

Conceptual Art in Britain 1964–1979

12 April – 29 August 2016

Art & Language Large Print Guide



Please return to exhibition entrance



Art & Language

To focus on reading rather than looking marked a huge shift for art. Language was to be used as art to question art. It would provide a scientific and critical device to address what was wrong with modernist abstract painting, and this approach became the basis for the activity of the Art & Language group, active from about 1967. They investigated how and under what conditions the naming of art takes place, and suggested that meaning in art might lie not with the material object itself, but with the theoretical argument underpinning it.

By 1969 the group that constituted Art & Language started to grow. They published a magazine **Art-Language** and their practice became increasingly rooted in group discussions like those that took place on their art theory course at Coventry College of Art. Theorising here was not subsidiary to art or an art object but the primary activity for these artists.

Wall labels

Clockwise from right of wall text

Art & Language

(Mel Ramsden born 1944)

Secret Painting

1967–8

Two parts, acrylic paint on canvas
and framed Photostat text

Mel Ramsden first made contact with Art & Language in 1969. He and Ian Burn were then published in the second and third issues of **Art-Language**. The practice he had evolved, primarily with Ian Burn, in London and then after 1967 in New York was similar to the critical position regarding modernism that Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin were exploring. **Secret Painting** is one of a group of works where the text accompanying and 'explaining' its content (as invisible and secret) has a primacy over what can be seen. This directly affects how the viewer might look at it.

Courtesy Mulier Mulier Gallery, Knokke-Zoute, Belgium.

X60187

Art & Language

(Terry Atkinson born 1939, Michael Baldwin born 1945)

Map to Not Indicate

1967

Linotype on paper

Map to Not Indicate is one of a series of three prints created in 1967 by Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin, which upset the conventions of marking the world's geographical boundaries (another, **Map of Thirty-Six Square Mile Surface Area of Pacific Ocean West of Oahu**, hangs nearby). The extensive title lists the geographic areas that the artists have removed from the map. Only Iowa and Kentucky are outlined and labelled but, floating like islands, they lose geographical relevance, metaphorically cast adrift from their cartographic moorings.

Tate. Presented by the Institute of Contemporary Prints 1975.
P01357

Art & Language

(Ian Burn 1939–1993)

Mirror Piece

1967

Framed and glazed mirror,
13 sheets of printed paper

The presentation of Ian Burn's **Mirror Piece** on the wall in the gallery alongside the content of the book (displayed in a display case nearby) realises the conditions for one of three different ways in which a mirror may be identified determined by its context: 1) hanging in a room, 2) hanging in a gallery, or 3) 'hanging in a room or a gallery, displayed with notes and diagrams. This concept becomes a framework for the mirror as art and aims at getting the spectator's "seeing" to cohere against a particular background of inferred knowledge. The context of room or gallery no longer serves to identify the function of the mirror; the intention is built into the work.'

At this time Ian Burn was working alongside Mel Ramsden, moving from London to New York in 1967. They did not encounter Art & Language until 1969, contributing to the second issue of **Art-Language**.

Tate. Purchased 2011. P80072

Art & Language

(Terry Atkinson born 1939, Michael Baldwin born 1945)

Hot-Warm-Cool-Cold

1967

43 sheets of printed paper

The content of **Hot-Warm-Cool-Cold** as well as Air conditioning **Show / Air Show / Frameworks** has been exhibited as a bound and editioned book in display cases or on tables to be read, as well as pasted to the wall, as here, reflecting the way in which it was exhibited in the group exhibition **VAT 68** at the Herbert Art Gallery in Coventry in 1968. The book form was adopted as a way to distribute the text works of Art & Language, the context of presentation determining how the work might be approached by the viewer.

Tate. Transferred from Tate Library 2011. P13191

Art & Language

(Terry Atkinson born 1939, Michael Baldwin born 1945)

Air conditioning Show / Air Show / Frameworks

1966–7

10 sheets of printed paper

Tate. Purchased 2011. P80069

Art & Language

(Terry Atkinson born 1939, Michael Baldwin born 1945)

Map of Thirty-Six Square Mile Surface

Area of Pacific Ocean West of Oahu

1967

Linotype on paper

The blank map that is **Map of Thirty-Six Square Mile Surface Area of Pacific Ocean West of Oahu** can be approached from the context of a critical engagement with monochromatic purity or, more simply, by the example of the map in Lewis Carroll's **The Hunting of the Snark**: 'Other maps are such shapes, with their islands and capes! But we've got our brave Captain to thank (so the crew would protest) that he's brought us the best, a perfect and absolute blank!' Art & Language used maps as a form of representation, aiming to spark analytic discourse surrounding context, conditions, function and content.

Tate. Presented by the Institute of Contemporary Prints 1975.
P01356

Art & Language

(Michael Baldwin born 1945)

Drawing (Typed Mirror)

1966–7

Mirralon

Baldwin's **Untitled Painting** (in room 1 of the exhibition) is a mirror mounted on a canvas so that the environment external to the work – both pictorially and measured through time – disrupts modernist ideas about the monochrome surface. Here a typed text disrupts the mirror's capacity to reflect, as much as the mirrored surface makes it difficult to read the text. The text itself is an expression of criticism of the avant-garde modernist stance adopted by Clement Greenberg and the American post-painterly abstract painters he supported, such as Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland and Jules Olitski.

The next step for Baldwin, Atkinson, as well as for Ramsden and Burn was to work out the implications of the change from object to text, or the difficulties of 'reading' rather than 'looking' as the site for their work.

Courtesy Mulier Mulier Gallery, Knokke-Zoute, Belgium.

X58409

Art & Language

(Michael Baldwin born 1945)

Abstract Art No 8

1967

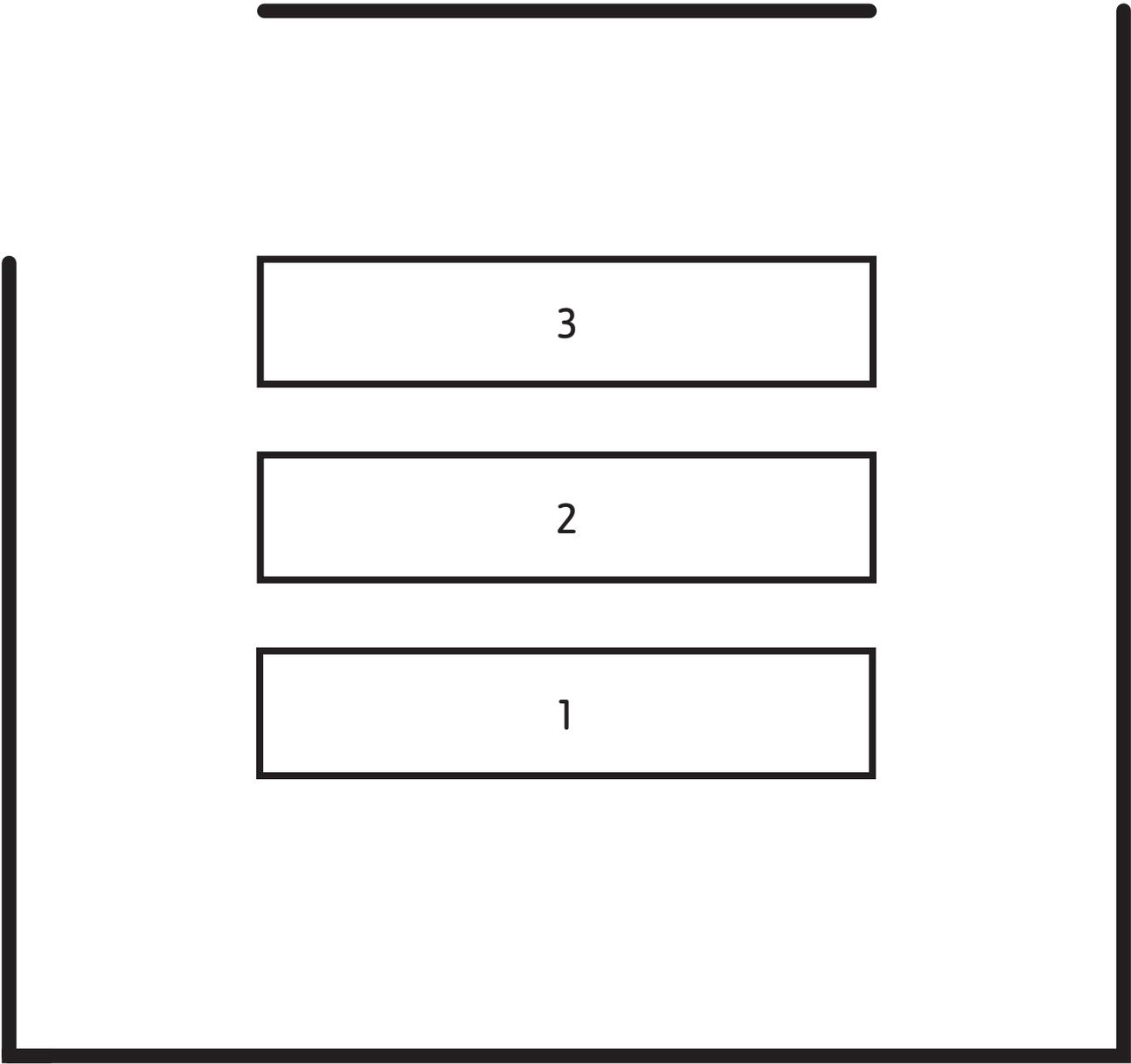
Silkscreen ink on canvas

Abstract Art No 8 is from a group of works that reproduce philosophical abstracts from the September 1966 issue of the **Review of Metaphysics** as silkscreen paintings on canvas. Baldwin plays on the word 'abstract', highlighting his critical position against formalist modernism. The appropriation of a textual 'abstract' or summary highlights not just the use of language as a tool but also specifically the philosophical outlook referred to in the text.

Courtesy Mulier Mulier Gallery, Knokke-Zoute, Belgium.

X56068

Showcase labels



Showcase 1 labels

Between 1968 and 1972 the practice of **Art & Language** was primarily textual, and they created the magazine *Art-Language*, subtitled for the first issue as 'The journal of conceptual art', as one way of distributing their work to a wider network. Its design (like those of their books) communicated a functional language, and echoed the conventions, format and content of academic philosophical journals such as the **Journal of Philosophy**. The founding of the magazine also coincided with the creation of the art theory course at Coventry College of Art led by Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin.

1

Art & Language

An Introduction to Precinct Publications

Pamphlet, Precinct Publications, Coventry 1968

This pamphlet describes the aims of Precinct Publications (named after a shopping area in Coventry) that would soon after be renamed as **Art & Language Press**. Art & Language describe themselves here as artists who have 'over the past two years, been placed in a position such that they "only write",' and that Precinct Publications offers 'a vehicle through which their ideas can be made public'.

Tate Archive, TGA 786/5/2/7. Z05453

2

Art & Language

(Michael Baldwin born 1945)

**'Remarks on Air Conditioning:
An Extravaganza of Blandness'**

Arts Magazine November 1967, pp22–3

Photocopy

This text is one of a number by Baldwin and Terry Atkinson (some of which were published by Precinct Publications/Art & Language Press) that investigated the example and effects of air-conditioning, considered as an artwork. It was published in **Arts Magazine** with the encouragement of Robert Smithson after Baldwin had sent the text to him.

Tate Library. Z05455

3

Art & Language

Art-Language Vol.1, No.1 1969

Art-Language Vol.1, No.2 1970

Art-Language Vol.1, No.3 1970

Art-Language Vol.1, No.4 1971

Tate Library. Z05487–Z05490

4

David Rushton, Philip Pilkington (eds.)

Statements January 1970, November 1970

Statements was edited by two students of Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin at Coventry, published by the Department of Fine Art at the college. As the editorial states, the essays 'were either written on topics set, or developed from work that was begun within the five areas of study covered by the fine art course... It was thought necessary by a number of students to establish an outlet for work, primarily taking a written form, to an audience not directly concerned with the course, who might find interest in the work produced within such a framework.'

Private Collection. Z06115-6

5

Art & Language

(Terry Atkinson, Michael Baldwin)

Air conditioning Show / Air Show / Frameworks

1966–7

10 sheets of printed paper, paper cover and detachable plastic grip

Published in October 1967 in an edition of 200, like many of Art & Language's texts of this period, this work was concerned not with what is named as art, but rather how and under what conditions the naming takes place as a way of getting to grips with the ontology of art. It is more concerned with contextual conditions than with the object itself.

Tate. Purchased 2011. P80069

6

Art & Language

(Terry Atkinson, Michael Baldwin)

Hot-Warm-Cool-Cold

1967

42 sheets of printed paper, paper cover and detachable plastic grip

Published in November 1967 in an edition of 200, **Hot-Warm-Cool-Cold** was a result of Michael Baldwin's obsession with details of weather reports. It analyses descriptions of weather as framings of one's experience that are so abstract as to be distinct from the psychological and phenomenological expression of that experience.

Tate. Transferred from Tate Library 2011. P13191

7

Art & Language

(Terry Atkinson, Michael Baldwin)

22 sentences: The French Army

1968

24 sheets of printed paper, paper cover and detachable plastic grip

Written in 1967 and published in March 1968 in an edition of 200, **22 sentences: The French Army** takes the French army as an example of an object that preserves its identity over time, even though its material and human constituents change. The work asks 'Is it possible to conceive of a work of art as something that persists despite, or even in virtue of, similar material changes?'

Tate. Transferred from Tate Library 2011. P13188

8

Art & Language

(Harold Hurrell born 1940)

[Fluidic Device]

1968

77 sheets of printed paper, paper cover and detachable plastic grip

[Fluidic Device] was published by Art & Language Press and 'Prelum' Churchill in Oxford in an edition of 200. It consists of a photograph of an installation of two integrated gas cylinders, a diagram explaining the nature of the installation that delivers a gas output that can't be detected because compression is too low, and the reproduction of pages of computer print-outs that list the possibilities of the switching system in the installation.

Tate. Transferred from Tate Library 2011. P13187

Showcase 2 labels

1

Art & Language

(Ian Burn)

Mirror Piece

1967

13 sheets of printed paper, paper and plastic cover and detachable plastic grip

Published by Ian Burn in an edition of 25, the content of this book is made up of notes and diagrams concerning the reflection and refraction of light relative to a mirror under different circumstances. It examines how one might identify and classify the mirror under those circumstances. The work is on display nearby, installed according to the artist's specifications.

Tate. Purchased 2011. P80072

2

Art & Language

(Ian Burn, Mel Ramsden)

Six Negatives

1968–9

13 sheets of printed paper, paper cover and detachable plastic grip

Six Negatives is a collaborative work published by Burn in an edition of 50. Ramsden's **Six Negatives** is a reproduction of category listings from eight pages of the index of **Roget's Thesaurus**. Each of the listed positive attributes has been struck out to leave only a list of negative descriptions. It is accompanied by a descriptive textual analysis by Burn **Holding system for Six Negatives**.

Tate. Purchased 2011. P80063

3

Art & Language

(Ian Burn, Mel Ramsden)

Notes on Analyses

1970

6 sheets of printed paper, card cover
and detachable plastic grip

Tate. Purchased 2011. P80064

Notes on Analyses was published by Burn in an edition of 50. Burn explained how his work was 'involved with books, not in a general sense of conventional dispensers of information about ideas, rather in the specific sense of using a book as an idea for form ... using a Xerox machine to make an "art" process.' This work, like **The Grammarian** of the same year, addresses the nature of conceptual art: 'the outcome of much of the "conceptual" work of the past two years has been to carefully clear the air of objects. One no longer feels obligated to materialize constructs and, perhaps of more consequence, one no longer feels the pressure to replace such constructs with specific "ideas", "proposals", etc.'

4

Art & Language

(Ian Burn, Mel Ramsden)

The Grammarian

1970

10 sheets of printed paper, paper cover and detachable plastic grip

Tate. Purchased 2011. P80065

The previous year Burn and Ramsden, with the artist Roger Cutforth, had founded the Society for Theoretical Art and Analyses. At the same time they met Terry Atkinson and started to contribute to **Art-Language**. **The Grammarian**, published in an edition of 50, ends: 'To inquire into the premises of "why an artwork is an artwork" one's methodology must first be made straight. This paper has initiated one type of inquiry in that in continuing to use the term "artwork", we may have to provide a theoretical account of the rules for its use. It has reflected upon certain problematic features in the artwork's operation – viz. in maintaining that this present text counts as an artwork.'

5

Art & Language

(Michael Baldwin, Harold Hurrell)

Handbook to Ingot

1970–1

21 sheets of printed paper, card cover
and detachable plastic grip

This work, like **Theories of Ethics**, was printed in an edition of 200 by the New York Cultural Center for Art & Language Press for the exhibition **The British Avant Garde** curated by the critic Charles Harrison in 1971. The text relates to Hurrell's work **Ingot** 1970, also exhibited at **The British Avant Garde**, being a pile of aluminium ingots. The text discusses the implications of the difficulty to discern differences between them, even though each ingot is metallurgically distinct, one to another.

Tate. Transferred from Tate Library 2011. P13192

6

Art & Language

(Terry Atkinson, Michael Baldwin)

Theories of Ethics

1971

73 sheets of printed paper, paper cover
and detachable plastic grip

Theories of Ethics considers ten ethical conditions in depth. It was printed in an edition of 200 by the New York Cultural Center for Art & Language Press for the exhibition **The British Avant Garde**, the catalogue for which contains Baldwin and Atkinson's text 'De Legibus Naturae' that further considers its status.

Tate. Transferred from Tate Library 2011. P13189

7

Art & Language

(Terry Atkinson, Michael Baldwin)

Declaration Propositions

1972

21 sheets of printed paper, paper cover and staple bound

Declaration Propositions was produced by Art & Language Press for Editions Bischofsberger, Zurich in 1972 in an edition of 50, of a text that had originally been written in 1967.

Tate. Purchased 2011. P80067

8

Art & Language

(Terry Atkinson, Michael Baldwin)

Part of a Short Lesson

1972

3 sheets of printed paper, card cover and staple bound

Part of a Short Lesson was produced by Art & Language Press for Editions Bischofsberger, Zurich in 1972 in an edition of 200, of a text that had originally been written in 1967.

Tate. Purchased 2011. P80070

9

Art & Language

(Terry Atkinson, Michael Baldwin)

Geology

1972

4 sheets of printed paper, paper cover and staple bound

Geology was produced by Art & Language Press for Editions Bischofsberger, Zurich in 1972 in an edition of 200, of a text that had originally been written in 1967–8. The work consists of text and maps relating to the geology of the Dee estuary as if a feasibility study for a large object.

Tate. Purchased 2011. P80068

10

Art & Language

(Terry Atkinson, Michael Baldwin)

Introduction to Discourse

1972

15 sheets of printed paper, card cover and staple bound

Introduction to Discourse was produced by Art & Language Press for Editions Bischofsberger, Zurich in 1972 in an edition of 200, of a text that had originally been written in 1969.

Tate. Purchased with funds provided by the Brian and Nancy Pattenden Bequest 2011. P80066

11

Art & Language

(Terry Atkinson, Michael Baldwin)

Intension II: Draft for a Text Book Section

1972

9 sheets of printed paper, card cover and staple bound

Intension II: Draft for a Text Book Section was produced by Art & Language Press for Editions Bischofsberger, Zurich in 1972 in an edition of 200, of a text that had originally been written in 1970.

Tate. Purchased with funds provided by the Brian and Nancy Pattenden Bequest 2011. P80071

12

Art & Language

(Terry Atkinson, David Bainbridge, Michael Baldwin,
Harold Hurrell)

Olivet Discourse

1971

22 sheets of printed paper, card cover and staple bound

Olivet Discourse was produced by Art & Language Press for Daniel Templon, Paris in an edition of 40. The work 'shows through careful selection and omission, the extent to which the Gospel story in **The New Testament** pivots around discursive conflict'.

Tate. Transferred from Tate Library 2011. P13190

Showcase 3 labels

Art & Language

'Editorial'

Art-Language Vol.1, No.1 1969, pp.1–10

Photocopy

The degree to which the content of **Art-Language** is an artwork, rather than text about conceptual art, is suggested in this closely-argued editorial that also distinguishes Art & Language's position from that of other conceptual artists: 'Suppose the following hypothesis is advanced: that this editorial, in itself an attempt to evince some outlines as to what "conceptual art" is, is held out as a "conceptual art" work.'

Tate Library. Z05495-Z05500

Joseph Kosuth

'Art After Philosophy' Parts 1–3

Studio International October 1969, pp.134–7

Studio International November 1969, pp.160–1

Studio International December 1969, pp.212–13

Photocopy

In this three-part essay, commissioned for **Studio International** by its assistant editor Charles Harrison (who first met Kosuth in the spring of 1969), Kosuth identifies a categorical shift in the nature of art – away from perception and towards a critical act of analysis. He stated: 'Being an artist now means to question the nature of art. If one is questioning the nature of painting, one cannot be questioning the nature of art . . . That's because the word "art" is general and the word "painting" is specific. Painting is a **kind** of art. If you make paintings you are already accepting (not questioning) the nature of art.'

Tate Library. Z05491–3

