

Daimler Art Collection

Conceptual Tendencies 1960s to today

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Preface

Based on the fundamentally new definitions of the idea of the artwork and the role of the observer in Minimal Art and Zero avant-garde USA/Europe around 1960, Conceptual Art has developed as an independent artistic direction since the mid-1960s. On the formal level it is characterized by clearly defined, objective structures, coherent imagery systems and—in transcending classical painting and sculpture—the trend towards the dematerialization of the artwork. It examines the conditions of the creation of art, temporal and spatial structures, the congruence of theory and practice, the capability of involving the observer mentally and physically as well as the institutional framework conditions of the presentation and reception of art.

How the central ideas, criteria, theories and practices of artistic media of early American Conceptual Art were able to be expanded (and from today's perspective must be expanded) to a field of internationally working artists of the 1960s/'70s (South America, Asia, Russia), how these lines must continue to be drawn to the art of the present day, to the likes of such

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artists as Tatsuo Miyajima, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Sophie Calle et al. was demonstrated impressively by Robert Osborne in his major Phaidon book “Conceptual Art” published in 2002. Tony Godfrey similarly follows the international interlinking of ideas, the contributions of early women artists in this field and in subsequent current positions in his book “Conceptual Art” published in 1998. Anne Rorimer examines the political motivations and those stemming from critique of ideology of Conceptual Art in her important book “New Art in the 60s and 70s: Redefining Reality” without exceeding her self-imposed timeframe.

“Conceptual Tendencies 1960s to today” combines current new acquisitions for the Daimler Art Collection with works from this context already in our collection as well as works by Geal Floyer and Robert Barr on loan. Artistic positions from the 1960s to the 1990s for example from Albert Mertz, Joseph Kosuth, André Cadere, Daniel Buren, Olivier Mosset, Arakawa or Dan Graham are juxtaposed with artistic statements from younger representatives such as Martin Boyce, Santiago Sierra, Jonathan Monk, Isabell Heimerdinger, Andreas Reiter Raabe or Lasse Schmidt Hansen. Some 80 works from 20 German and international artists are shown in the exhibition.

On the landscape of the focuses of the Daimler Art Collection—abstract avant-garde works from Classical Modernism via Concrete and Constructive Art, Zero and Minimal, Neo Geo to the present—examples of historic Conceptual Art represent a quasi-blind spot, for many reasons, with some notable exceptions (Arakawa, Barry, Burn, Cadere, Darboven, Mosset, Roehr, Walther). Only some of those are included in the exhibition but all are present in this catalogue. A corporate collection cannot and needs not strive for museum-like completeness. Nevertheless the aforementioned art-historical focuses are often limited by conceptual strategies, with the groups of works from Gernes, Mertz and Morellet being prime examples.

The intellectual and factual proximity of the works in the room allows the visitor to follow the fundamental moments of Conceptual Art mentioned at the outset: the emphasis on system and series, dematerialization and processuality, rationality/irrationality of the idea of the work, parameters of the artwork, involving the observer, art as language—language as art, the fringes of Conceptual and Minimal Art, media and techniques of conceptually reduced art.

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The constellation of the works as one passes through the exhibition is essentially based on the concept of the intellectual differentiation of classical conceptual ideas and strategies up to the present. Some examples: the central theme in the work of Joseph Kosuth and Isabell Heimerdinger, which is the starting point in the first room, is the fundamental replicability—and the loss of meaning that entails—of the material used and the generation of meaning through linguistic moments as well as through cultural and intellectual contexts. Their works question and transcend (art-) institutional frameworks by referring to other fields of knowledge such as philosophy, film and psychology. The thinking and action spaces of Daniel Buren and Andreas Reiter Raabe in many ways transcend the boundaries of the classic notion of art and the studio. Both artists decline a strictly conceptual form idiom using processually designed series of works, and reflect situational and intellectual contexts. Also of relevance to both artists is the analysis of painting and photography as artistic media.

The tour through the exhibition ends with three Danish artists: Poul Gernes has recently been rediscovered as a wanderer of the boundaries of Concept/Minimal/Pop of the 1960s and '70s who combined these styles with a social revolutionary impetus. A comparable revisiting of the conceptual multimedia work of Albert Mertz that began to emerge in the late 1950s is still pending. Both artists were important role models for young Danish concept artist Lasse Schmidt Hansen, as is evident in his sculptural deconstructions of the norms, systems and regulations of art and day-to-day life.

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Conceptual Tendencies—an introduction

On the historical term: 'Conceptual Art'

The historical 'conceptual art' movement—primarily an American invention—had many beginnings. Henry Flynt came up with the term in 1963 (in the age of Fluxus) as a response to the problematic relationship between the theory of Conceptual Art in terms of the artwork form and the act of concerning oneself with texts, the business of reader work. Flynt uses serial music as an illustrative example, pointing out that the notation of the music can be the subject of aesthetic judgments, and that aesthetic judgments therefore do not begin with the performance of the piece of music. This philosophy increases the importance of the mental

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achievement of both the composer and the recipients relative to the practical business of performance.

In 1967, Sol LeWitt published 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art' in *Artforum*, illustrating his thoughts with reproductions of works by artist colleagues such as Carl André, Mel Bochner, Dan Graham and Robert Morris. What follows is an extended quotation from 'Paragraphs'—an early programmatic text—in which the main criteria for Conceptual Art are enumerated:

“When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes art. This kind of art is not theoretical or illustrative of theories; it is intuitive, it is involved with all types of mental processes and it is purposeless. It is usually free from the dependence on the skill of the artist as a craftsman. [...] To work with a plan that is pre-set is one way of avoiding subjectivity. The plan would design the work. Some plans would require millions of variations, and some a limited number, but both are finite. Other plans imply infinity. In each case however, the artist would select the basic form and rules that would govern the solution of the problem. [...] It doesn't really matter if the viewer understands the concepts of the artist by seeing the art. Once out of his hand the artist has no control over the way the viewer will perceive the work. [...] The idea itself, even if not made visual, is as much a work of art as any finished product. All intervening steps – scribbles, sketches, drawings, failed work, models, studies, thoughts, conversations – are of interest. Those that show the thought process of the artist are sometimes more interesting than the final product. [...] These ideas are the result of my work as an artist and are subject to change as my experiences changes.” (*Artforum*, June 1967, vol. 5, no. 10, pp. 79-83)

'Paragraphs' was followed in 1969 by LeWitt's 'Sentences on Conceptual Art' (in: *Art-Language*, vol.1, no. 1, May 1969, pp. 11-13). In the concise phrases of this text, the artist reiterates the significant starting principles for his artwork, emphasizing the polar entanglement of the “rational” and “irrational”, “logical and “alogical”, the equality of all media and all artistic forms of expression.

Implementation of 'Conceptual Art' 1966 to 1970 Exhibitions, galleries, artistic works

Between 1966 and 1970, the development of conceptual art was given a characteristic outline by a number of group exhibitions. The show organized by Mel Bochner in 1966 for the

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New Yorker Visual Arts Gallery was entitled 'Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to Be Viewed as Art'. It consisted of pages and copies of art-object books, displayed on pedestals in an otherwise empty space. The show 'Serielle Formationen', held in the summer of 1967 and curated by Paul Maenz and Peter Roehr for Frankfurt's Goethe Universität, brought European and American artists together for the first time, as did *Dies alles Herzchen wird einmal Dir gehören*, an event held on the evening of 25.9.1967 from 19:45 to 21:55 featuring temporary sculptural happenings by Dibbets, Flanagan, Höke, Johnson, Long, Lueg, Posenenske and Roehr. An exhibition of work by American conceptual artists curated by Joseph Kosuth opened in the Museum of Normal Art in New York in November 1967, with Hanne Darboven present as a guest. In 1968, exhibitions in The Hague and Düsseldorf introduced American Minimal Art and related conceptual movements to Europe and to the European canon. The pioneering exhibition 'Prospect 69' (organized by Konrad Fischer and Hans Strelow) put Beuys, Buren, Merz and Ruthenbeck, as well as Morris, Naumann and Serra, on display in the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf. Shortly before Museum Schloß Morsbroich opens 'Konzeption/Conception' showing texts, concepts, photos only. Two European exhibitions — 'Op Losse Schroeven: Situaties en Cryptostructuren' at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam in March/ April of 1969 (co-curated by Harald Szeemann) and the Szeemann show 'When Attitudes Become Form' that took place at the same time in the Kunsthalle Bern — plus the New York show 'Information' in the Museum of Modern Art in 1970 summarized the conceptual and minimalist movements and placed them in the same context with contemporary art movements such as Land Art, Minimal Art, Process Art, Arte Povera, Anti-Form etc.

Conceptual Art's historical roots—or rather, our image of historical Conceptual Art—was also significantly facilitated by the intelligent strategy and communicative competence of a gallerist and a book project. In 1968, New Yorker Seth Siegelaub issued a brochure with reproductions of numbered artworks by Douglas Huebler, although no corresponding exhibition was held in his gallery. At the same time, he published the 'Xerox Book', today regarded as a founding document of Conceptual Art. Carl André, Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt and Robert Morris were each allotted 25 pages to design as they chose, and the book was reproduced using photocopiers. In 1969, Siegelaub organized the exhibition 'January 5–31, 1969', which featured Barry, Huebler, Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner. To mark the occasion, he published interviews with the four artists in the arts magazine. He integrated these interviews into the exhibition 'Prospect 69' in Düsseldorf,

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an exhibition which was itself accompanied by interviews published in the catalogue. Although these interviews represented only the gallery's program, they created the impression that 'Conceptual Art' was a unified artist group with a clearly-defined program. Siegelau's exhibition 'March 1-31, 1969' was an equally important statement along the same lines. This exhibition initially consisted only of a catalogue. For every day of that month, this catalogue simply listed the name of an artist, who might also provide an 'artwork' in text form.

In view of the prominent place that has been given to Siegelau's artists, it should be emphasized that the commitment and presentation choices of a small number of German galleries also helped to establish minimalist trends and played a role in shaping the image of early Conceptual Art. In October 1967, Konrad Fischer opened his gallery in Düsseldorf with a first solo exhibition by Carl André in Europe, followed by further European premières for minimal and conceptual artists such as Artschwager, Weiner, Darboven, Long, Panamarenko, Rinke, Rückriem, Ruthenbeck and the first German solo exhibitions for Boetti, Buren, Dibbets, Fulton and Merz. From 1967 to 1968, the Galerie Ricke Kassel presented 'Ten from Castelli' and 'Primary Structure' plus solo exhibitions for Gerhard Richter, Barry Flanagan and Gary Kuehn. After the gallery reopened in Cologne in 1968, first solo exhibitions for Bill Bollinger, Keith Sonnier, Richard Serra, Lee Lozano, Richard Artschwager and Barry Le Va followed. In 1967/ 1968, the Galerie Hans-Jürgen Müller in Stuttgart brought artists from the USA to Germany, including Arakawa, Robert Mangold and Tony Smith. Between 1964 and 1972, Heiner Friedrich displayed work by pioneering exponents of Minimal Art, Land Art and Conceptual Art in his gallery in Munich (in association with Franz Dahlem from 1966 onwards). A summarized overview of these developments, reflected to a high standard and communicated to a German public, has been presented by Paul Maenz and Gerd de Vries in their gallery in Cologne since 1970.

In the mid-1960s, the American galleries were initially very tolerant of the presentation of artworks by 'their' artists in Europe, as this promised to increase their market value: "Art museums, which in America were privately financed, only offered the opportunity to hold retrospectives to young American artists who had already made a name for themselves via gallery exhibitions and exhibitions in European museums. For the trustees, such well-known names represented a lucrative opportunity to attract financial investment, as debutantes

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whose names were already known in America had a higher market value. New collection acquisitions ahead of the planned exhibition and pushing of the acquired artist through exhibitions in the gallery itself were the most standard strategies. The links between art and criticism were therefore affected by private interests—by proprietary interests—in a more open way in America than in Europe” (Thomas Dreher, *Konzeptuelle Kunst in Amerika und England 1963– 976*, Frankfurt 1992, p. 161). After a euphoric first visit to New York in the early 1960s and a second visit in 1968 that left a sobering impression, Hans-Jürgen Müller tells of this climate of coldly calculated strategy: “I flew to New York again. This time, my feelings were cooler. A year previously, the friendly weather that prevailed in the art scene had suddenly changed, and the Americans made no attempt to disguise their commercial interest in us Germans. ‘Can we do some business together?’ had replaced, ‘What can I do for you?’ Before, people had said, ‘It would be a pleasure to show you the artist’s studio’, but now, ‘We can put you on the waiting list’ was the standard phrase. Last year, I worked with the Fischbach Gallery on a Tony Smith exhibition; now, the creative wind of New York is only a moderate breeze.” (H.-J.M., *Kunst kommt nicht von Können*, Nuremberg 1976, reissued 1990, p. 99)

When one looks at the progression of new exhibition forms and theories between 1962 and 1970, the significant changes take place in artists’ reformulating of artworks. This is a trend which largely defines attitudes to both historical Conceptual Art and its new manifestations in contemporary art: the anti-photo photo books of Ed Ruscha (from *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations*, 1962 to *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*, 1966), Yoko Ono’s *Instructions for paintings*, which first appeared in 1962, the first photo performance projects by Stanley Brown in Holland 1962/63, Joseph Kosuth’s ‘One and Three’ artworks series, which began in 1965, (an object presented together with its photo and its lexical definition), Daniel Buren’s first public stripe artworks in Paris 1966, On Kawara’s *date paintings* series (beginning in 1966) and the accompanying *postcard* and notebook pieces, Bruce Nauman’s *Eleven Color Photographs* of 1966 (which featured scenes staged in the studio), the first painting performance by Buren/Mosset/ Parmentier/Toroni in Paris on the evening of the 2nd January 1967, Dan Graham’s article *Homes for America* in the ‘Arts’ magazine 1967/68, Michael Heizer’s first *Earth Works* and Richard Long’s first Land Art works in 1967, Robert Ryman’s first solo exhibition in the Bianchini Gallery New York, featuring the 13-part Standard series, Franz Erhard Walther’s 1968 book project ‘Objekte, benutzen’ (published Cologne/New York), Sol LeWitt’s *46 3-Part Variations on 3 Different Kinds of Cubes* exhibition

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in New York's Dwan Gallery in February 1968, Walter de Maria's *Erdräum* [Earth space] in Heiner Friedrich's Munich gallery in September 1968, Hans Haacke feeding the doves on Coney Island beach on the 30th of November 1968, Ian Burn's and Mel Ramsden's photograph and text work *Excerpts from 'Six-Negatives' Book* in 1968 (as part of the group Art & Language), and Hanne Darboven's solo exhibition in the Städtisches Museum Mönchengladbach, featuring six film projections based on six books from the year 1968. One very influential artwork from the 'heyday' of conceptual art was Robert Barry's *Inert Gas Series: Argon (from a measured volume to indefinite expansion)*: the release of a liter of argon gas into the atmosphere on the 4th of March in 1969, photographically documented. The subsequent events can be seen in Lucy Lippard's tabulated compilation 'Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972' (First edition New York 1973, reissued 1997).

The criteria of Conceptual Art Even the brief outline above goes to show that, unlike the various -isms of Classical Modernism, Conceptual Art was not an avant-garde movement with clear boundaries that could be readily defined. Instead, it comprised a wide variety of working methods, attitudes, strategies and arguments. In many cases, these separate strands were united by an explicit political orientation or critique of the age, a tendency to criticize institutions and an analytical attitude to the development of art.

What justifies the usefulness of the term 'Conceptual Art' is "a translocal interest in strategic counter-discourses that attack commodification and fetishisation of art and the production and distribution systems of late capitalist society" that began circa 1970. Significantly, conceptual art distances itself from modernist concepts of authorship and ownership that are based on expression and subjectivity, and also from the construct of the purely visual artwork. Like other artistic developments of the post-war years, conceptual processes partially served to demystify individual signatures and technical craft abilities, giving an artworkconstituting role for the observer." (Sabeth Buchmann, in: Dumonts Begriffslexikon zur zeitgenössischen Kunst, ed. by Hubertus Butin, Cologne 2002, p. 49.)

Some of the key factors in Conceptual Art already mentioned in the foreword to this publication are briefly given here, as seen in individual artworks both historical and

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contemporary: the emphasizing of system and series, dematerialization and processuality, the rationality/ irrationality of the idea of an artwork, investigation of the circumstances that affect an artwork, involvement of the viewer, art as language and language as art, the outlying areas of concept and minimalist art, and an analytical approach to the media and technologies of conceptually reduced art.

System and series – Painting as Concept

“To work with a plan that is pre-set is one way of avoiding subjectivity. The plan would design the work. Some plans would require millions of variations, and some a limited number, but both are finite. Other plans imply infinity.” (Sol LeWitt)

If it is true that classical Conceptual Art tried to exclude the medium of painting as an ideologically contaminated art form, it is also true that some conceptual artists have worked to deconstruct the material and intellectual factors of painting and to thereby create new forms of artwork.

High-profile examples include Robert Ryman’s white picture objects, which he spent four decades developing. They represent an analysis of the elements of pictorial compositions and artist decisions translated into a visual form. The Danish artists Poul Gernes and Albert Mertz also addressed the painting medium in serial artwork sequences. Gernes’ work combined aspects of Pop Art, Fluxus, Minimal and Conceptual Art with an explicitly politically and socially conscious attitude. In 1961 he founded the ‘Experimental Art School’ in Copenhagen, which served as a base for transporting painting and art into public spaces as design elements that could be positively experienced. His poster-like picture objects reduced to circles or strips, presented in all their rapid and emotionless ‘property of having been physically made’, could be used as a type of decoration. However, the art system has since relentlessly re-mythologized them.

“Why I am opposed to painting pictures? The act of painting itself gives me sensual gratification but I find the decisions which form and color impresses me to be wrong because they can only be answered subjectively and cannot be regarded as an axiom.” (Cat. Total Mertz, Copenhagen 1999, p. 145) The objective of overcoming expression and sensualism as moments of art expressed here already marked Mertz’s early work. With his move to France

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in 1963 image-related, conceptual research gained in importance and Mertz explored the theories of minimal art and concept art. He read the writings of artists such as Buren, Andre, Judd, Morris or Kosuth, who emphasized the contextual and processual nature of work conception and presentation. In 1968 Mertz reduced his palette to the primary colors red and blue, titled by the artist “red/blue proposition,” but at the same time expanded his image ideas to space-related constellations of freely suspended canvases, ready-mades, objects and sculptures. Mertz demonstratively emphasized the ‘non-intact’ and conversationally speaking the battered nature of the physical form of his works to focus the viewer’s attention on the authenticity and stringency of the thought.

Olivier Mosset showed his first circle pictures, developed as serial project, in the Paris gallery Yvon Lambert in 1966. Shortly after that he met Daniel Buren, Niele Toroni and Michel Parmentier, with whom he founded the group of artists known as B.M.P.T. (Buren, Mosset, Parmentier, Toroni, the group existed from 1967-69). With public painting events, lasting just one evening, the four young artists’ polemic, voiced at demonstrations, was aimed at a radical break with the painting of the École de Paris and of Abstract Expressionism, which was dominant at the time. From 1966 to 1974 Mosset painted about 200 identical pictures of circles, and this ‘excess’ of reduced painterly decisions and the levelling down of the picture as a signifier finally led to his temporary departure from art.

From the mid 1960s to the present day, Daniel Buren’s work has combined media-critical aspects, and aspects that are explicitly critical of institutions. His pieces with stripes 8.7 centimeter wide which first emerged in 1967 in the context of B.M.P.T.—as painterly actions and temporary manifestations in public space—developed over what is now almost five decades and count among the most consistent formulations of a conceptually directed artistic-serial strategy. Shusaku Arakawa and Madeline Gins lived and worked in New York for about four decades on the idea of a universal work of art including architecture and the human body, poetry and philosophy. In their 1960s pictures, Arakawa/Gins developed their own language for conceptual painting. It is a poetic combination of signs, concepts and graphic elements placed against the white background of Zen philosophy’s ‘silent emptiness’. The concept pictures only acquire color and form in the viewer’s imagination. In 1963, Arakawa/Gins enveloped a monumental conceptual painting project, *The Mechanism of Meaning*, 1963-73, directed explicitly against what they felt to be the soulless geometries of

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classical Minimal Art, which was dominating New York at the time. Arakawa/Gins set a poetic, minimalist sign language against Minimal Art's self-referential objects, articulated as a comprehensive compendium of human abilities.

The *Blue Reflex* works were Ian Burn's last abstract paintings, originating immediately before his conceptual phase, in which he rejected completely the use of color. The image 'mirrors' various different artistic sketches from the 1960s: in local terms, the color blue has particular significance in the history of Australian painting; and in international terms, Burn makes reference to the legendary 'International Klein Blue' by Yves Klein and the reduced object art of American minimalism. The surface appears to have been created by means of an industrial application, although it was in reality hand-sprayed by the artist. "The surface is unimportant, pure chance, and remains intact only as a reflex [...] the reflex is what gives the image its scale." (I. B.)

Jonathan Monk has been analyzing the reception of pioneering works in Abstract Art of the 20th century since the mid-1990s. In animated films, drawings, objects and installations, he interprets the icons of 'subjectlessness' through aspects of duplication, perpetuation and permutation. He does this however not in a denunciatory manner, but instead in the sense of a critical-scientific analysis of fundamental parameters of abstraction, and their interpretation, combination and reduction, accompanied by misunderstandings, on the path through the progression of styles in Modernism. Monk draws on the approaches taken in Concept and Minimal Art of the 1960s/70s in order to generate logic and the ability to objectify the process. Yet at the same time he nonetheless undermines them by offsetting them with forms of private appropriation and blasé British humor.

In a way comparable with Jonathan Monk, 'playing his way through' Modernism's various isms becomes concrete for Andreas Reiter Raabe firstly in testing and researching more deeply the kind of random artistic events relating to notions of painting and conceptual decisions: How does one interrupt pure monochrome using its own resources? How far does one leave an allover to its own devices? In what form can color fields be further explored in terms of sculpture? How can spaces be conceived pictorially through light reflections and mirror images, and how would architecture have to look in order to respond to that? Which couplings of color, wall, space and architecture are still viable today, and open to further

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development? Where and for what context does photography alone concentrate essential qualities of a found image?

Using photography conceptually

»Note: this sculpture was not made with the intention of creating a situation for a photograph. The photograph, through repeated use, through the years, has inadvertently come to be a work in its own right.« (Walter de Maria, in Kat. Pier + Ocean, Hayward Gallery, London 1980, S. 44)

The fact that photography became accepted as an independent art form is to a considerable extent due to the intelligent and strategic use of the medium in the context of Conceptual Art—this despite the fact and because artists explicitly and demonstratively deploy photography in an anti-photographic way: no high-quality prints, no individual pieces, no choice of subjectively and expressively charged motifs, no framing: in other words, no photographic art in the classical sense. Instead of that: work with ready-made photos, snapshots, badly rephotographed or copied magazine and newspaper photos, the use of unlimited photographic series, artists' books sold cheaply or photographic blow-ups in public places.

Joseph Kosuth, as one of the leading practitioners of analytical American conceptual art, attempts as of the characteristics of his practice to replace traditional, formal and content-orientated art with an understanding of cultural processes taken from language itself. The initial model 'art—language—meaning' has been expanded in the 1970s into the model 'art—language—culture'. From this point on, Kosuth employs art as language bound to a specific cultural situation which only derives meaning in the context of other cultural languages, including elements of language as well images/photos. Kosuth describes the photos, historical or contemporary, which he includes in his installations, as 'photo-texts': "Functional units of my installations are comprised of 'photo-texts' [...] each suggesting an aspect; a conversation/ description is formed by the exclusion (or inclusion) of specific 'photo-texts' and, more significantly, the relationship between the cultural productions which the included 'photo-texts' indicate." (J.K., in: R. Wiehager [Hg.], Kein Ding, Kein Ich, Esslingen 1992)

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Eadweard Muybridge studies of motion in photograph sequences from the early 20th century had a significant impact both on Duchamp's artwork, on the development of seriality in the 1960s as well as on American conceptual artists. Sol LeWitt uses female nude photographs by Muybridge in his artworks *Muybridge I* and *II* (both 1964), focusing on their seriality. Dan Graham also links his 1967 editorial and photographs for *Homes for America* (Arts Magazine, 1966/67) with Muybridge under the heading of seriality. In the paintings of Arakawa/Gins photos as ready-mades often appear as pictorial, signlike elements. In the painting *Untitled*, 1964/65, from the Daimler Art Collection four collaged upside-down male nude photographs by Muybridge are integrated as collages.

Between 1946 and 1949, the US-Congress passed housing programs with low interest rates, leading to the construction of an incredible number of housing units—17,450—on Long Island alone during a period of just four years. The 'instant-building' in the post-war period was addressed by Dan Graham in the December/January edition of 'Arts Magazine' (1966/67); under the title 'Homes for America' this was his first conceptual work, phrased as an editorial contribution. After a brief period of running a gallery in New York, which came to an end in 1965, Graham had begun to photograph the faceless, infinitely uniform suburbs of upstate New York. Two of the photos owned by the Daimler Art Collection, *New Highway Restaurant*, 1967, and *Row Houses*, 1966, are prints of his first photographic research.

Isabell Heimerdinger has with several conceptually based photographic series and videos since the mid 1990s been working on the blurring boundaries between cinematic reality and the reality of everyday life, between medial appearance and factual being. For this purpose she has been dealing for some time with the figure and role understanding of the actor. In photographic, cinematic or installationtype experimental designs she explores the subtle difference between pose and (actor) personality, between the self and self-projection, between role and identity. In the photo series *Thomas*, 2005, for example, different psychological states (excited, cheerful, hesitant, melancholy) all serve as titles for one and the same photo.

Since the 1980s, Andreas Reiter Raabe has played his way through the intellectual and formal repertoire of the essential isms of Modernism, deploying his own parameters, effectively in

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order to be able to present the way the argument goes for himself in visual form. The photographic image—whether a ready-made newspaper photo, ‘painting’ with photograph, critical reflection about the medium of ‘photography’ or as a photographic series developed processually and conceptually —plays a central part in Reiter Raabe’s work. The background to this interest is an almost instinctive urge to collect photographs, and on the other hand the intellectual analysis of the role played by photography in Conceptual Art. Reiter Raabe continued this substantial linguistic analysis of photography as a medium from the mid 1990s in interviews with numerous international artists like Dan Graham, Daniel Buren, Ed Ruscha and Sol LeWitt, discussing their conceptual photographic and artistic practice in detail. In 2004, Andreas Reiter Raabe condensed this organically developed, intricate analysis of photography as a medium into a photographic series called *Natural Monochromes*, referring to Sol LeWitts artist book ‘Autobiography’ from 1966. This combines the here and now of a creative photographic moment with global activity in locations in Europe, America, Asia, Japan and Australia.

Photographic series play an important role also the work of young Danish artist Lasse Schmidt Hansen: simple repetitions of a black-and- white landscape motif, views of his working table, copies of copied photos. In the four-part photographic work *Piled up stuff*, Lasse Schmidt Hansen photographed a pile of unpaid bills, unanswered letters and documents in the style of Christopher Williams’s functional photography. The cryptic element of this apparently simple random arrangement lies in the fact that the envelopes and paper formats conform with DIN standards, while their content must be associated with highly charged personal subjects, communications and decisions.

Discussing Santiago Sierra’s photographically documented performances and actions from the point of view of conceptual strategies tends to be unusual, as this seems to weaken their explicit and demonstrative indication of existential, political and economic questions by constraining them conceptually. The works in our exhibition—three examples from the *111 Konstruktionen mit 10 Elementen und 10 Arbeitern* series [111 Constructions with 10 Elements and 10 Workmen, Zurich 2004]—nevertheless criticizes the possibility of measuring manpower purely on the basis of utility and exchange values in the form of a conceptually organized performance and within the image of social formalizations. The artist engaged ten workmen who followed his instructions and are voluntarily holding ten plaster slabs (100 x

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100 x 2.5 cm) in various positions, thus creating 111 variations. Aestheticizing the 'production run' to make it into a kind of constructional ballet means that the resulting reduction of the individuals to anonymity emerges all the more strikingly.

Idea, Concept, Language

"The idea becomes a machine that makes art. This kind of art is not theoretical or illustrative of theories; it is intuitive, it is involved with all types of mental processes and it is purposeless."
(Sol LeWitt)

From 1965 onwards, Joseph Kosuth, one of the founders of American Conceptual Art, studied Ludwig Wittgenstein's analytical philosophy of language and his concept of tautology, the idea that language possesses meaning only in relationship to itself. '490 (+216, After Augustine's Confessions) reflects the basic tenets of Kosuth's work: The early understanding of tautology and of the circular nature of the confessional process are evident in the repetition of the Wittgenstein quotation; the easily reproducible method used of screen-printing on glass ensures the supremacy of the idea over all other criteria for originality of a formal nature. Wittgenstein considered Augustine's "Confessions" 'the most important book ever written'. He particularly valued the "Confessions" for not being a theory of language, but an image of language. It is in this sense that Kosuth's work is entitled *After Augustine's Confessions*.

Robert Barry has been involved with spatial perception since 1964, his work developing subsequently into a study of the conceptuality of art. In particular, his aim was to challenge the sensory faculties of the observer through absolute reduction and concentration. For his experiments he used traditional artistic media such as color and compositional form, whilst treating the image on a conceptual level as both a mental and physical space. "In 1972, Barry began to isolate words from their syntactic context. In his projector installations of this period, projector project fragmented phrases onto the wall in a sequence structured by carefully inserted blank transparencies. In a dark room, the words that appear, their associative potential and the intervals of time they take place in become the real means of artistic creativity. [...] The artist subsequently positioned individual words on the edges of quires of paper, then on monochrome color charts, thereby creating the template for his characteristic 'word-works'. Isolated words speak directly to the viewer—from the canvas or,

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increasingly, from the walls and glass surfaces of buildings.” (Exh. cat. Robert Barry: Three wall drawings, ed. by Helmut Friedel, Lenbachhaus, Munich, 2001, p. 18.)

Ian Burn was a leading member of Art & Language, an international group of artists, and his work is fundamental to both Australian Minimal Art and Conceptual Art. Burn’s analytical work on the concept of “art”, his critical examination of traditional art criteria and of the question of what makes art into art, led to results that were unusually radical, and not just for Australia. “*Undeclared Glasses* interrogates things about their art content, in this work I kept the question about the function of art as open as possible.” (I.B.) Ian Burn applied linguistic and philosophical insights to problems of perception: as part of the artistic concept, and under its conditions, the panes of glass are art, but purely in terms of perception they are still just glass. It is only the accompanying text that makes them function as art.

Martin Boyce has been developing a creative inventory for his solo shows and exhibition contributions since about 2002, and this involves condensing scenes he has experienced or imagined down into atmospherically charged sign constellations. He constantly recombines his sculptural alphabet to form new constellations, shifts and spatial articulations, like an anagram grouping the letters of an opening sentence to form new sentences on the border between sense and nonsense. Here he follows the ‘language’ of a given place, an urban structure, historically charged space and architecture. In 2002 Martin Boyce came across a black-and-white photograph of concrete sculptures made by Joël and Jan Martel (Paris, 1925) modeled after trees. The graphically analyzed structure of the trees became for Boyce a foundational module for the invention of a reduced Alphabet of constructive forms and signs. All elements of Boyce’ oeuvre—the hanging treelike light sculptures, furniture, poster, birds houses, lamps or telephone booths—are based on this ‘iconic image’ of nature transformed into abstraction.

“While I was making models of the Martel trees I would have cut out components of the trees lying flat on my desk, I began to arrange these to see if they could repeat and from there developed a linear pattern based on the trees central structure. It was then, within the lines of the repeat that I began to see the possibility for letters of the alphabet to emerge. At first I found an R an M and an S (for Robert Mallet Stevens). Slowly, over a period of time new and different versions of letters appeared. Through a work by Cerith Wyn Evans I was introduced to ‘The Changing Light at Sandover’ (1976 - 82) by James Merrill, an epic poem that employed

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the ouija board as a writing tool. It has recently occurred to me that that there is something similar at play with my relationship with the concrete trees. Through the linear repeat pattern; this graphic forest, letters, words and forms were being whispered.” (M.B., Interview with Christian Ganzenberg, uned.) The wall sculpture *We Are The Breeze (Concrete Leaves)*, 2006, touches on impressions of urban landscape and gives the title set in brackets a fragile image written across the wall—the abstract characters of *Concrete Leaves* rise, fall and float from left to right, punctuated by the equally formalized lampshades: “There is no specific literary reference for ‘Concrete Leaves’, it comes from my thinking about the original concrete trees. If the trees are concrete then what happens in the autumn, do concrete leaves fall? This while still poetic is a slightly more alarming prospect. It could perhaps take you to ideas of falling fragments of architecture etc. When I was installing the 2007 show at Johnen in Berlin I looked out of the window at the autumn leaves lying on the cracked, concrete paving slabs illuminated by the street lamps and the ‘Concrete Leaves’ and ‘Electric Trees’ texts I was installing had a perfect reflection in the landscape around the gallery.” (M.B.)

Lasse Schmidt Hansen works with adherence to and deviation from formalized standards, and the role of perception. Through minimal modifications of standard DIN (‘German Industry norms’) measurement coordinates the artist attempts to open our eyes to the incidental nature of rules, regulations and prescriptions which determine sizes and volumes of most objects of everyday use. “Further to your enquiry of today, I regret that we have been unable to identify any ISO standard referencing a recommended eye level measurement for an exhibition.” Without any address, sender, salutation, date or any other of the conventional features of written correspondence, this sentence written in standard format at the top of an A4 sheet and addressed to an anonymous reader—to a reader as exhibition visitor or perhaps a future exhibition organizer looking at a work of art hanging at eye level and in its turn speaking to an anonymous member of the art world who has apparently been trying to find information about standards for hanging works of art.

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Daimler Contemporary
Haus Huth Alte Potsdamer Str. 5 10785 Berlin
daily 11 am - 6 pm

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