

For nearly 60 years Mel Bochner's intellectual and material analysis of painting, photography and sculpture has yielded ground-breaking works that explore the intersection of linguistic and visual representation. As a leading figure within the conceptual and post-minimal art movements of the 1960s, he experimented in complicating the relationship between image and language. His early works dissected the art object and formed the 'analytical' groundwork so crucial to his investigation into the function of painting and its potential as a method of linguistic communication. Words and language as both subject and medium form the backbone of a practice fundamentally concerned with a continual oscillation between the verbal and the visual. In recent years his conceptual practice has developed in tandem with a lush, painterly practice that investigates the interrelation of form and meaning in the visual manifestation of language. With his word paintings Bochner explores the cognitive links between looking at and reading a painting.

The thesaurus paintings are an important part of this particular enquiry. With their focus on text and its interpretation, these works re-imagine language as a form of pictorial expression. His use of colour sometimes affirms the language it is painting and at other times ignores it, intentionally avoiding system and pattern. Each block letter oozes with pigment, drips and smudges, which escape the crisp edges of the typeface thereby emphasising the material expression of their own execution. Meaning is both enhanced and obscured by Bochner's technique, which invites the viewer to re-consider the ways in which we interpret language and image. These paintings make us think about the acts of reading and looking, of representation and abstraction, and how they intersect. The thesaurus paintings are just one of many rationalising systems that Bochner uses to question and explore our irrational trust in language and the world around us.

Mel Bochner was born in Pittsburgh, PA in 1940 and lives and works in New York, NY. In 2019 Bochner unveiled a new, large-scale work from his Measurement series at Dia:Beacon, Beacon, NY and in 2018 he participated in the 57th Edition of the Carnegie International, Pittsburgh, PA. His work has been the subject of many solo museum exhibitions, most recently at Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, OH (2018); Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, South Hadley, MA (2015); Jewish Museum, New York, NY (2014); Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK (2012), which travelled to Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany (2013) and Fundação de Serralves, Porto, Portugal (2013) and National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. (2011). His work is included in major public and private collections internationally, including Tate, London, UK; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France; Städel Museum, Frankfurt, Germany; Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, Montreal, Canada; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA.