



AMBIGUOUS PORTRAIT OF A CUNNING LINGUIST

VERBAL IMAGERY IN ART
CURATED BY ANDREW HERDON

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8 JUNE – 27 JULY 2013

Artists

Ashley Bickerton
Mel Bochner
On Kawara
Glenn Ligon
Harland Miller
Lucas Samaras
Gary Simmons
John Stezaker
Lawrence Weiner

+ Young Artists

Nicola Anthony
Tom Gallant
Dawn Ng

+ Works from the Russian Criminal Tattoo Archive

Sergei Vasiliev

IKKAN ART GALLERY

Artspace@Helutrans
#01-05 Tanjong Pagar Distripark
39 Keppel Road
Singapore 089065

Open : Tues-Sat, 12 Noon to 7pm

info@ikkan-art.com

(+65) 6681 6490

www.ikkan-art.com

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VERBAL IMAGERY

A mental image representing a word as heard, as seen,
or as felt when pronounced

Ambiguous Portrait of a Cunning Linguist (Verbal Imagery in Art) showcases artworks that use language as a medium. This is a challenging, playfully serious, group exhibition of international artists which concentrates on the material qualities of language - visual, aural, and beyond - highlighting the mysterious gulf between images and words. At first appearance it is a somewhat 'dry' show with text and symbols mostly replacing images. But, our minds process combinations of visual and verbal cues, and many artists give these categories equal value - the power of a word being as important as an image. Combining words and images in inventive ways challenges audiences to rethink the interplay between visual and verbal communication. In Singapore especially, the power of language (particularly English) is very relevant. Sometimes words can be more powerful than graphic images (bringing censorship into discussion), and combined in art they communicate on many levels of meaning. How we interpret words versus visual stimuli, the varying methods of communication and understanding and 'Verbal imagery' (the descriptive use of words to create a picture) are central themes in this exhibition.

The 'sexy/ambiguous/tongue-in-cheek' exhibition title is causing much discussion. People will either understand one literal meaning of the title, or something entirely different that will provoke a small smile, or they will see multiple meanings, or not understand it at all. This is very important to me, as often 'Lost in Translation' incidents are frequent on my travels around Asia, but through misunderstanding something is learnt. These thoughts are reflected in the artworks selected for the exhibition. Language as a medium offers artists the means to directly engage in an open-ended dialogue, compelling the viewer (or rather, the reader) to explore realms beyond the physical presence of an object in a gallery, whilst the complexity of language has the ability to both inform and confound us. In this exhibition, the letter, the word, a phrase, or a symbol are seen and experienced, and not necessarily read - embracing language's malleable state: its ambiguity, its penchant for questions, subtexts and double meanings.

Andrew Herdon

ASHLEY BICKERTON



Ashley Bickerton's set of two screenprints *Good* and *Bad* are an example of his early work which often incorporates signs, symbols and logos. Like a compendium of natural and unnatural positives and negatives, these silhouettes muddle the distinction between what could be considered moral or immoral. Our tendency to categorise our lives and individual interpretation of meaning are questioned.

British by birth, but establishing a career in New York, Ashley Bickerton (born Barbados, 1959) now lives and works in Bali. He is associated with the early 1980s New York art movement 'Neo-Geo', which includes artists such as Jeff Koons.

Ashley Bickerton
Good; and Bad, 1988-89
Screenprints on wove paper
Edition of 25 & 20
165.1 x 121.9 cm
& 132.1 x 121.9 cm

ON KAWARA



On Kawara
AUG. 20, 1997, 1997
Liquitex on canvas and
handmade cardboard box
with newspaper clipping
from the New York Times
25.5 x 33 cm
© On Kawara

On Kawara (b. 1932, Japan. Lives and works in New York) is a conceptual artist who since January 4, 1966, has made a long series of Date paintings (the Today series), which consist entirely of the date on which the painting was executed in simple white lettering set against a solid background. The date is always documented in the language and grammatical conventions of the country in which the painting is executed (i.e., "26. ÁG. 1995," from Reykjavik, Iceland, or "13 JUIN 2006," from Monte Carlo); Esperanto is used when the first language of a given country does not use the Roman alphabet). The paintings, executed in liquitex on canvas, conform to one of eight standard sizes, ranging from 8x10 inches to 61x89 inches, all horizontal in orientation. The dates on the paintings, hand-painted with calculated precision, are always centered on the canvas and painted white, whereas the background colors vary. Four coats of paint are carefully applied for the ground and each allowed enough time to dry before being rubbed down in preparation for subsequent coats. Eschewing stencils in favor of hand-drawn characters, Kawara skillfully renders the script, initially a sans-serif, elongated version of Gill Sans, later a quintessentially modernist Futura. Each work is carefully executed by hand. Some days he makes more than one. If Kawara is unable to complete the painting on the day it was started he immediately destroys it. When a Date Painting is not exhibited, it is placed in a cardboard box custom-made for the painting, which is lined with a clipping from a local newspaper from the city in which the artist made the painting. Although the boxes are part of the work, they are rarely exhibited. Each year between 63 and 241 paintings are made.


Each Date Painting is registered in a journal and marked on a One Hundred Years Calendar. When Kawara finishes a painting, he applies a swatch of the paint mixture he used to a small rectangle that is then glued onto a chart in the journal. Under each colour is a number showing the painting's sequence in that year and a letter indicating its size. The journal therefore records the details of the painting's size, color and newspaper headline, while the calendar uses colored dots to indicate the days in which a painting was made, and to record the number of days since the artist's birth. Kawara has now created date paintings in more than 112 cities worldwide in a project that is planned to end only with his death.

A vertical rectangular artwork with a vibrant red background. The name 'GLENN LIGON' is printed in large, bold, white, sans-serif capital letters in the upper half of the image.

GLENN LIGON

Glenn Ligon (b. 1960, New York) is an American conceptual artist whose work explores race, language, desire, sexuality, and identity. He engages in intertextuality with other works from the visual arts, literature, and history, as well as his own life. For *Red Portfolio* Ligon printed the Rev. Donald Wildmon's descriptions of Robert Mapplethorpe controversial photographs. Reverend Wildmon's irate words, originally written on postcards and sent to supporters and politicians in hopes of inciting a boycott of offending museums which exhibited Mapplethorpe's work, are here coolly redeployed as "art" through appropriation. This transformation into another medium also highlights the mysterious gulf between graphic images and graphic words.

Also on show at Ikkan Art Gallery is a large text painting by Ligon titled *I Feel Most Colored When I Am Thrown Against a Sharp White Background*, 1990. Ligon's paintings incorporate literary fragments, jokes, and evocative quotes from a selection of authors, which he stencils directly onto the canvas by hand.

A large, solid black rectangular area. In the center, the text 'A photo of a man in a suit exposing himself.' is printed in a small, white, sans-serif font.

A photo of a man in a suit exposing himself.

Glenn Ligon
Red Portfolio, 1993
9 b/w silver prints
50.8 x 40.6 cm (each)
Edition of 5

HARLAND MILLER



Harland Miller
International Lonely Guy – Aldous, 2003
Watercolour on paper
72.4 x 85.4 cm

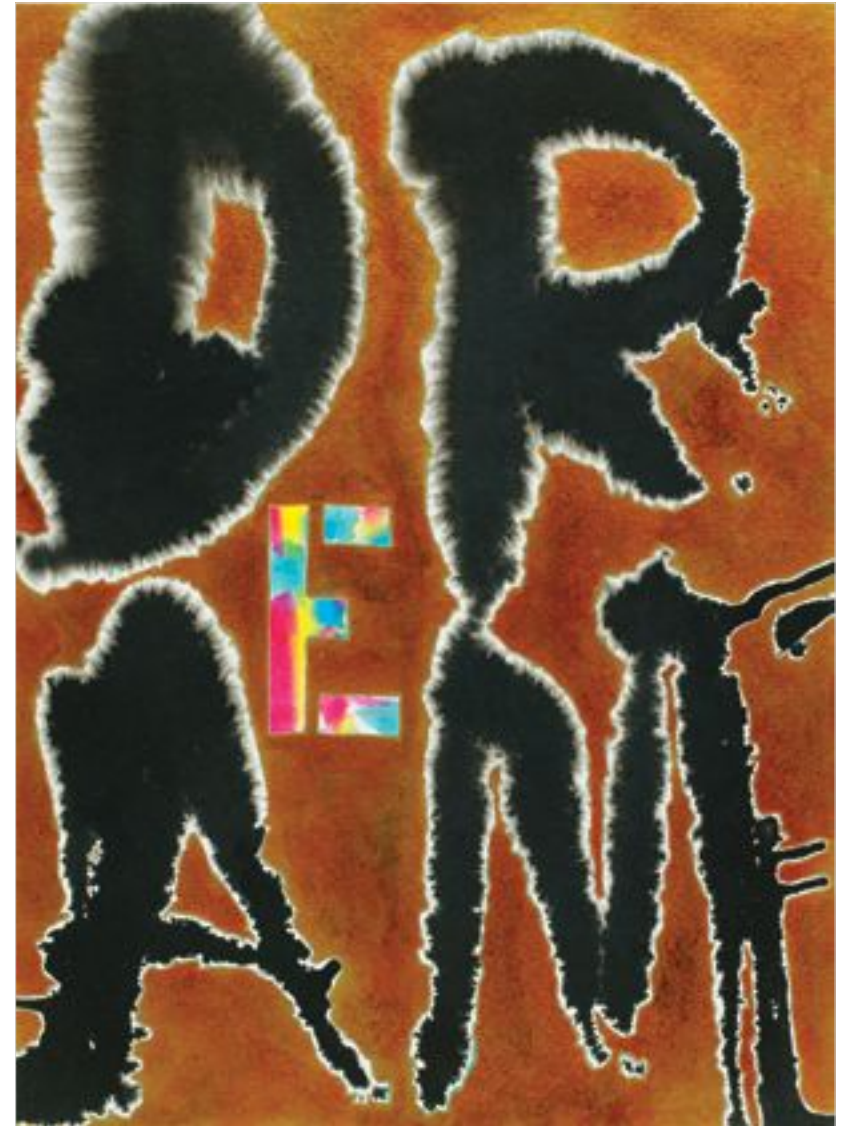
One day, Harland Miller picked up a Penguin book, and an idea was born. The artist and novelist makes paintings of humorous and ironic fake book covers. "There's always been this compunction to write on pictures," Miller has said. It wasn't until he started painting book covers that he realised he had stumbled across a style of painting that didn't look right without words. "*International lonely guy*" are apparently the first words Elton John sees when he opens his eyes in the morning. He owns a painting of that title, inspired by the swaying hangers in the empty wardrobe of a cheap chain hotel. The American painter Ed Ruscha is an obvious and acknowledged influence: his work is celebrated for its juxtaposition of words and images; gnomic shout-lines and slogans scroll across the surface of his paintings.

Harland Miller (British, born in 1964) lives and works in London.

LUCAS SAMARAS

Lucas Samaras (b. 1936, Greece) works with a unique subject matter - himself. He has interviewed himself, photographed himself, sculpted himself, and decorated himself and, in doing so, he has always seemed to be a work in progress. Samaras is not necessarily a narcissist, even though one of his retrospectives was titled "Unrepentant Ego." He is an intrepid self-investigator and he has made a career out of mutating his own image and likeness. Since the 1960s Samaras has devoted his art to the evocation of an intensely private, obsessional, sometimes hallucinatory realm. With obsessive compulsive-like zest, Samaras is a voyeur of the self, an astute observer of the human condition. A critic notes that: "Samaras's almost obsessional self-observation extends past narcissism toward a physical understanding of himself." These works are not residual creations that stem from a narcissistic psyche; they are a lifelong investigation of the self that reveals depth, intensity, honesty and paradox that few artists can tackle successfully.

The painted words 'DREAM' and 'DRAW' featured in this exhibition are references to the artists' own life and similarly act as types of self-portraits - beautifully simple, characteristically candid linguistic elaborations of a solipsistic feedback loop. They are like reflecting mirrors, a material that he has frequently used. Psychological metaphors to explore the subconscious – integrating visual experience and philosophical.



Lucas Samaras
Small Word Drawing #26, June 17 – July 25, 1975
Ink on paper
31.8 x 27.9 cm
Photograph by Kerry Ryan McFate,
© Lucas Samaras, Courtesy Pace Gallery

GARY SIMMONS



Gary Simmons
Half Page, 2011
Pastel on paper
30.48 x 25.4 cm
© Gary Simmons,
Courtesy Simon Lee Gallery,
London/Hong Kong

The featured works by Gary Simmons draw inspiration from Stanley Kubrick's unforgettable 1980 horror film *The Shining*. The images take their cue from memorable motifs and moments from the film, such as the infamous quote, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy". Over and over again, the same sentence is repeated, rewritten and thus the idea is reiterated to the viewer over and over again. The idea of repetition reminds the viewer of schoolboy punishments. As the words rise off the page and come to life, the viewer too comes to understand that all work and no play DOES make Jack a dull boy. The writing is sketchy and rushed, which in the minds of a movie watching populous, evokes feelings of someone's inner voice manifesting their presence in a visible way. As you read the lines of text over and over again, the phrase ingrains itself in the memory and thus, Simmons piece has made an impression and the viewer has associated their own personal memory with this piece and its content.

Simmons smears his work in such a way that suggests a sense of ghostly movement and heightens the feeling that they are alive, attempting to tell stories. These text images allow the viewer to create a space by standing in front of the image itself and allowing it to affect them beyond an aesthetic appreciation. Gary Simmons, b. 1964 New York City to parents who emigrated from Barbados, uses icons and stereotypes of American popular culture. He creates works that address personal and collective experiences of race and class.

JOHN STEZAKER

John Stezaker (British, b.1949) is one of the leading artists in modern photographic collage and appropriation. Employing vintage photographs, old Hollywood film stills, travel postcards and other printed matter, Stezaker creates seductive and fascinating small-format collages that bear qualities of Surrealism, Dada, and found art. Indeed, in referring to the large compendium of images he has collected, Stezaker asserts that the images "find him", not the other way around. With surgical-like precision, Stezaker excises, overlays and conjoins distinct images to create new personalities, landscapes and scenes.

Tabula Rasa is a book as a work of art. A distorted rectangle has been added to a double spread image of mountaineers surveying the peak of Sgurr Alasdair, Scotland, from a book entitled *The Magic of Skye*. The book lies open, seemingly implying that its revelation is temporary; that the work – its text – could be returned to obscurity by the simple act of it being closed. Displayed under an acrylic box on a pedestal, the pages cannot be turned to discover if another spread of *The Magic of Skye* will present a similar intervention by the artist, however the remaining text of the book is whole, and it is understood that while the selection of this particular spread as the vehicle of intervention is a component of the piece, so too is the remainder, as a whole. The text within assume a state of being that the usual preoccupation with the articulation of surface denies. The way the book is displayed reinforces the unopenness, and the sense that the book's unrevealed text has been silently assimilated into the overall substance of the work.



John Stezaker
Tabula Rasa, 2011
Artist's book
Published by Ridinghouse
28.6 x 21 x 2.5 cm
Edition of 10 (+3 AP)

LAWRENCE WEINER



Lawrence Weiner
& *GIVEN & REPLACED*, 2009
(Language & the materials referred to)
Wall Vinyl
Dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery

Lawrence Weiner (b. 1942, New York) is one of the central figures in the formation of Conceptual Art in the 1960s. Weiner is regarded as a founding figure of Postminimalism's Conceptual arm, which includes artists like Joseph Kosuth, and Sol Lewitt. His work often takes the form of typographic texts. Weiner has long pursued inquiries into language and the art-making process and posits a radical redefinition of the artist/viewer relationship and the very nature of the artwork - translating his investigations into linguistic structures and visual systems across varied formats and manifestations.

The belief at the core of Weiner's work is that art is a material reality between human beings and objects and between sets of objects in relation to human beings. Weiner considers language to be a sculptural material and believes that a construction can function as adequately as a fabricated object.

YOUNG ARTIST

NICOLA ANTHONY

The sculpture *David Copperfield* explores found language, sub-plots, and re-appropriation. Charles Dickens' original tale involves many changing settings, identities and sub-stories. In this piece the artist renews a neglected novel by cutting away its timeworn sections and revealing a new story existing within the same text. Pages were carved into until the artist reached a sentence where the next word fitted. Word by word, a new, haphazard and eccentric story was revealed.

Nicola Anthony (b.1984) is an artist based in Singapore and working internationally. Alongside her artistic practice, she also lectures and writes about art for journals & publications. Spending her formative years in the UK, she has an Asian ancestry which influences her work, and helped lead her to Singapore.



Nicola Anthony
David Copperfield, 2011
Cut found novel and music stand



Tom Gallant
DULUXXX Strict Bitch, 2011
Matt Emulsion paint, Tin,
Giclée print label
H7.5 x Dia 7.5 cm
Edition of 7

Tom Gallant (b. 1975, UK) appropriates images and mediums that connect to an abusive or absent male reflected in our visual culture. His background in illustration and printmaking influenced his fascination with the didactic image and the dissemination of ideas through the various industrial revolutions, from the industry of organised religion to the printing press and the loom. Gallant has constantly placed the analysis of literature at the core of his practice and the psychological, social and cultural influences on the narrator and the reader.

Using the entire issue of an adult magazine called *Knockers*, Gallant created a new version obsessively transcribing all the erotic text and explicit images into the 'perfect grid' for an A4 page. The photos were then reduced to their absolute average colour; the essence of the fleshy tones that attract us so primitively to pornography. The text becomes the focus yet ridiculous without its overbearing illustrations. The pages are reminiscent of minimal painters and sculptors and the logical progression was the paint tin. Itself a copy of selected adverts from the re-dux book, the colours were scanned in a DIY store and converted to matt emulsion.

YOUNG ARTIST
DAWN NG

With a background in studio art and journalism at Georgetown University and the UCL Slade School of Fine Art, Dawn Ng (b. 1982, Singapore) spent 10 years across Singapore, Paris and New York straddling art and advertising. Her time in advertising is reflective in the pop cultural resonance of her personal work and its attempt to toy with the obvious to tell the truth.

Dawn Ng's *Surveillance Camera* is from the series *Everything You Ever Wanted is Right Here* (handcrafted photographic and typography-based collages which explore 'home'). This series is a tongue-in-cheek visual documentary of present day Singapore, over a 4 month period of photo-journalism and interviews with locals. By slicing huge panels of words through large scale photographs, these collages expose the cultural sentiments bubbling beneath one the world's most highly case-studied cities, as it tells the ongoing story of a country in-the making. The juxtaposition of image and text sets up a visual peek-a-boo, revealing hidden socio-commentaries on the tensions, idiosyncrasies, and hopes unique to Singapore. Dealing with everything from the poignant to irreverent, *Everything You Ever Wanted Is Right Here* is core to Ng's obsession with the notion of home, identity and belonging, and her attempt to capture the ever-changing form of the latter:

Dawn Ng is represented in Singapore exclusively by Chan Hampe Galleries.



Dawn Ng
Surveillance Camera, 2012
Archival inkjet print collage
104 x 139 cm
Edition of 3 + 1 AP



Sergei Vasiliev
Print No. 15 (Man with cello),
Strict Regime Corrective Labour Colony
No.40, Kungur, Perm Region, 1991
Giclée print on archival fine art paper
54 x 41 cm
Ed. of 8 (+2 AP)
© Sergei Vasiliev / FUEL

PHOTOGRAPHS FROM
THE RUSSIAN CRIMINAL TATTOO ARCHIVE

SERGEI VASILIEV

The unique archive of the *Russian Criminal Tattoo Encyclopedia* Volumes I-III (FUEL Publishing) documents Russian criminal tattoos and their range of coded meanings. From 1948 prison warden Danzig Baldaev used his drawings to catalogue the extensive range of designs made by prisoners on their skin. These homemade tattoos, which were illegal in the prisons, were made in clandestine fashion - inked into the skin using a mixture of melted boot-heels, urine and blood, contained a whole range of coded messages against the Soviet regime and about the prisoners' individual crimes. Baldaev was reported to the KGB who unexpectedly supported his project, realising what a resource it would be for their criminal files. Sergei Vasiliev began photographing prisoners separately (although the two met in the 1990s).

"Together with Baldaev's drawings, my photographs became a sociological record of a disappearing sub-culture, and a dark reflection of our Communist regime and society. Ideological lies, the humiliation of people, the deprivation of rights – these were the vices of the government depicted in the tattooed patches of criminals' skin. They showed plots, scenes, and perverse ideas about society, nations, and social beliefs. The tattoos are a unique social document and, in a strange way, also a form of proof."

These photographs by Sergei Vasiliev, were taken between 1989–1993 in prisons and reform settlements across Russia. In these incredible images the nameless bodies of criminals act as both a text and mirror; reflecting and preserving the ever-changing folklore of the Russian criminal underworld. Sergei Vasiliev was born in 1936 in the Chuvash region of Russia.

Large scale versions of these works are currently exhibited at the Saatchi Gallery in London.

IKKAN SANADA

Between 1971-1977, Ikkan Sanada worked at Galerie Tamenaga France, the first Japanese gallery in Paris dedicated to bringing major European paintings to Japan. From 1977 to 1979, he moved back to Tamenaga, Tokyo, as Director of Foreign Operations. In 1980 he moved to New York to study Art History and Arts Administration at New York University. 1982 saw the incorporation of Ikkan Art International with Mr. Sanada as its owner and president. Involved with the purchasing and selling of Modern and Contemporary works of art, Ikkan Art deals for its own account and on behalf of its international clients, who include key individual and corporate collectors, galleries, private dealers, investors and auction houses. Ikkan Art also provides advisory services to both private and corporate clients in acquiring and exchanging their art holdings and investment.

In 2011, spurred by a quiet confidence of the emergence of Southeast Asia as a key market for quality art, he moved to Singapore to set up Ikkan Art Gallery with the vision to present a programme of innovative museum-quality exhibitions.

ANDREW HERDON

Andrew Herdon has over a decade of experience in the art business, having worked for well-known galleries, museums, and collectors; including the Saatchi Gallery, Lisson Gallery and Simon Lee in London and the State Hermitage Museum in Russia.

Andrew studied History of Modern Art, Design & Film and his professional background is in curating, exhibition and collection management, marketing/business development and corporate sponsorship of the arts (as Director of Corporate Art Partnerships at the Saatchi Gallery, working with clients such as Coutts and Deutsche Bank).

Based in Singapore since 2011, Andrew is an independent art advisor and exhibition consultant and has previously collaborated as a co-curator with Ikkan Sanada for the photography exhibition Shoot and Point and the new media art exhibition The Experience Machine at Ikkan Art Gallery.

