

Press Release

Art & Language *HOSTAGE*

March 3 – April 16, 2022
504 West 24th Street, New York

Art & Language returns to New York with *HOSTAGE*, a rare exhibition that focuses solely on the conceptual artists' paintings. Featuring the seminal 1990 *Hostage* series, the presentation underscores Art & Language's continuous experiments with the painting surface. Presented alongside are studies for the internationally acclaimed series as well as the more recent *Sea Ghost* works that continue Art & Language's exploration of visual and conceptual realms of art. The presentation marks the artists' first in New York since their 2019 performance, *Letters to The Jackson Pollock Bar in the Style of The Red Krayola*.

HOSTAGE is Art & Language's 16th solo exhibition with the gallery, marking a relationship that spans just under 50 years. Founded in 1968, Art & Language has assumed many forms central to the origins and development of Conceptual art. The pioneering artists, now a collaboration between Michael Baldwin and Mel Ramsden, have combined text, performance, painting, music and publishing to persistently question the complexion of a historically significant art practice. Painted 25 years apart, the *Hostage* and *Sea Ghost* works examine aspects of Modernist and post-Modernist ideology.

The *Hostage* paintings incorporate a composite and purposeful layering process. The works begin with realistic impressions of poplar trees in bucolic landscapes, transferred from preparatory drawings to vertical canvases. This verticality is highlighted through bands of color that obscure various segments of the scene. The initial drawings are marked in certain areas by graphic deformations of the letters S.U.R.F. indicating 'surface'. These areas are covered in tape during the original painting process and subsequently removed when the next layer of thicker paint is planted over the marked fields. While the final painting surface is still wet a glass panel is screwed onto the canvas, flattening globs of paint in different directions across the façade. The glass is not used as the familiar protective layer but rather as a means to reflect the surface and make the act of looking at the painting also one of looking into a mirror.

This play of feints and disguises is at the core of Art & Language's painting practice. The primary landscape is no longer the focus and the subject is shifted to the material itself. The viewer is asked to reflect on painting and its histories. The multiple layers have a fragmenting effect on the surface. Images are obscured by strata of paint, architectural plans and even by the reflection in the glass faceted to the exterior. The artists have described these works as performative satires: 'These works are satire but not simply satire. You might say they tell truth through lying and lie by truth-telling. The aspects of imposture, performance and production conceal and reveal each other.'

The *Sea Ghost* paintings carry the memory, both conceptually and physically, of the *Hostage* works. *Sea Ghosts*, an anagram of *Hostage*, were a revisitation in 2014 to previously completed painting surfaces, further layering and confusing the subject. The artists' featured new gestures, swirling colors within new borders, parodying historical painterly styles. They are layered amongst non-specific architectural plans of buildings and representational fragments of ceiling from various galleries and art institutions. These additions explore the idea of paintings and culture being held hostage by institutions. The body of work contains an indexicality; they are levels of past conversations, other paintings, and the artists' histories. Worlds of detail are squashed between planes of canvas, paint and glass. The term 'hostage' recalls jeopardization, uncertainty, and possibly deceit. The displaced images of art, continuously obfuscated, elude easy looking.

About the artists

The activities of Art & Language have been marked from the outset by practical variety, by resistance to easy categorisation and by a tendency to provoke open and reflexive enquiry. Art & Language's earliest works date from before 1968, when the name was first adopted as the name of an artistic practice. In the following year, the first issue of the journal Art-Language was published in England. Then and over the next few years Art & Language provided a common identity for a number of people already involved in various types of collaboration. The mid 1960s had seen widespread collapse in the authority of those individualistic cultural protocols which go under the name of Modernism, and the coming together of the two terms 'Art' and 'Language' served to recognise a range of intellectual concerns and artistic expedients which that collapse had occasioned. For a variety of activities which bore practically and critically upon the concept of art, but which were at home neither in the studio nor in the gallery, Art & Language promised a social base in shared conversation. That conversation in turn transformed the practice of those involved and generated other kinds of work.

Experimental and sceptical, perhaps their most famous work is Index 01, exhibited at dOCUMENTA 5, Kassel, Germany (1972), a catalogue of their writings in eight filing cabinets presented on four plinths at eye level. Major solo exhibitions include 'Figure it out who can', Galerie Michael Janssen, Berlin, Germany (2019); 'Nobody Spoke', Kunstsaele, Berlin, Germany (2017); Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), Barcelona, Spain (2014); Foundationn Antoni Tapies, Barcelona, 1999; Musee d'art moderne de Lille Metropole, (2002); Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle, Belgium (2013); Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich, Switzerland (2012); Espoo Museum of Modern Art, Espoo, Finland (2009); Centro De Arte Contemporáneo (CAC) Málaga, Spain (2004); MoMA PS1, New York, USA (1999); ICA, London, UK (1991); Tate Gallery, London, UK (1985); Musée d'Art Moderne, Toulon, France (1982) and Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, UK (1974). Art & Language have participated in numerous group exhibitions, including 'Guernica' at the National Picasso Museum in Paris, France (2017); 'Conceptual Art in Britain: 1964-1979', Tate Britain, London, UK (2016); 'Before Normal: Concept After Concept', Museet for Samtidskunst, Roskilde, Denmark (2014); 'Invisible: Art about the Unseen 1957-2012', Hayward Gallery, London, UK (2012); 'Sound of Music', Turner Contemporary, Margate, Kent, UK (2009); dOCUMENTA 10, Kassel, Germany (1997), dOCUMENTA 7, Kassel, Germany (1982), the Xème Biennale Internationale d'Art, Palais de L'Europe, Menton, France (1974). In 1986 they were nominated for the Turner Prize.

About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and promotes the work of more than 60 international artists across two spaces in London, three in New York City and East Hampton, and one in Shanghai. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, John Latham, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. It still works with many of these artists as well as others of that generation from Carmen Herrera to the renowned estates of Leon Polk Smith, Ted Stamm and Roy Colmer.

In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors to the public for the first time, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie. Since 2000, the gallery has gone on to represent many more leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller, Tatsuo Miyajima and Sean Scully. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists led by Hugh Hayden, Van Hanos, Cheyney Thompson, Cory Arcangel, Ryan Gander, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes and Wael Shawky.

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