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems*, also challenges the politics of image-making and street photography in particular. Here she photographs the Bowery in NY (then a place where many down-and-out alcoholics lived on the streets) without depicting people, instead using text to describe the state of being of those who live there (and are often photographed there). She also challenges the ability of the image, and text, to fully describe a human being or experience.

Martha Rosler is still a force in the art world. The *Martha Rosler Library* is one of her most exciting and extensive contemporary works:

<http://www.e-flux.com/projects/library/>

Mary Kelly, *Post-Partum Document*, 1973-79

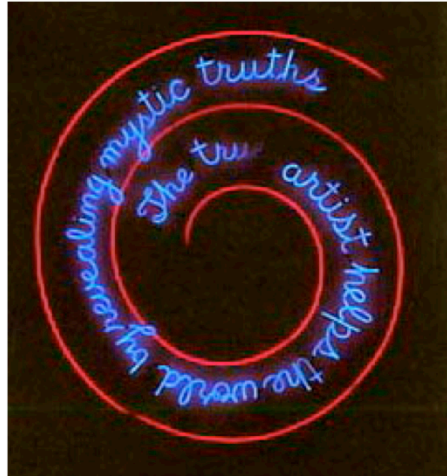


Mary Kelly is an LA-based artist. She is best known for her 1973-79 work entitled *Post-Partum Document*. This was a piece that took the deadpan, serious, information-aesthetics of Conceptual Art and applied them to the information and materials she gathered after giving birth to and while raising her son up to the age of 5. She takes objects such as clothing, diapers etc., and writes on them, documenting her relationship with her son and her changing role as a mother. She also includes detailed analyses of the artifacts as part of the work, as she relies heavily on Lacanian psychoanalysis in this work.

She is a pioneer of feminism in art, and was integral to making that a central discussion in the art discourse of the 1970's.

More documentation of this extensive work can be found here:
http://www.marykellyartist.com/post_partum_document.html

Bruce Nauman, *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths*, 1967



Here I will show you a couple of Bruce Nauman's neon works. He works in a wide range of media, and also comes out of the LA Conceptual Art school where he started out in 1966...

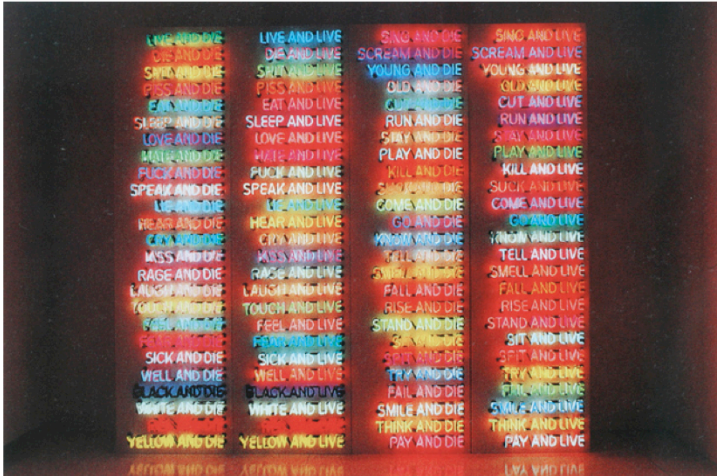
You may have seen his early video works, in which he documented many things in his studio, when he was a younger artist trying to figure out what it meant to be an artist (especially with no money!), or the famous photographic work of a failed attempt to levitate in his studio.

Later he also began to work more and more with language. He has incorporated this into video works (like the one in which he continually yells 'Thank you' at the camera), and the neon works you will see here...

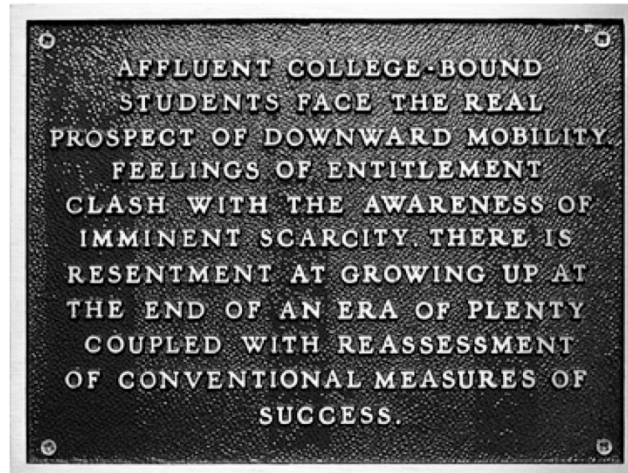
More about Nauman:

<http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/bruce-nauman>

Bruce Nauman, *100 Live and Die*, 1984



Jenny Holzer, From *Living Series*, 1981



Jenny Holzer is one of my favourite artists working with text.

She came out of a Post-Conceptual (sometimes called Neo-Conceptual) generation of artists who came after the Conceptualists in the late 70's/early 80's, and were still making theoretically a concept-rich art, but began to focus again on the image and materiality of the work – and a discussion of issues beyond art / the self-referential etc.. There was a focus on feminist critique, and a critique of the media and consumer culture with this group of artists (Cindy Sherman, Louise Lawlor, Barbara Kruger etc.)

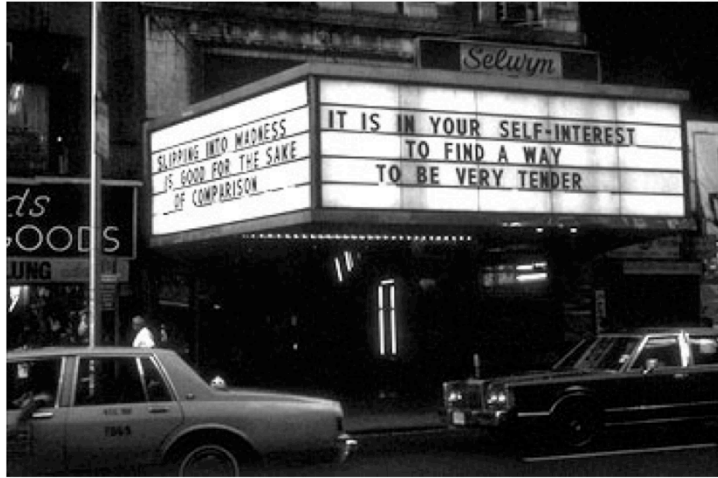
In her case, text becomes the image, and many of her early works (and her work to this day) exist out in public, and are meant to be site-specific. She began with her *Truisms* in 1977-79 which were posters she wheat-pasted around NY, and continued making amazing text-based work from then on, working with bronze plaques, marquis', billboards, public projections, posters, signage, etc.

Jenny Holzer, Poster, 1989



More Jenny Holzer...

Jenny Holzer, *Marquis*, 1993



More Jenny Holzer...

Jenny Holzer, *Protect Me from What I Want*, 1983-85



Holzer's first billboard work in Times Square using LED lights...

Barbara Kruger, *I Shop Therefore I Am*, 1987



Barbara Kruger is a contemporary of Jenny Holzer's. She came from a graphic design background and worked in the magazine world before becoming an artist, and her work is deeply informed by, and exists as a critique of that realm, and the media in general. Her work is boldly feminist, and often consists of b/w and red collage with text. The subject is often anti-consumerist, or feminist (challenging the male gaze, the objectification of the female body in art and advertising, and so on).

I am sure you have all seen this image. It first existed as a critical artwork by Kruger... Although sadly (or ironically, I guess) it is now a heavily marketed image that you can buy as a mug, magnet, t-shirt etc. In many places (including museum gift shops!)

Barbara Kruger, *Your Gaze....*, 1981-83



More Kruger...

I will end there for now. After this, I will start in the early 1990's with the next lecture.

Please comment, discuss, ask questions, etc. About this lecture, and any of the artists mentioned here, in the discussion forum.