

ARTDEPENDENCE

magazine

AN INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE COVERING ALL SPHERES OF CONTEMPORARY, AS WELL AS MODERN AND CLASSICAL ART

March 2016 / N° 2 / quarterly magazine



€ 9,90 / 7,99 GBP / 11,90 \$

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Anj Smith
Nicolas Provost
Rodel Tapaya

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH

Elizabeth Neilson and
Paul Luckraft from
the Zabłudowicz Collection

BILL VIOLA:

“The work is always about
life and death, and of birth,
light and darkness.”

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Politely punkish in appearance, Lawrence Weiner's brittle beard and rasping utterances have him carry the crowd for the time it takes the aging American artist to introduce his evanescent adventure, to a press and palace audience intended to be positively perplexed by the imposition of contemporary works upon classical artefacts. Siting his artistic presence as a presentation and not a provocation of one moment of history over another. And as such the conundrum of what does and doesn't belong inside this regal setting is at the heart of the foundation's commitment to giving the estate over to a contemporary artist, without apology or compromise. Following the impressive inaugural configuration of works by Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, Weiner's inclusion appears more subtle in many respects; as his works are there for the taking once they have been found out.

*Lawrence Weiner, LAWRENCE LONG LIBRARY, WITHIN A REALM OF DISTANCE, LAWRENCE WEINER AT BLENHEIM PALACE 2015
Photo credit: Hugo Glendinning Courtesy of Blenheim Art Foundation*

Bought up on a gritty aesthetic of 'miscellaneous materials' and 'painterly processes', that was part of a detritus gathering counter-culture challenging the rules of representation in the United States in the 1940's and 1950's; activated in part by fellow Americans Jasper Johns, Frank Stella and Robert Rauschenberg. Weiner saw in their work a looser and more intuitive approach to making art that liberated the materials, whilst concentrating on them at the same time. And those initial visual encounters proved an epiphany for Weiner, whose early works were in and of the dirt and debris that littered the corners and crevices' of the city. Initially collecting the most rudimentary elements, including plywood, rope, cardboard, and nails, Weiner took the gutsy step of abandoning everything for the language of art itself. And of instigating an art based entirely on the notion of making those semiotic associations oneself. As Weiner explains "I would build it, and look at it, and then translate it into language, because everybody sees things in terms of language. You see a 'stone' you say 'stone' to yourself, you have to say something in some kind language to yourself." And of his approach thereafter, "Once that's done, you present it within that context. And if you get it right in that moment it enters into their context, and the work becomes site-specific. And then if you move it to someplace else if it works it becomes site-specific to the new location."



Lawrence Weiner, *MORE THAN ENOUGH, WITHIN A REALM OF DISTANCE*
LAWRENCE WEINER
AT BLENHEIM PALACE
2015
Photo credit: Hugo Glendinning
Courtesy of Blenheim Art Foundation

Artdependence Magazine: Can you explain the ideas and circumstance that led to your contributing your 'word' works to Blenheim Palace? And of the relationship of your sculptures to the grand structure, as a juxtaposition of modern graphics in a very austere setting.

LW: What happened is I expected Blenheim as a normal simple structure. Every place you go has a history, and I am not so impressed by big old collections, and also I am not much of a collector. But I tried to create a situation in order to set up an alternative structure, and hopefully people will notice the works as they appear in situ. So instead of having a conversation with the objects that are already here, and trying to move them to one side. What you do is try and present a reality that obviates what's there, and so it no longer becomes a point of interest; when our interest is what you place upon it now today. So it's simple. Other than that it's just that Blenheim offered itself (to me) and I took the Queen's shilling.

AD: So in terms of semiotics, do you see your graphic works, as subtle or not so subtle 'interventions' upon existing structures?

LW: No not at all, they are here as what they are, they are not intervening upon anything. It is an exhibition of sculpture, and so they are not intervening, they are using the structure and presenting themselves. They are not of an alternate reality. They are not the 'token thing', in social circumstances where you have the token thing. It is excepting that it is another thing that human beings make that's entered into the work.

AD: And how do you see your works sitting in-situ here at the Palace, in relation to a more conventional white cube style setting?

LW: A white cube has as much interference, but it is a little more subtle.

AD: In a neutral setting are you able to concentrate entirely on the works themselves, or is the inclusion of the everyday a fundamental element to your work becoming art?

LW: You actually don't (have neutrality in a gallery space) because there is the desk, there is the lighting, there is the architecture. So you always seeing something. And if you look at the kind of people who are here, you will have people in their shorts and t-shirt wondering through. And in a white cube you have people in whatever outfits they are wearing. It's really the same.

AD: So you don't differentiate one environment from another, as a prerequisite for the choice of work for a specific location?

LW: No I don't.

AD: So when you are invited to produce a work, do you think less of the space and location, and more of the content and scale of your graphics, in order it supersedes the space?

LW: No when invited to do something here, (and there are pieces here that I have done for Blenheim); when invited to something in any place, or when you choose you want to do something somewhere, you pay some attention to the local theme. If they are making coal or oxide you get involved in that. I am a materialist, so I get involved with the material. Once you put something together and you make a configuration. You build it, you look at it, and then you translate it into language, because everybody sees things in terms of language. You see a 'stone' you say 'stone' to yourself, you have to say something in some kind language to yourself. Once that's done, you present it within that context. And if you get it right in that moment it enters into their context, and the work becomes site-specific. And then if you

Left
Lawrence Weiner, *NEAR & FAR & EQUAL MEASURE AT SOME POINT, WITHIN A REALM OF DISTANCE*
LAWRENCE WEINER
AT BLENHEIM PALACE
2015
Photo credit: Hugo Glendinning
Courtesy of Blenheim Art Foundation

Right
Lawrence Weiner, *WITHIN A REALM OF DISTANCE (2), WITHIN A REALM OF DISTANCE*
LAWRENCE WEINER
AT BLENHEIM PALACE
2015
Photo credit: Hugo Glendinning
Courtesy of Blenheim Art Foundation

move it to someplace else if it works it becomes site-specific to the new location. And I have had work that was shown in one place, and it was okay, and then it was put into another exhibition, into another space publicly, and it became part of the whole city. It became then the 'Viennese' piece, it became then the 'Bradford' piece, or 'Middlesbrough' piece. But basically the materials that were presented, and those that were presented here are essentially 'dry earth and scattered ashes', or 'dry earth and buried gold', which as a graphic we made into a little coin, which is in the wash basin. Children can just help themselves, and other people can too. Which asks the question of the whole exhibition.

AD: So the proclamative work here in the Great Hall, 'Matter so shaken to its core to lead to a change in inherent form to the extent of bringing about a change in the destiny of the material' (2002) is specific to Blenheim?

LW: No it was shown in Munster, (Germany) at the museum. Some work was bought in, but it seems to suit here.

AD: So you see location as much transit-ry as it is a relevant element to the work?

LW: (The work) can move someplace else, but right now it is working quite well here. Especially when you come into the entrance. Little things, and you see the little framed works.

AD: So there is a definite 'geography' to their location, which implies a level of decision making as to where a work should be.

LW: Yes there is, but everything changes by its geography. Put you on a cruise ship and you are a different person.

AD: Crucially as much as you concentrate on the works in-situ, there location becomes as significant. And the message and meaning is managed by its setting.

LW: The idea with my work is if it really is about material, then it doesn't have a metaphor. Nobody has to expect your value structure in order to interact with it. And you can use it yourself to make your own metaphor to understand where you are. Work that has a metaphor is almost like journalism. It has its meaning, it has its use, when you are talking about something important. But in fact in five years that idea doesn't exist anymore. This way work itself allows the person coming to it to see a material reality, and that material reality they can use to do what you do with art. To make a metaphor to fit into it and find your place. It's really quite simple.

AD: So there is a significant weight to the words, as you manipulate their scale and appearance.

LW: They are about materials, they say something. It is like when some people talk about graffiti, if it says something you have a real problem, and you have to deal with it. If it says 'my children are hungry', or 'the sky is blue', you have said something. If you are just talking about existential angst, everybody has that. But that doesn't give you the right to place it in public. Everybody wakes up every morning with 'Why am I born?', 'Why am I here?', and if they don't

“Everybody wakes up every morning with 'Why am I born?', 'Why am I here?', and if they don't it just means that they have deadened themselves to such a point that they forgotten who they are. That they don't even see themselves (in the mirror) when they brush their teeth.

it just means that they have deadened themselves to such a point that they forgotten who they are. That they don't even see themselves (in the mirror) when they brush their teeth.

AD: So how do you go about generating these works?

LW: I am an artist, I go into my studio and I work. Or I am working in a field, the studio can be a field. It is about materials, it really is. The relationship of objects to objects in relation to human beings, and then presented. That is your job. Other people notice it and use it, but artists are the people who put it together in a package and present it.

AD: And then on another level the 'packaging' as you describe, and presentation of your works visually, how do you determine that?

LW: The graphics, I am really quite happy for words being on a page, but when you are presenting things publically it is very much as if you are going out to some place you dress. And I began to get dissatisfied with some of the fonts and things that were being used. I used standard 'Franklin Gothic Compressed' and then designed my own font, 'Margaret Seaworthy Gothic'.

AD: And you have stayed faithful to that font?

LW: I haven't had the resources to sit down and design another one, it takes a very long time, and they are designed by hand.

AD: So you had people working on that?

LW: No originally I did it, and then somebody translates it into a computer so people can use it. How I work is not all that interesting. Usually it is 'chicken scratches' and then someone puts them on a machine. And then someone who can work the machine correctly, instead of doing the programme that is offered for the graphics, tries to approximate what my intention is; and we get pretty close.

AD: And in terms of the scale of the lettering for each work, are you always determining that in situ?

LW: It is determined by the location, the 'area'. The piece itself has no scale, it really doesn't. This is just as fine as in Munster. 'Matter so shaken to its core to lead to a change in inherent form to the extent of bringing about a change in the destiny of the material' (2002) was on big sheets of steel in the city that they cover holes with. It was on two sheets of those but cut through. Here this is certainly not two sheets of steel.

AD: This and the other works have an incredible scale about them, that isn't as you said inherent to the works, but comes with their locality.

LW: But it is the content of all art that matters, think about a little (Jan) van Eyck, think about a large (Francisco) Goya; they are functioning. They have their own scale. Everybody has their own size, and it is the content that determines whether you pay attention or not. You obviously try to attract attention with the way you show something. Every painting, every sculpture, every piece of couture, everything. You try to catch the eye of somebody, and then once you catch their eye, they realise that that fold means something, that line means something.



Lawrence Weiner, *FAR ENOUGH AWAY, WITHIN A REALM OF DISTANCE*
LAWRENCE WEINER AT BLENHEIM PALACE 2015
Photo credit: Hugo Glendinning
Courtesy of Blenheim Art Foundation

“ In New York you don't look up to the stars, you look down for where you are. And I looked at them and I said, 'but why do I want to fuck up somebody's day on their way to work?' Which a lot of my colleagues were doing at the time. I decided I wanted to fuck up their whole live.

does it mean now, it means nothing. But the concept still exists, 'each to their needs and each to their abilities'. It is still a concept that makes a lot of sense. The structure has changed. So when you are looking at Blenheim Palace you are not looking at something so different, it is just another structure. And it is a structure that has been afforded to a contemporary artist. Fucking use it and stop talking so much about how you are at the Palace. Hooray you are in the palace, you want someone to see you dance, you need to get past the bouncer and get in the club, or else they are never going to see you dance, and then you couldn't make your own club, or make your own world.

They have got to see it. There is no reason they should accept it because you say so. And this is what I am doing, putting them in another context. And most people who come here (to Blenheim Palace) don't go to contemporary art galleries. They don't, and there are crowds and they are happy. I don't want to make them unhappy. I want them to see something else. I mean I have been quoted on this, because I did some man-holes covers in New York years and years ago, and I am a New York City kid, and it was New York City station. And somebody who has known you since you were a kid, because I was involved with civil rights and labour youth. So they know you have been around. I started showing in New York when I was very young. And they said 'you are usually very aggressive with your work, and this isn't very aggressive'. Because it was a work that read as 'in direct line with another and the next' on the man-hold covers.

In New York you don't look up to the stars, you look down for where you are. And I looked at them and I said, 'but why do I want to fuck up somebody's day on their way to work?' Which a lot of my colleagues were doing at the time. I decided I wanted to fuck up their whole live. Which means that they realise that 'in direct line with another and the next', that second day the first thing that enters into your life is likely to change your relationship to all objects. So all of these other issues, they are academic issues, which has nothing to do with what I do. I make a specific object and it has no specific form. You figure that one out, I have to do it every day.

AD: That is the key thing for you, of the content bearing fruit?

LW: The key thing is that I find that almost as common courtesy. You are trying very hard to attract their attention. 'This is important you have to look at it', which is what they have done with art for most of the time. And that is what they have done now with the commercial thing. 'This is worth that', okay it is worth that, but what do I do with it. When I just present something, and somebody interacts with the sculpture, I want them to think that 'oh this does relate to me a little bit.'

AD: So there seems to be a democratisation of ideas with your works.

LW: It is not democratisation, it is about common dignity. Let's forget the words, they do not mean anything anymore. They did in my youth, obviously, they meant something. This meant something. But what

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