Information and ideas to explore works from IMMA's Collection

Strand 6: Lawrence Weiner
(...) WATER & SAND
+ STICKS & STONES (...)

STRANDS

Prepared by artist Christine Mackey

Introduction

Strands is a series of information sheets devised in response to works from IMMA's Collection, where an artist is invited to develop a range of responses to works selected from an exhibition. The purpose of this series is to provide information and ideas for anyone – adults, children, teachers, lecturers, students – to encourage OBSERVATION, DISCUSSION and MAKING.

Each Strand focuses on one artwork from IMMA's collection and includes the following information:

- **about the artist**: who they are

- **background to the artist's practice**: how they make their work, what kind of work they make

- **for discussion**: some questions and observations about the artist and the work which are intended to prompt further looking, discussion and making

- **key words**: words used in the document which are explained further

- **activities**: a variety of suggestions for further activities and projects in response to the work

- **further explorations**: further information about the artist, artwork and related themes

- **further reading**: some suggestions for books, websites and other resources

These responses have been developed by artist **Christine Mackey** in collaboration with IMMA's Education and Community Department.

She has drawn out strands from the current Collection exhibition **One Foot in the Real World,** curated by **Marguerite O'Molloy, Assistant Curator: Collections.** These responses reflect Christine's particular interests and they are intended to encourage further enquiry and response from individuals and groups, adults and children of all ages before, during and after a visit to the exhibition.

Lisa Moran
Curator: Education and Community Programmes

Christine Mackey

Christine Mackey is an artist and independent researcher who employs diverse disciplines, subject matter and tactics in devising works that can generate different kinds of knowledge of place - their hidden histories and ecological formations. Using diverse graphic sources and quasi-scientific methods, her work explores the interactive potential of art as a research and pedagogical tool; its capacity for social and environmental change and as a way of organising diverse knowledge systems for a 'social' model of practice coupled with diverse publics.

http://christinemackey.com
www.leitrimsculpturecentre.ie

One Foot in the Real World

Drawing on IMMA's Collection, **One Foot in the Real World**, includes works that explore the urban environment, the everyday or the domestic. Prompted by the Eileen Gray, Leonara Carrington and Klara Lidén exhibitions which run concurrently, the exhibition addresses the psychology of space, scale and the body, gravity and transformation. Elements of architecture and design recur as points of departure in the works such as bricks, the keyhole, the window, the door and the table.

Lawrence Weiner
(...) WATER & SAND + STICKS & STONES (...)

(...) WATER & SAND + STICKS & STONES (...), 1991
Ink and metallic pen on paper
Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art

(...) WATER & SAND + STICKS & STONES (...), is a series of works in IMMA's Collection. They comprise an out-door permanent **WALL-RELIEF** sculpture cast in bronze that can be found installed in the East Arch of the Royal Hospital (1993).

The other works from this series exist as a number of finished and unfinished drawings, map work, folders and a cloth type badge.

The main drawing executed in blank ink with metallic pen on paper comes with instructions – hand-written by Weiner. These notes outline how the work should be re-created in a gallery setting if devised as a wall installation. The notes refer to the font, the size of the **INSTALLATION** and how the words should be painted directly onto the wall using specific colour paints – black and silver. This drawing also outlines how the work should materialise as a permanent installation (as referenced above) and that the site should determine the scale and materials suitable for the site in relation to the work.

In the exhibition there are also materials such as a brown folder and in particular a small work, which looks like a badge with the same text printed/painted onto cloth. The main difference between this work and the drawing is not only the **SCALE** but in the centre – between the phrases – is an outline of a circle drawn in black against a grey background. A Saint Brigid's cross is drawn in between the outline of the circle. Perhaps this is a clue into the meanings of these varied, complex and inter-related works.

Lawrence Weiner

b. 1942, Bronx, New York
Lives and works in New York and Amsterdam

Laurence Weiner is a self-taught artist who uses **LANGUAGE** as his medium. He began working in the 1960s and tends to be categorised as a **CONCEPTUAL** artist. His interest in language as a medium stems from a concern with the way meaning is carried in words, symbols and codes. Weiner challenges traditional assumptions about the nature and form of the art object.

He has exhibited internationally since the 1970s, including major solo exhibitions at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C.; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA); Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City; and the Tate Gallery, London.

Background to Lawrence Weiner's process

Weiner's exploration of **IDIOMS, PROVERBS**, meditations, descriptions of physical actions, or evocations of space such as *TO SEE AND BE SEEN*, *EARTH TO EARTH DUST TO DUST ASHES TO ASHES* and *AT THE LEVEL OF THE SEA,* extends across the wide variety of mediums in which Weiner works, including film, video, posters, book art, sculpture, performance art, installation art, music composition, graphic design, graffiti, videotapes, LPs, compact discs and even a web-site, *HOMEPORT* www.adaweb.com/project/homeport (1996).

The main reason that Weiner developed a varied and flexible method of distribution for his art work was because he was interested in how art could transcend social, cultural and creative barriers of access. Wiener came from a humble background and he was acutely aware that many people did not attend or even feel confortable visiting a public art gallery.

At the beginning of his career, Wiener was not overtly concerned how his 'words' were to be displayed – handwritten, on loose sheets of paper or printed in catalogues. It was not untill he meet the collector Giuseppe Panza di Biumo, who commissioned Wiener to have one of his works presented on a wall, that Wiener began to create large-scale, **TEXT-BASED** wall installations. These works brought Weiner's work to international prominence.

Lawrence Weiner

SELF TAUGHT as an artist, Weiner turned to language as the primary vehicle for his work, formulating his "Declaration of Intent" set forth in 1968:
"(1) The artist may construct the piece.
 (2) The piece may be fabricated.
 (3) The piece may 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.]"

The appearance of Weiner's **WALL TEXTS** has significantly varied from one installation to the next across the span of his career. He is generally involved in all decisions about the manifestation of his work, specifying the typeface, size, proportions, placement and colour. These creative decisions vary with the site. Similarly, the context — whether a poster, artist's book, gallery wall, mural or other public arena — influences not only the work's form but its very meaning.

Beyond the adaptation of his works to the walls of a given space, there are also fundamental questions regarding the realisation of the work as public inscription versus spoken word or printed text (e.g., in a book). In SOME LIMESTONE SOM*E SANDSTONE ENCLOSED FOR SOME REASON* (1993, Halifax, Henry Moore Sculpture Trust Studio) he recast the iron weighbridge of the Dean Clough carpet factory, incorporating the words of the title as an embossing inscription. Installed in a cultural centre which was formally a factory, this monument which was a legacy of industry, points to the transience of social structures. Set horizontally into the ground, it raises questions about the place and function of public monuments and memorials.

Weiner is associated with the origins of **CONCEPTUAL ART**, but his significance as an artist lies in the fact that his use of language as a plastic medium is joined to a **MATERIALIST** concept of work. Weiner and other artists of his generation such as **Dennis Oppenheim, Stephen Kaltenbach, Robert Barry, Sol LeWitt, Robert Smithson** and **Douglas Huebler** were no longer concerned with the question of how art should look, but rather what art is and how, in society, we even know that art is art.

For discussion

Why do you think Weiner presents the same work in different formats?

Is the artist intent on creating new meanings through these different arrangements of the same work?

How does the choice of materials in these works change how we understand these works?

Do you read the work or see the work? Is this important?

How do Wiener's 'word' works raise questions about what we think art can be?

Should art be limited to a visual experience?

Why do you think the artist is concerned with presenting words that do not read like proper sentences?

How is he trying to challenge or expand language as a convention built from strict grammatical and sensible rules?

Should artists challenge creative, political and social habits, traditions, customs and practices?

How can words have the same material strength as an object or painting for example?

What do you think these words convey?

Are the words puzzling?

Should art-works be puzzling?

Is it important for art to make us question things in terms of what things should look like and ideas in terms of what things mean?

Do you think, in Wiener's case, that the process and 'thinking' behind the work is more important than its final outcome?

Is it important for artists to have a concept behind their work?

Should art raise questions or provide answers?

Is it important that artists should work in different public spaces and not just in a gallery environment?

Semantics is the study of meaning behind words, phrases, signs and symbols. When Weiner manipulates words they do not necessarily read or make sense as ordered statements or indeed descriptive paragraphs. How does Weiner achieve a certain kind of semantic disorder in his work?

Key words

CONCEPTUAL ART
Originating in the 1960s, Conceptual Art pushed arts practice beyond the conventional limits of the art object, placing an emphasis on the idea or concept rather than a tangible art object. The ideas and methodologies of Conceptual Art inform contemporary art practice.

CUBISM
An early twentieth-century movement led by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque which focused on the physical qualities of painting rather than the subject matter. It is characterised by the breaking up of the picture plane, merging of figure and ground, the adoption of multiple viewpoints, and simplification of form into geometric shapes. Cubism was very influential on subsequent art movements and artists, and is considered to be the forerunner of abstract art.

DADA
An international, avant-garde art movement founded in 1916 which used a variety of media, including collage, sound, nonsense texts and absurd performances to protest against the social, cultural and political conditions prevailing in Europe during World War I. Originating in Zurich, the movement spread to Paris, Berlin, Cologne, Hanover and New York.

DIAGRAM
Diagrams are one of the oldest forms of visual communication drawn by people who work in a variety of disciplines such as science, ecology, medicine and geography. They economise on words, replacing relations of words and concepts with lines, arrows, shapes and spatial arrangements. Diagrams are used to model buildings, map new ideas and concepts, organise complex data, explore patterns or relationships between things, and to present an argument. Reading a diagram, the viewer may ask: What does this line mean in terms of the larger structure? What part of the argument does this shape represent? Why is this term included and why is it positioned here?

FUTURISM
Early twentieth century movement which originated in Italy and embraced all things modern, including technology, speed, industrialisation and mechanisation. It also embraced violence and nationalism and was associated with Italian Fascism.

IDIOM
An expression, style or dialect the meaning which adheres to the grammatical rules of language but which is not understood in a conventional way. An example of an idiom would be 'kick the bucket' or 'hang one's head'.

INSTALLATION
An artwork made for a specific site or location, which engages with its context and audience.

LANGUAGE
The use of verbal and written text as a medium.

LINGUISTICS
The scientific study of language methodologies, such as grammatical structure, perception, meaning, the action and sound of speech and how these methods are acquired.

MATERIALIST
A concern with the materials with which an artwork is made.

MEDIUM
In the arts media, the plural of medium, refers to the materials, methodologies, mechanisms, technologies or devices by which an artwork is realised. Traditional media include painting, sculpture and drawing and the specific materials used, such as paint, charcoal or marble, can also be referred to as media. In contemporary art practice artists use a wide range of media, such as technology, found materials, the body, sound, etc.

MINIMALISM
An abstract art movement which emerged in the US in the 1960s which emphasised the use of simple, geometric forms and the use of modern materials often drawn from industry. Minimal artists rejected the expressive and subjective qualities associated with Abstract Expressionism emphasising the innate properties of materials.

MULTIPLES
A series of identical art objects commissioned or created by an artist. Multiples can be a means of making artworks affordable and accessible and also can be seen as a method of distribution.

PROVERB
A proverb can range from a biblical 'truth' or a short and popular saying of unknown and ancient origin, that expresses effectively some commonplace truth or useful thought.

SCALE
The relationship in terms of size and proportion between one object and another. The scale of an art work is often measured in relation to the size of the human figure.

SEMIOTICS
The study of the relationship between signs and symbols in visual and written communication.

SURREALISM
An anti-establishment, literary and visual art movement founded in 1924 by André Breton and influenced by Dada, Psychoanalysis and Sigmund Freud's theories of the unconscious.

TEXT-BASED
Artwork created using written or printed words as the material and/or subject matter.

WALL-RELIEF SCULPTURE
Three-dimensional art work that is fixed to a wall and viewed frontally rather than in the round.

Activities

WORDS AND IMAGES

Everyone has a different, though often related, visual association with a word or concept, even when we share a common language.

Draw a Noun.
Draw a picture of a noun (chair, house, or dog, for example) and present it to several friends and family members. Have them guess what the picture represents.

Draw a Verb.
Draw a picture of a verb (run, think, or fly, for example) and have others guess what the picture represents.

Which pictures were easiest to draw?

Which did people guess correctly?

Activities

REPETITION AND MEANING

Many of Wiener's works are repeated not only in different materials but the phrase or idiom can also be repeated numerous times in the context, for instance, of a publication.

Other notable examples of repetition include artists such as Sol LeWitt who drew twenty five variations of a rubix cube; and Joseph Kosuth drew a a series of lines again composed in different arrangements.

Hand-write a five-to-seven-word phrase of your choosing 20 times.

Does the repetition have an effect on the meaning of your statement?

How did the process of writing the statement impact on its meaning?

Activities

HOW TO MAKE A POEM

In 1920, one of the founding members of Dada, Tristan Tzara, wrote instructions for making a Dada poem, leaving the responsibility of selecting words and communicating ideas up to chance rather than the artist.

Here are Tzara's instructions:

HOW TO MAKE A DADAIST POEM

Take a newspaper.

Take some scissors.

Choose from the newspaper an article of the length you want to make your poem.

Cut out the article.

Carefully cut out each of the words that makes up this article and put them all in a bag.

Shake gently.

Take out each cutting one after the other.

Copy conscientiously in the order in which they left the bag.

The poem will resemble you.

And there you are — an infinitely original author of charming sensibility, even though unappreciated by the vulgar herd.

Follow Tzara's instructions to make your own Dadaist poems from one or two paragraphs of a newspaper article.

Using this worksheet, write down three poems composed with this method.

Read them aloud.

What are your favorite or least favorite word combinations?

What is the effect of reading words that have been put together without logic?

EMPTY OUT

Choose a friend and pull items from your pockets, wallets or bags.

Arrange the objects on a sheet of paper.

Taking turns, write a word or make a noise that comes to mind as you assemble your creation. Your poem needn't make sense, nor does it need to have a clear connection to the objects you choose.

Record your poem on the same sheet of paper.

Activities

WORD BADGES

Weiner's **MULTIPLES** are an essential aspect of his practice. On one level, they may be seen as a way of making artworks affordable but also can be seen as a method of distribution.

Weiner's ideas about art are developed by the addition of texts ('Statements') to everyday objects. Posters, badges, bags, cups, t-shirts, pens, cutlery, vases, writing desks and tables are all items by which the artist's 'Statements' may be mediated. Yet the choice of object is often crucial to the interpretation of the work.

Weiner's badges, for example, are made from enamel. They come with their own boxes and can be worn or simply displayed in the box (and they can be purchased). The recurring phrase 'Stars don't stand still in the sky for anybody' is printed on one particular badge that he has created.

Consider making your own badge.

Make a list of your favorite phrases or lines from poems you may have read, lines from a story or film, or make up phrases that may be in the form of a question, statement or a fact.

You could also think about cutting out words from a magazine or newspaper and placing them in a bag.

Take out a number of words at a time and play with the first four you retrieve from the bag.

Think about how you could use these words to make a series of badges.

Most arts and crafts shops have badge-making materials.

You can make a series of badges that you can distribute or give to family and friends.

Activities

THE XEROX 'Photocopy' BOOK

In 1968, **Seth Siegelaub,** whom I mentioned previously, commissioned **Lawrence Wiener, Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt** and **Robert Morris**, all artists associated with either **Minimalism** and/or **Conceptual Art**, to create a series of works on paper bound for publication. But this publication was not designed as a beautiful printed publication – rather it was made using what we know as a regular office-based photocopying machine.

Siegelaub was interested in this printing process because it was cheap, accessible and bland, but also in terms of how art could be shown in different contexts – indoors, outdoors, books, posters etc. He was also intrigued by how artworks could be perceived as bits of data or 'information' rather than in terms of the aesthetics of the artwork as a unique object. The artists worked in collaboration with Siegelaub who had proposed a series of 'requirements' for the project.

These guidelines included page numbers, size of page and how the works would be contained or bound. What interested Siegelaub was that although the conditions or requirements for each of the artists were exactly the same – the output by each artist was very different.

Using this process as a guideline – consider working with a number of people to create your own Xerox book.

Draw up a set of rules – such as:

What format the publication would take?

The page number and size?

Would it be printed or photocopied?

What methods of distribution could be considered: digital format distributed online, or produced as a hardcopy?

If you produce a hardcopy edition – how do the public have access to it?

Is this important?

Full colour and/or black and white?

Would you consider a theme?

There are endless possibilities here to consider, which is really exciting.

Activities

SHAPING AN IMAGE

Pick out a recent newspaper or magazine photograph of
a politician (online or printed).

Write a response to the following questions:

What kinds of choices did the photographer make?

How is the image cropped or framed?

What about the focus?

From what point of view was the photograph taken?

Is the caption important?

Is the politician portrayed in a particularly positive or
negative way?

What would you do differently?

Further explorations

Art & Words

For Weiner, Language was a material similar to clay; it could be moulded, re-shaped and formed into different kinds of meanings, presentations and contexts. In this sense he considered language to be ambiguous – the meaning of words were in dispute or questionable. His reasoning was this – he believed that when words were translated into different languages that the meaning of words changed and were therefore open to different interpretations based on the individual's reading of such words.

For example, the Sami people, who live in the northern tips of Scandinavia and Russia, use at least 180 words related to snow and ice according to Ole Henrik Magga, a linguist in Norway. We put so much emphasis on words, even these that I write, that we presume who ever reads will understand. What is interesting with regards to Weiner is that he understands that the process of Language is a **TIME-BASED,** evolving medium that changes and adapts according to the ideas and needs of people.

The written, painted, collaged, sculpted and spoken word has played an important part in the development of art in the twentieth and now the twenty-first century. **CUBISM, FUTURISM, DADA** and **SURREALISM** all used words as well as images as vehicles for their particular form of artistic revolt. Perhaps the best known Surrealist user of language was René Magritte, whose most well known work is *The Treachery of Images* (1928-29). This work includes the text 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe' (This is not a pipe), set against the image of a pipe, making clear through this work that the connection between words and the object they describe is nothing more than a convention – 'this' (whether the word pipe or a picture of a pipe) is not clearly a pipe.

Conceptual Art expanded the use of language as a way of creating works that acted as formal descriptions, definitions and instruction of things and/or ideas. Weiner's work could provide an interesting platform to explore these art historical contexts by researching how each of these movements developed and overlapped - particularly the way artists worked with words.

There are artists such as Hamish Fulton who created a text-based installation titled *ROCK FALL ECHO DUST* (1988) in response to a journey that he had taken across Baffin Island. The text was a condensed arrangement of words that reflect his experience of walking in a landscape where he had seen a rock fall, heard noises echoing all around him and witnessed dust rise from the ground as he moved.

The artist team Christine Kozlov and Ian Wilson used language in a completely different way from Weiner and Fulton, for example. They made verbal artworks whereby the form of the works amounted to the words been spoken in a gallery rather than putting pen to paper.

These are just a few examples of how artists have engaged with language in thoughtful and insightful ways.

Further
reading

Selected Publications
Lawrence Weiner, *Coming and going*, Écart Publications, 1977.
Lawrence Weiner, *Mit einem hauch von rosa,* edition: 1000, Kabinett Für Aktuelle Kunst, 1978.
Lawrence Weiner, *Moi+Toi & Nous*, Le Nouveau Musée / Institut d'Art Contemporain, 1994.
Lawrence Weiner, *A tale of a maiden or two,* edition: 1000, Salon Verlag, 1996.
Lawrence Weiner, *Por Si Mismo*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2001.
Lawrence Weiner, *If in Fact There is A Context: 100 Notes, 100 Thoughts: Documenta Series 008*, Hatje Cantz, 2011.

Alexander Alberro and Alice Zimmerman, *Lawrence Weiner,* Phaidon, 1998.
Gregor Stemmrich and Gerti Fietzek (eds.), *Having Been said: Writings & Interviews of Lawrence Weiner: 1968-2003*, Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2004.
Donna De Salvo and Ann Goldstein (eds.), *Lawrence Weiner: As Far As The Eye Can See: 1960-2007*, Whitney Museum of American Art, 2007.
Gregory Burke, Wystan Curnow and Lawrence Weiner, *The Other Side of a Cul-de-Sac*, Toronto: The Power Plant, 2009.
Thomas Kellein, *The Grace of a Gesture: Lawrence Weiner,* Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2013.

Conceptual Art Publications
Sophie Richard, *Unconcealed: The International Network of Conceptual Artists 1967-77*; Dealers, Exhibitions and Public Collections, London: Ridinghouse, 2009.
Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*, University of California Press, 1997.
Tony Godfrey, *Conceptual Art*, Phaidon London, 1998.
Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer (eds.), *Reconsidering the Object of Art 1965-1975*, MIT Press, 1995.

Websites
IMMA
www.imma.ie
www.imma.ie/en/subnav_123.htm   (IMMA's *What is_?* programme)
Lawrence Weiner
www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/lawrence-weiner-talking-art
www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/studio-lawrence-weiner
www.mariangoodman.com/artists/lawrence-weiner
www.artistsbook.org/artists/lawrence-weiner
www.ubu.com/concept/index.html
Other
www.ubu.com/concept/weiner_tracce.html
http://primaryinformation.org/index.php?/projects/seth-siegelaub-archive
www.primaryinformation.org/files/CARBDHJKSLRMLW.pdf
http://artistsbooksandmultiples.blogspot.ie/2012/03/xerox-book.html
www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk
www.adaweb.com/project/homeport
www.moma.org/collection
www.oxfordartonline.com/public/book