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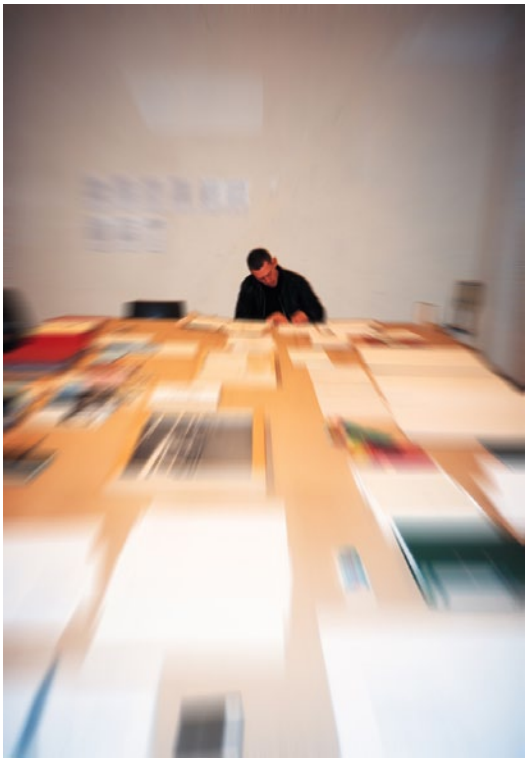
MAGASIN

# FROM 199C TO 199D
## *LIAM GILLICK*

MAGASIN / Centre National d'Art Contemporain
École du MAGASIN

June 6 - September 7, 2014



For more than twenty years Liam Gillick (born 1964, U.K.) has questioned the exhibition as a phenomenon and isolated the possible markers that could define it. These include the occupation of time, the role of the institution and varied forms of collaboration. In the 1990s the most prominent of his interests questioned the dynamic relationship between artists, curators and institutions. Twenty years later he is working with curatorial students to reanimate early works from the 1990s. The first version of this process was From 199A to 199B at the CCS Bard Hessel Museum in New York in 2012.

The exhibition From 199C to 199D is a completely new development that expands upon the original exhibition. Liam Gillick has worked closely alongside the students of the École du MAGASIN - Claire Astier, Neringa Bumbliené, Paola Bonino, Giulia Bortoluzzi, Selma Boskailo and Anna Tomczak – and MAGASIN Director Yves Aupetitallot for nine months towards the reanimation of a selection of key works from the 1990s. Particular focus is upon works that articulate changes and continuities in cultural, political and social discourse over the last twenty years. The exhibition at MAGASIN expands in different way through a forthcoming publication and the official website of Session 23.

A book will be published by JRP/Ringier that includes a survey of the Bard and MAGASIN exhibitions and includes essays by Paul O'Neill and Jorn Schaffaf.

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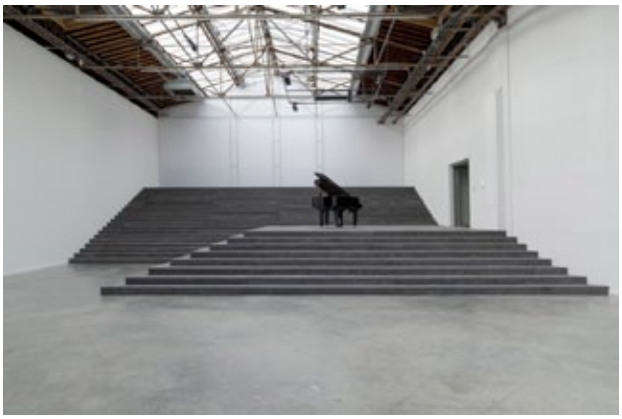
ARTiT

# Liam Gillick Part I.
# ON A CERTAIN DAY IN A CERTAIN PLACE AND TIME
## By Andrew Maerkle



Liam Gillick - Factories in the snow (2007), exhibition view in Philippe Parreno: "Anywhere, Anywhere, Out Of The World," Palais de Tokyo, 2013. Photo Aurélien Mole.

*Born in England in 1964 and now based in New York, Liam Gillick works across diverse media, but is perhaps best known for his sculptural installations in which materials from the everyday built environment are transformed into both ironic, minimalist abstractions and powerful commentaries on the structures guiding behavior, and thought, in contemporary society. Extending his practice to architecture, graphic design, films and videos, Gillick is also a prolific writer of texts and books that inform his visual art projects without explicating them. Taking the form of speculative fiction or art and social criticism, the texts might contribute to the development of a body of work, but both texts and works operate in parallel to each other, rather than in a specific hierarchy.*

*Gillick recently visited Japan for the opening of his exhibition at Taro Nasu Gallery in Tokyo, "Vertical Disintegration," held from November 28 to December 27. As part of our annual special issue reviewing the events of the past year and looking ahead to the year to come, "Things Worth Remembering 2013," ART iT met with Gillick at the gallery to discuss the role of time in his practice and thinking.*

I.

ART iT: It's funny you mention that you're staying at the Hotel Okura, the interior of which is like a time warp to a very specific period in postwar Japanese sensibility, because one of the topics I wanted to discuss with you is the idea of time and how it applies to your practice and thinking. From notions of historical time to labor time to parallel time and time travel, time seems fundamental in many ways to your concerns, but it also seems to be something that you work around as opposed to using directly.

LG: Yes. Philippe Parreno has an exhibition now in Paris at the Palais de Tokyo, ["Anywhere, Anywhere, Out of the World"], where he plays quite directly with time. For me, the problem is often expressed in a way that's more still or stable, in the same way that the Okura has a particular atmosphere. This is partly to do with my placement of objects, as well as a conceptual element: the existence of physical objects rather than the expression of time in a clear way. I think Philippe is questioning the exhibition as a site where you might not know how much time to spend there – he is trying to play with exhibition time. My issue with time is less to do with the exhibition as a space, and more to do with what I'm thinking about when I'm working.

But I have to say my previous visit to Tokyo affected me very strongly - I took a lot of photographs - and that's happening again. So my certainty has started to disappear, which is good for me, but it changes something, and I don't know what that is exactly. I know this seems a strange thing to say, because obviously Tokyo is just another modern city, but maybe there are elements of inside and outside that get confused here. There's something about the design of objects in Tokyo and the particular trajectory of modernism that they reflect. I'm going through a phase of testing some ideas at the moment, so many of the certainties I had, or the areas that interested me, are not so clear any more. I'm trying to look more, to check and verify things rather than build a big conceptual construction and say, ok, this is a big set of ideas and here's the work. I'm going back to more physical things. I'm trying to be less in my head and more concentrated on the way things are made. This is a good city for doing that.

ART iT: This confusion of inside and outside could apply to the sliding door piece in the exhibition here, Scorpion then Felix (2012), which divides the two galleries. When I entered the exhibition space, the door had been left open, so I could see into the interior room and have some sense of looking through a pictorial frame, but without being particularly conscious of the relation between the door and the space beyond it. It was only when I shut the door and looked again through its bars into the interior that all of a sudden a scene materialized. Looking through the partial obstruction of the door completed the space.

LG: Exactly. I think what happens when I come here is that I become aware of the fact that I still have a lot to learn or understand. This has nothing to do with Japanese culture or history or architecture in a specific way, and more to do with how space is used and divided and how, when space is valuable – meaning literally that there's not much of it – new views are created through screens or barriers that play with the perception of space.

So coming back to your question about time – time or duration is normally the thing I'm really thinking about, but when I come here, I'm forced to think about space and deception, too. In Tokyo, looking

at the spaces between everything, you're not sure how deep something is or how wide it is or how far it continues, because there's the effect of what Donald Judd used to call "real illusion," where devices are used to suggest that there might be something more or beyond, when in fact there might just be a wall, or a narrow void. So, for this exhibition, instead of coming to Tokyo, looking at the gallery and making new work, I wanted to stay away at first, then bring work from outside and start to think of new ways to produce something that will appear later somewhere else. My stay here will lead to a displacement. My time in Tokyo now will affect the exhibition I do in Germany next year.

ART iT: This recalls the scenario for your novel Erasmus is Late, in which parallel times coexist in the same space.

LG: It does. I was watching television this morning and saw the news about Caroline Kennedy's arrival as the new United States Ambassador to Japan. The Okura is right next to the Embassy and she came to the hotel for some kind of diplomatic courtesy call, but of course what's also happening there is that the hotel was built [in 1962] just before the death of President Kennedy, so there are a lot of strange parallels and time slips taking place.
Maybe what I'm looking for at the moment is a subject. The experience of staying in the Hotel Okura, with all this activity and symbolic politics and symbolic architecture, turns me into a ghost in the room, because I'm invisible there – I'm just a guest. I have my camera out – but so do many others – and if I have a camera then it means I am only taking a few photos. I'm killing time. I'm standing there and people walk right through me. Yesterday all these diplomats and people were weaving around me and I was standing silently as if I didn't exist. It's a good place to not exist. People leave you alone. So it's a good time to think, and look for a subject.

ART iT: You often describe your works as parallel positions, and the way you describe the Okura sounds as if it's a gigantic parallel position. But in terms of your work, is it possible for there to be time in a parallel position?

LG: Yes, it is possible. It's a complicated thing to explain. I wrote about it in depth last year, but you would need to have the whole text to understand what I was talking about. The point is that this all depends on the point of view. Imagine you have parallel strands of ideas or thinking. If you look at them one way, there seem to be separate points, but from another angle ideas appear to intersect.

Maybe what I'm talking about is not finding a new subject but finding a new point of view. For the last days I've been playing with isometric projection, used when you draw a building with no perspective, a technique which also appears in older Japanese art. In the old prints, for example, the front of a building and the back of a building will be the same length, because the artist was trying to show all the information in the image with no distortion of perspective. Maybe what will happen with this parallel thinking is that the time component of my work will change if I change my point of view.

But in the end I'm not sure. I'm in a period of doubt about a lot of things. This is partly because I just started making a film with a French filmmaker who previously did some work with Godard and made a great film about surgeons. He wants to make a film about an artist who is played by different artists at different ages. I'm the middle artist, because I'm 20 years older than the youngest one and 20 years younger than the oldest one. We already filmed in New York, with me just talking, explaining, talking about time, and by doing that I had this sense, like in a bad movie, of opening a door and suddenly standing in the middle of a field, surrounded by space. So I need to decide whether to go back through the door or to start to construct a new way of playing with time.

Singular Roundrail (Red) (2012), powder coated aluminium, 5 x 200 x 5 cm.
Courtesy Liam Gillick and Taro Nasu, Tokyo.

ART iT: You mentioned your certainties are starting disappear. What are these certainties?

LG: There has been an increasing pressure in the last few years that has come with the emergence of a new art history, a history of contemporary art. This history often looks at what was missed and tries to bring it back, to replay or reanimate something that happened in the past. There's a lot of reanimation and recuperation going on, which means saving something or reenacting it, and I'm thinking about this a lot.
One response is that I'm starting to make a film about another artist, Richard Hamilton, who died in 2011. Instead of thinking about ideas, as it were, I want to look closely at the ideas of another artist. Hamilton had a lot of good ideas. He did a lot of work around Duchamp. In the 1950s he played a lot with time and he played with projection and the idea of the exhibition as a form. He also liked to collaborate with other people, but then I think at a certain point he felt that he had to look more carefully at the artists he admired or who had influenced him, and verify what they meant for him. He went through a long process of reconstructing work by Duchamp and also transliterating Duchamp's notes into a form that could be clearly understood. So I decided to make a film about him as another way to find an escape route.
I think he's an interesting character, but of course he's quite central at the same time. He's not on the edge. He's not forgotten. Certainly in Britain a lot of people think they like him, or think he's good, even though they don't know anything about him.

ART iT: Is the film going to be a condensed way of doing what Hamilton did with Duchamp?

LG: I don't know, to be honest. I have all this archival material, but I don't know how to start. I like the idea of making a film without permission, although obviously I can't upset him. It is a bit like repeating the past. Like if something strange happens or there's some kind of crisis, you recreate the situation or conditions that caused the crisis. I want to just look at this person and see what kind of film I can make. I don't know what it will produce, but something will happen.
I'm in that situation where, if you can imagine someone who's working and focused and writing or producing work on the computer, and then there's a knock on the door and they suddenly look around - I'm that person. I'm looking around, because I've suddenly realized that I need to check something. Some of it's to do with being physical, some of it's to do with watching and photographing, and some of it's to do with new subjects, using a human being as a subject, or a city. We'll see.

Part II

ART iT: Earlier this year you presented the Bampton Lectures 2013 at Columbia University in New York, which were collectively titled "Creative Disruption in the Age of Soft Revolutions." The lectures focused on four combinations of dates and themes: 1820 Erasmus and Upheaval; 1948 Skinner and Counter Revolution; 1963 Herman Kahn and Projection; and 1974 Volvo and the Mise-en-scène. Were the lectures

a summation of a certain trajectory in your thinking?

LG: Yes. The lecture series is very materialist. It is about the history of materials and production and objects, and on that level it does have a lot to do with everything I've done in the past 20 years. The lectures will be made into a book published by the University, and the book is now twice the length of the lectures. I've almost expanded it too much, so now it covers too much. So I have to edit it, but I can't even look at it, I hate it so much. I have to sit down and rewrite it. It's sitting in the hotel room right now. But I'm just walking around, taking photographs of the floor. I thought I would do the edit here, but of course I haven't done anything of the sort. Right now the problem is voice, like what voice should I use, who speaks? That's something I have to work on.

ART iT: Previously have you considered time to be an actual material you're working with or, as in the lectures and Erasmus is Late, are you more interested in a speculative playing with historical time?

LG: A few years ago I would probably have given you a simple answer. What's happened recently is there's more of a gap between the abstract work and the text - a bigger space that is not accounted for - which might beconnected to the deliberate decision to make art in a state of distraction. In any case, I decided to keep working this way and let the gap get bigger. In 2005 I abandoned the book I was writing, Construcción de Uno (Construction of One) - which was literally about the construction of an individual, and also about questions of production. This changed the way I worked – it allowed the gap between abstraction and the text to widen – so exhibitions would jump, between having a subject and not having a subject, without any consistent method while moving through time. That's basically what's been happening, although it doesn't really answer your question.

I think what I'm doing is checking some of my assumptions about the relationship between objects and time and the perspective from which you look at them, and of course part of this has to do with trying to respond to the emergence of people agonizing about object-oriented philosophy and speculative realism and new ideas about animism. I'm an artist who works in a context: there's one group of people now who are talking about animism, and another thinking about objects and how they affect everything and how to look at something from the perspective of an object and so on, and I'm working out my position in relation to all this.

I know we think about contemporary art as this big matrix of different stories and directions, but the decision to be an artist is also a kind of philosophical position. You sometimes have to decide where you stand in relation to this or that. Some of my friends are taking clear positions. Pierre Huyghe has decided he's interested in a certain position, Philippe Parreno has decided he's interested in another position. And I have an enduring fascination with the problem of abstraction, the problem of the art object as a thing, and I don't know if I'm ready to escape to the cinema or the landscape. I still believe in the possibility of doing something in an art gallery, even though they seem so stupid to me as well. There's a certain feeling that galleries have that strikes me as ridiculous. But I still want to deal with the legacy of abstraction in relation to time and to other ideas, and the artist as a phenomenon and the genealogy of an artist, and also the question of "point of view" as an artist. In a way the title of the exhibition at Taro Nasu, "Vertical Disintegration," is about all of this. Vertical disintegration is a management concept where if you're producing, say, an airplane, you devolve autonomous companies to produce all the different parts, which are then assembled as a single airplane. The exhibition is not a collection of fragments, but it is made of irresolvable elements from different moments that come into one space. It's very much an exhibition about exhibitions, which maybe is a terrible thing to do, but sometimes necessary.

ART iT: The practice of vertical disintegration, or, specifically, subcontracting, was a major part of the Japanese postwar economy. Were you thinking about that in relation to the exhibition?

LG: I didn't really think about that. Japanese production is such an enigma for some people and always connected to simple misunderstandings about "other cultures." I have always been interested in what you could call the Scandinavian Model, on one hand, and not so much how the Japanese industry functions, but I do think a lot about Japanese structural components, and the innovations produced.

ART iT: What's interesting about the Japanese context is that you would have a mom-and-pop factory making widgets for a major industrial conglomerate in some warehouse in a residential backstreet. The scale of production was really skewed.

Liam Gillick & Louise Lawler - Exhibition view, "November 1-December 21" at Casey Kaplan, New York, with Gillick's Övningskörning (Driving Practice Parts 1 - 30) (2004) in foreground. Photo Jean Vong, courtesy Liam Gillick and Casey Kaplan, New York.

LG: That's something I find really fascinating, because the work I make comes from that kind of environment. It's like having a mom-and-pop organization, as it were. I work with the materials that are left over after you build the city, or after all the construction is finished.
I make almost everything in Germany, which has a similar, although different, quality of structural production as exists in Japan. There are mid-level businesses there, which are higher up in the chain of production and bigger than a small business, but which still allow you to do a small number of things quite easily and at good quality.
It was actually in 2001 after I came back from the residency at CCA Kitakyushu on my last trip to Japan that I started working this way. To that point I would always work in the gallery space, ordering all the materials and cutting and assembling them on site; the gallery was the site of production for me. After Kitakyushu I went straight to Zurich to make an exhibition there, and worked in my normal way, but when the exhibition was finished I thought, I will never work this way again, I need to change the way I work. I don't know why I had to change it, but I found someone in Germany to work with and have continued to do this ever since. Something happened while I was in Japan that made building work in a gallery seem stupid and meaningless. Maybe it was from seeing what you describe, seeing different scales of production in one place, which is much more evident in Kyushu than in Tokyo, because you have different industries each nested inside each other like a doll within a doll within a doll.

In any case after Japan in 2001 I decided I wanted to make use of the potential of production in Berlin at the time, which was connected to the rebuilding of the whole city. I could get anything I wanted done by pulling out little strands and pieces from this enormous reconstruction process.

ART iT: Are the materials literally taken from construction sites?

LG: No, they're taken from the various distribution sites around Germany. Everything is kind of new, but extra. The material for the

black piece downstairs on the wall [Extended Regression (2013)] - those specific aluminum extrusions - were made for the façade of a big building in Berlin but weren't used, so I bought all of it and then started to make work with it. There's something about the different size of businesses in Germany, with these different levels, that means you can find resources in different places. Materials don't disappear. They get moved from a big situation to a slightly smaller one, and then I take it out and bring it to an even smaller situation.

ART iT: I saw the video documenting the installation of your collaborative exhibition with Lawrence Weiner at M HKA in Antwerp, "A Syntax of Dependency" (2011), which includes interviews with the staff of the flooring company that produced and installed the linoleum mats used in the work. This also evokes the German situation. It brings up the question, what is the economic scale of possible positions?

LG: I don't know. This is what I've been thinking about, and it's very confusing at the moment. On my way here this afternoon I was thinking, maybe I need to address the question of scale. Maybe that's part of the problem. There is a problem about scale that gets lost in the way people talk about art now.

Today I was in the area of the Mori Tower and there were these little paths and parks caught between these huge towers, creating sudden shifts of scale. I don't know what I was thinking, but I realized something. So I'm thinking much more about physical things at the moment rather than time. Scale and expansion and contraction and numbers of aspects of how things are produced in opposition to time.

I just made a film in Texas for an exhibition with the Contemporary Austin. In this park in the middle of nowhere, I made a standing form about 90 feet by 25 feet [Raised Laguna Discussion Platform (Job #1073) (2013)], and then I shot the film in the park. The film, [Margin Time 2: The Heavenly Lagoon (2013)], speaks about questions of time and production in a basic way. I mainly filmed trees and flowers, and then divided the footage into four sections, each with a different soundtrack. The first soundtrack is the sound of microprocessors being produced - which actually sounds quite soft and natural, with a lot of soft clicks and whirs. The second part is from an interview with Lawrence Weiner, when he was 29, that took place while he was working on the exhibition "When Attitudes Become Form," with the interviewer asking questions like, what does it mean to produce something, and how does it exist in your head, or anywhere, or does it change if you move it from one place to another. The third part is the sound of pilots going through the pre-flight systems check. You hear a little speaking, but mostly you hear all the emergency sounds and phrases like "wind sheer" and "50 feet," and then the engines start up. And then the last section is Gilles Deleuze talking about territory and deterritorialization, but with a big reverb on his voice, so that it's like a voice of authority, without any subtitles. Basically, for an average American audience, they hear a French guy speaking with a big echo, and he can't breath properly, because he smokes too much, but I wanted them to hear the voice as a thing in itself, which sounds so beautiful with the reverb.

So when you talk about these other projects, they are important in a way, but they definitely have the sense of being a project. What I've been doing is connected to unpacking or taking things apart and on some level being much clearer, and on another level changing my approach, whether by working with other people, using another artist as a subject, or doing collaborations with older artists, as with Lawrence Weiner at MuKHA and now with Louise Lawler at Casey Kaplan Gallery in New York. I like this idea of working with people who are a little older – partly because I can now – and they are prepared to do it - but also I am aware that we will only do it once. It's the same with the Richard Hamilton film I am going to make. It's just my way of finding a way to recharge some ideas without pretending to be 25.

III.

ART iT: The design of the door downstairs, with a frame filled in by vertical slats, is similar to the sliding doors made of wood that are often used in Japanese restaurants. Was that part of the inspiration for the work?

LG: Not consciously, but in fact it's possible there there is a connection. I am interested in non-fundamental, extra architecture, the thing that is a canopy or a screen or a door that is not completely closed but only symbolically closes or alters the space. That interests me regardless of Japan. For instance, I did something similar in the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2009. In the entryway to the pavilion I placed these blinds made of vinyl, which are usually meant to stop flies from entering, to create a zone without completely closing it. It's about seeing people through something, creating spaces of semi-autonomy rather than a space that is completely autonomous.

I generally work in a really material way. I have an idea and sit down with technical paper or at the computer and start to make models of the architecture, and then I start to work within the actual architecture. It's a really specific way of working.

ART iT: In your writing you've been critical of the idea of transparency, and yet in your works you often use transparent materials.

LG: In my writing I refer to transparency more in a political sense. Transparency is the physical manifestation of the democratic lack in neoliberalism. We are told the banking system or financial regulation has to become more transparent in order to liberalize it somehow. Right now I think all these things are changing and shifting a bit, but in the past I was worried about the idea of art that suggested an equal exchange. I want things to be grayer than that, even as my work is becoming less gray and more precise. There's a more precise battle between abstraction and the texts taking place now. But that doesn't mean I am more interested in art as a set of certainties.

ART iT: For me there's a duality to your work. On the one hand it appears to be quite benign, on the other it appropriates the logic of the barrier, the kind of device that is built into the everyday environment as a means to restrict behavior.

LG: Absolutely. I've been looking at Dan Graham's work a lot more because I have so much in common with his interests and I have to make some decisions about that relationship. In fact, what I want to do is start talking to him. I saw a very good improvised exhibition of his work in Porto recently.

I think with both of us there's this feeling that you should address questions in the culture that are not exactly ambient but are at least evocative rather than didactic. There's also the problem of the viewer, the human relationship to the work, which I think Graham has always dealt with very clearly: the viewer has a very clear perspective, but it's also fucked by the reflection of the materials and so on.

I'm wondering whether or how to deal with this question of the human relationship to art. I'm thinking about Philippe Parreno's exhibition in Paris, which is literally a journey through a series of different experiences. With this exhibition, Philippe has clarified something very strong about his work, and it means I have to rethink my work as well. I work in relation to other artists, not just in relation to a space or a city or so on. Philippe and I have started making a new film together using CGI animation and will introduce a number of people we have worked with in the past. We are working initially with an animator who works on big budget films in French cinema to create visualizations of a series of settings or mise-en-scènes. Two of the early visualizations are inspired by the first night I ever spent in Tokyo, but now reworked on an extreme

level so that the city looks like a cross between Venezuela and Japan - urban highways intersecting all over the place and half-finished buildings with people living in them. As a project, it sounds basic, but it's going to start to produce something.

ART iT: Cerith Wyn Evans was also deeply affected by his first trip here. He said of Tokyo, "the matrix of the codes that the city was performing was devastating."

LG: I can imagine. You can see it in his work. It sounds like I'm saying this to be polite because I'm a visitor, but that's not really the case for me. It's interesting to work in a place that was completely remade within the lifetime of my father. Yesterday I spent an hour walking around the area near the Okura, and I realized that every single thing I saw had been built since 1950, or even 1970. That has very strong implications. It's like somebody took lots of human energy, condensed it and stored it in this physical production. There's nothing magical about this process, but in a certain way, it's really powerful.

The areas I'm interested in have always been middle-area questions around renovation, compromise, collectivity without communism, organization of production that involves individual work and team work, and when you come here, even in the downtown area, you see this all locked into physical form. So that's what I mean: I'm only affected by being here in relation to other objects. It's not about Japanese culture; it's to do with the physical manifestation of human energy into condensed physical object form.

Raised Laguna Discussion Platform (Job #1073) (2013), painted steel, 304.8 x 406.4 x 1096.6 cm. Installation view at The Contemporary Austin. Photo David Mead, courtesy Liam Gillick and Casey Kaplan, New York.

ART iT: There are certain repeating forms that appear in your works. How do you understand this idea of repeating form when each work is also given a specific title at the same time?

LG: I don't have a good answer. Sometimes there are specific reasons why I use certain forms, and they have a particular function, but they're not based on any system thinking. Some of it is about asserting a type of expression or set of forms that needs to be restated and refined in order for it to communicate.

One of the works here, [Suspended Agreement (2010)], is an advanced version of earlier versions of my "Discussion Platforms." The first versions were made alone and very quickly and just hung from the ceiling. I couldn't have made this advanced version in the beginning. There's nothing fundamentally different - it's a similar production technique - but there's something about it that satisfies me in terms of what it's doing now. It occupies a type of physical space that I felt needed to be occupied.

And it does so using a restricted number of forms: the "T" shape and the "L" shape. These are my shapes – aluminum extrusions. For example, in working with three-dimensional digital software, whenever you open a new file the program automatically gives you a sphere, a square and a triangle as the fundamental forms to work with. I have always liked working with the non-fundamental forms, and the "T" and the "L" are the first variants of the fundamental form of the square. You remove two sides, or you put two lines in relation to each other, but they don't have the supposed "truth" of the cube. They are essentially the shapes that are used to make windows or storefronts, temporary construction, office spaces. And it's the same material, too. It's hard to do certain things with these shapes, which are what you could call secondary forms, because they're not closed like a square. But you can make them sit without fixing them together: there are only four screws holding the whole piece together here. These works are always meant to go in relation to something. They're not really meant for a white room. The "T" and "L" are relational rather than fundamental.

So that's where these things come from, and I'm still satisfied with them to a point, but I'm taking some time now to examine other things, like the idea of the artist, the idea of contemporary art and also collaborative thinking, while at the same time trying to keep alive something that's to do with my version of abstraction, which is a very material, relativistic, parallel way of doing things.

ART iT: You use abstraction both as something that is non-representational and as something that has been extrapolated from a complex set of information.

LG: Exactly. In the new book I am publishing of my Columbia University Bampton Lectures there are two early chapters, one on abstraction and one on parallelism. In a way they say the same thing, but one's referring to where you are placed in relation to ideas and the other is about where things are placed in relation to other things. I started using the word abstraction at some point in relation to physical work because I wanted to remove some of the narrative and storytelling aspect from the work, or the feeling that it has a designated use. I started using it partly to be annoying or irritating. But it's true that I often use the same term, or a similar process, to talk about two completely different things.

ART iT: The "Discussion Platforms" are suspended from the ceiling, which to me suggests an inverted or upturned space of discussion. Is this what you had in mind for the concept?

LG: Absolutely. For me it creates a sort of pressure rather than liberation. I always have the feeling there's something above me, a discomfiting presence. The term "platform" implies that you should be standing above it, not underneath. It was possibly influenced by reading The Tin Drum when I was young. In the book there's the part where the boy sits beneath the seats during a Nazi rally and discovers a space of potential away from the corruption of ideology taking place above. It becomes for him a protected space that acts as a screen. If you've ever sat beneath a stadium, there's something very profound about that feeling of being underneath, hidden, and free while getting glimpses of the action and hearing the mood of the crowd.

ART iT: Ideology is of course itself a "platform" upon which discussion takes place, so being beneath the platform suggests a space where you can see the structure of ideology and how it supports what is going on above.

LG: Yes. That was the original idea. It designates a space within which you can think about the idea of these things. You don't have to actually do it. It's not an instruction to behave a certain way or actually do something. That's the basis of my frustration about how people have tried to write about participatory art or relational aesthetics, which misses the aesthetics part and only focuses on the relational part, for example, or misunderstands the differences in certain participatory

practices and assumes that there is a designated action that is even across time, space and ideology.

ART iT: Is it accurate to say, then, that your works emerge from a kind of corporate aesthetic, or an aesthetic of control, as both a residue and a commentary on that aesthetic?

LG: In a way, although I was also thinking about renovation, and how spaces of culture are designed or thought about. The Mori Tower hosts a museum but also has offices, and in fact many museums today are indistinguishable from office buildings. The Museum of Modern Art in New York has the same flowers, the same front desk, the same women in black clothes, the same atrium as a big corporation. I wasn't thinking about corporate things as such, I was thinking more about how they have merged.

ART iT: But the architecture of control is increasingly integrated into every facet of our lives now through things like proprietary software connecting our smart phones to our computers, determining how we communicate, how we relate to our photos and music and so on, and it seems that with each upgraded device it gets harder and harder to work around that proprietary structure.

LG: There are probably workarounds, but you need to work harder to do it. With my work, when we're talking about these physical things and not the conceptual or written aspects, it is quite sinister in a sense. The work seems to be attractive but of course the door that evokes a traditional sliding door is still made out of painted aluminum, and the handrail [Restricted Roundrail (White) (2012)] is placed too low, so it might have some other function. In the apparently formalistic arrangement of these things, I always think of them as though they have some kind of electrical function, as though they're used to disperse heat: they are the disguised element of something that has an environmental or channeling function. So I think that there is a way to talk about my work in relation to physical things and to look at what you're looking at and say, "Here is a relationship between this specific thing and other things in the world." But most people don't do it because they don't want to, or they think it's maybe not relevant, but it absolutely is relevant.
So I agree with you, and that's why I spent so much time today sitting and looking at disguised forms of control. And of course Japan's particularly good at this, so in these corporate environments you don't really see any control system when in fact there are all these subtle things taking place within the built structure of the place. I think most tourists would single out the man with the white gloves who tells people politely to avoid the hole in the street. But that's not control. That's service, or a legacy of class and identity, but not really control. What's more interesting is how the semi-public space is arranged around the base of a building so that it is completely abstracted away from a sense of control, but still affects the way people behave much more than the guy with white gloves pointing at things, who's just doing a job.

ART iT: With the door piece, the other immediate association is the prison cell.

LG: Absolutely. So at the moment I have to decide how to proceed. Now what do I do? I would say that these works are getting to the point where this is just about the way they should be. They are about as big as they should be for this kind of space to make it work, and in this exhibition we are seeing an advanced expression of this kind of work. For my exhibition in Berlin in the spring I will strip away all the surface and color from everything, just to see what happens. It's part of the same process I described to you before. Take the surface off; make the artist a subject; collaborate with people who were important for you when you were young. Play with time in a new way. It's a process of taking apart a lot of things and laying out the different elements to see what you have.

ART iT: "Horseness is the whatness of all horse." What does that mean to you now?

LG: I like it because it's an expression of Irish genius – the quote comes from Ulysses by James Joyce. And it's a very modernist expression, but of course it has deep philosophical roots: the quality of a horse is its horseness. I like it because it seems to answer a particular question through a quasi-philosophical statement, but it evokes images in your head that are somewhat stupid or strange. It keeps bringing you back to the horse. The line comes from Joyce, but for me it also connects to Tarkovsky, and the part in the film Solaris where the protagonist is bidding goodbye to earth, because he has to go on this long journey, and there's a few points where you see a horse, and that horse has the quality of a horse - it has this fundamental quality of horseness. Of course the planet of Solaris is actually a kind of sentient memory machine which plays with the reiteration and revitalization of memory, and the horse is a thing, an essence and an entity. So in a way the phrase is a great mockery of early modernist thinking and its puritanical focus on material things, because it's about a horse and beyond a horse at the same time.
It's really weird that you mention this work, because as I was walking here I thought I heard horses, and then I realized of course there are no horses in Tokyo, and then I had this idea of riding to the gallery on a horse, and leaving it tied up outside or something like that. So, there you go. It's that combination. It's a great statement. The thing is the thing, or the thingness of the thing, but it's taking an abstraction and turning it into a physical, contradictory image. It's a stupid thing to say and it's brilliant at the same time. I think I need a bit of that every day.

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The New York Times

November 21, 2013

# Liam Gillick / Louise Lawler

By KAREN ROSENBERG

*Casey Kaplan*

*525 West 21st Street, Chelsea*
*Through Dec. 21*

In their first collaboration, Liam Gillick and Louise Lawler stay within their comfort zones but manage to nudge us out of ours. Their familiar methods of institutional critique (photographic in Ms. Lawler's case, sculptural for Mr. Gillick) combine to form a dynamic, disorienting installation.

Mr. Gillick's contribution is a text piece composed of cutout aluminum sentences, which hang from the ceiling in neat rows and lure readers deeper and deeper into the gallery. Gradually, it reveals a vague and halting narrative about workers at a defunct factory (the Volvo plant in Kalmar, Sweden, as the news release tells us).

Ms. Lawler contributes a striking background, a long vinyl wall sticker that links the three rooms of the gallery. The image printed on it is a stretched-out version of some of her earlier photographs of artworks in bland white-box settings; here, pieces by Degas, Richard Serra and Gerhard Richter, among others, are distorted beyond recognition.

The collaborative ethos of the show, the references to the socialist history of Volvo production, the relentless conveyor belt of the installation and the content of Ms. Lawler's photographs (individual artworks by top-selling male artists, blended into a single seamless strip) all signal discomfort with the rah-rah capitalism of the current art market. But no alternatives are proposed, and the installation leaves us with a haunting vision of a factory in limbo. As Mr. Gillick's text puts it, "No one has secured the building, and no one has wrecked it either."

Rosenberg, Karen. "Liam Gillick/Louise Lawler," The New York Times, Art in Review. New York:November 22, 2013, p.C25

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**November 1 – December 21**

Casey Kaplan is pleased to present an exhibition by Liam Gillick and Louise Lawler. Lawler's work provides a critical examination of the way art is displayed, documented and reprocessed. Gillick uses many strategies to examine the tension between modes of production and the legacy of abstraction.

This exhibition marks the first time that Gillick and Lawler have shown together, and is the result of a simple idea: to have two artists show alongside one another in the same space. Here, Gillick and Lawler operate in parallel – Lawler occupies the walls and Gillick hangs his work from the ceiling. The dates of the exhibition determine its parameters. The artists then produced two extensions – one via text and the other through images - that both address time without resorting to time-based media. Working with others is vital to both artists' practices, producing a welcome shift in their individual focus and concerns. Lawler has worked most notably in the past with Allan McCollum and Sherrie Levine. Gillick recently produced an exhibition with Lawrence Weiner, A Syntax of Dependency, at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Antwerp, Belgium.

Lawler's work takes two significant images from her archive and stretches them at eye-level around the perimeter of the gallery space. Both images are of institutionalized artworks. The first is focused on the space between works by Carl Andre, Richard Serra and Gerhard Richter. The second image is of an Edgar Degas sculpture of fourteen year-old ballet dancer, Marie Geneviéve van Goethem, photographed and cropped from behind. Once placed and pulled, they transform into smeared abstractions, occupying a new time and space that is disconnected from the photograph's originating moment.

Gillick's large-scale, text-based installation, Övningskörning (Driving Practice Parts 1-30), describes a scenario conceived during a site-visit to the town of Kalmar, Sweden where Volvo had first instituted its socialistic approach to auto-manufacturing in a now-defunct factory. Formatted as an outline for a book, the work consists of key sentences from the text that are cut from aluminum and suspended from the ceiling. The narrative imagines how production could be controlled following the breakdown of organized systems. Its compressed reading can only be had while moving through the gallery, following the blurred and stretched images on the walls.

Liam Gillick (Born 1964, Aylesbury, United Kingdom) lives and works in New York. Gillick's work is currently the subject of an exhibition at The Contemporary Austin, Texas (through January 5, 2014). Additionally, his work is included in 9 Artists, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (through February 16, 2014) and ANYWHERE, ANYWHERE OUT OF THE WORLD, a survey of Phillipe Parreno and his collaborators, Palais de Toyko, Paris (through January 1, 2014). Past solo exhibitions include: Liam Gillick: From 199A-199B, curated by Tom Eccles, Hessel Museum of Art, Annadale-on-Hudson, New York (2012) Liam Gillick: One Long Walk – Two Short Piers, Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik, Deutschland (2009) and the travelling retrospective Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario, Kunsthalle, Zürich, organized by Beatrix Ruf (2008), Witte de With, Rotterdam, organized by Nicolaus Schafhausen (2008), Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, organized by Dominic Molon (2009). Texts that function in parallel to his artwork include: Proxemics (Selected writing 1988-2006), JRP-Ringier (2007); Factories in the Snow by Lilian Haberer, JRP-Ringier (2007); Meaning Liam Gillick, MIT Press (2009); and Allbooks, Book Works, London (2009).

Louise Lawler (Born 1947, Bronxville, New York) lives and works in New York. A retrospective of the artist's work is currently on view at the Museum Ludwig, Köln through January 26, 2014. Louise Lawler has had one-person exhibitions at the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio (2006); Dia:Beacon, Beacon, New York (2005); the Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel (2004); Portikus, Frankfurt (2003); and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. (1997). Her work was included in Documenta XII, Kassel, Germany and the 1991, 2000, and 2008 Whitney Biennials, New York. Lawler's work is held in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Guggenheim Museum, LACMA, the Art Institute of Chicago, and Tate Modern, among others.

For further information about the artists or the exhibition, please contact Loring Randolph or Alice Conconi, loring@caseykaplangallery.com and alice@caseykaplangallery.com.

GALLERY HOURS: TUESDAY – SATURDAY, 10:00AM – 6:00PM

OPENING FRIDAY NOVEMBER 1, 6:00 –8:00PM

UPCOMING: JASON DODGE, JANUARY 6 – FEBRUARY 22, 2014

HENNING BOHL, MATTHEW BRANNON, JEFF BURTON, NATHAN CARTER, JASON DODGE, TRISHA DONNELLY, GEOFFREY FARMER, LIAM GILLICK, GIORGIO GRIFFA, ANNIKA VON HAUSSWOLFF, BRIAN JUNGEN, SANYA KANTAROVSKY, JONATHAN MONK, MARLO PASCUAL, DIEGO PERRONE, PIETRO ROCCASALVA, JULIA SCHMIDT, SIMON STARLING, DAVID THORPE, GABRIEL VORMSTEIN, GARTH WEISER, JOHANNES WOHNSEIFER

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# The Contemporary Austin

LIAM GILLICK
September 21, 2013 – January 5, 2014

Laguna Gloria
The Jones Center

A sparse aesthetic vocabulary belies conceptual complexity in the work of Liam Gillick (British, born 1964), in which distilled elements of utopian modernism, power ideology, social interaction, and corporate production make up a constellation of open-ended proposals. His work references function, then departs from it; mines architecture, but prioritizes aesthetic; suggests known structures, only to abstract them; proposes narratives, then fragments, rearranges, and corrupts them. Alluding to iconic mid-century modernist architectural forebears, such as Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier, and the Minimalist sculptors who followed shortly thereafter, such as Donald Judd and Carl Andre, Gillick's three-dimensional objects tend to be industrially fabricated in materials such as steel, aluminum, and Plexiglas and to take the shape of autonomous platforms, shelves, cubes, and architectural interventions on walls, floors, or ceilings. Emerging from the dynamic arts program at Goldsmiths College, University of London, in the late 1980s, Gillick expanded into social sculpture, cultural critique, and "Relational Aesthetics," the critic Nicolas Bourriaud's term for art within a context of relationships. Gillick's process of creating and producing his commissioned objects is an intellectual and participatory one, catalyzing collaboration and engagement with both the commissioning institution and the public. His sculptural works—in combination with his excursions into writing, architecture, design, film, and music—propose a network of phrases, sentences, and paragraphs that critique a set of idealistic objects and ideas implicit in our lived environment.

For his two-part exhibition at The Contemporary Austin, Gillick has taken on the rich and complex identity of Laguna Gloria, a site with a historic Italianate villa and twelve acres of lush, semi-wild landscape bordered on three sides by water. At the Jones Center—on view in the video gallery and as audio projecting from the first-floor soundscape—is the second in a series of films the artist has produced dealing with specific architectural sites toward the construction of new, speculative narratives addressing territory, power, and change. At Laguna Gloria, Gillick has created a multicolored, powder-coated steel platform structure, with the participation of the museum as well as local architects, engineers, and fabricators, installed at the base of the Driscoll Villa stairs on the shores of Lake Austin. With its colorful fins and geometric forms, the work is a surprising architectural insertion into the site's natural beauty, inviting the wayward wanderer to sit, play, or take shelter beneath it.

*Liam Gillick (British, born 1964 in Aylesbury, U.K.) currently lives and works in New York. He is perhaps best known for a traveling retrospective titled Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario, shown at the Kunsthalle in Zurich, the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam, and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago in 2008-09, and for his installation in Germany's official Pavilion at the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2009. His books include Meaning Liam Gillick (MIT Press, 2009). His collection of bags, accessories, and knitwear was launched at Art Basel Miami Beach in 2011.*

IMAGE CREDIT: Liam Gillick. *Raised Laguna Discussion Platform (Job #1073),* 2013. Painted steel, 120 x 160 x 431 ¾ inches. Courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York. Photograph by Liam Gillick.

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The New York Times

"*Art Begetting Art, and Social Commentary, Too,*" The New York Times, July 6 2012, p.C23.

ART REVIEW

# Art Begetting Art, and Social Commentary, Too

'Anti-Establishment' and Liam Gillick's Work at Bard


A survey of Liam Gillick's work from the early 1990s in "From 199A to 199B."

By KEN JOHNSON
Published: July 5, 2012

ANNANDALE-ON-HUDSON, N.Y. — The road to a job as a museum art curator used to be winding and haphazard. Now there are degree-granting programs like Bard College's Center for Curatorial Studies and Art in Contemporary Culture, which has been processing aspiring organizers of world-changing exhibitions for 20 years as of this summer.

Along with other anniversary events the center is presenting a pair of exhibitions in the spacious galleries of Bard's Hessel Museum. Viewed as independent shows, "Anti-Establishment" and "From 199A to 199B: Liam Gillick" are remarkably enervating. Considering them in light of the occasion, however — and that one was organized by the center's executive director, Tom Eccles, the other by its graduate program director, Johanna Burton — the shows are fascinating to think about together. What do these exhibitions tell us about the education of curators today?

In her brief introductory essay Ms. Burton characterizes the model of the artist implied by "Anti-Establishment," which she organized. Seemingly contrary to that title, the 13 individuals and collectives she picked are not uncompromising rebels. They do little to unsettle well-established norms of contemporary art making. But, according to Ms. Burton, they imagine "novel collective relationships and emergent models of engaged citizenship."

Some of the work is overtly political. Sculptures by Wynne Greenwood consist of pink, portable televisions equipped with strap-on harnesses; mainstream and queer cultures collide.

A duo called H.E.N.S. present a weakly humorous installation revolving around a pair of adult-size baby bouncer seats that you can sit in, positioned in front of a television playing a sock-puppet show. The long title of this piece

is worth quoting for what it says about the ennui of the citizen artist steeped in stale theory: "Alternative Pedagogy and New Left Daycare II, consisting of: H.E.N.S. World-Historical Sock-Tragic Puppet Drama, Marxist Baby Buggy Bouncers, Pragmatic Piscene-Pedicure Program; Showing The Subject's Passage from Vulgar Individualism to Agonic Pluralism."

Much of the work is more self-reflexively preoccupied with art than with worldly affairs. Scott Lyall's opalescent, Minimalist canvases, digitally covered by thousands of tiny bits of color, invite thought about painting in an age of mechanical reproduction. "Kiss Solo," an installation of videos of young men dancing by Brennan Gerard and Ryan Kelly, is a response to "Kiss," a performance work by Tino Sehgal that was part of his exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in 2010. Pam Lins makes prickly, abstract sculptures out of plaster, string and other materials, which she displays on sleek pedestals. A wall label notes that Ms. Lins "was thinking about a particular photo of Henry Moore in his studio and the parts of sculptures that are usually hidden, or better, covered up."

There is an exhilarating exception to the prevailing conceptualism: an installation in its own gallery of Abstract Expressionist-style paintings made with vibrant Day-Glo paints and displayed under ultraviolet light, by Jacqueline Humphries. With their nearly hallucinatory, artificially enhanced luminosity and quicksilver shapes the paintings suggest a sudden irruption of transcendental energies into imaginative consciousness.

None of the artists in "Anti-Establishment" exemplify Ms. Burton's characterization of the engaged citizen artist more completely than one who is not in her show: Liam Gillick, the subject of Mr. Eccles's exhibition. Routinely associated with the much-debated Relational Aesthetics movement, Mr. Gillick is a nearly ubiquitous figure on the international art scene as a conceptual artist, speaker, writer and collaborator with other international luminaries like Rirkrit Tiravanija and Pierre Huyghe. He designs shiny, quasi-architectural sculptures for sale in commercial galleries, but here the focus is on projects from the 1990s, driven more by verbal than visual thinking.

If you like the idea of reading news articles, letters, documents and other sorts of informational material as an art experience, this show is for you. Sprinkled throughout "From 199A to 199B" are fabric-covered panels onto which invitees — all alumni of the Bard Center program — have pinned material from magazines and other sources that caught their eyes and minds. One large gallery has pushpin panels covering the lower parts of the walls all the way around. Tacked to them are pages from Tattoo Magazine and an operational manual for a large airplane. A lot of uncovered pinup surface remains, so you can only imagine the flood of information that could be in store.

For another project Mr. Gillick proposed that copies of all the public papers of the United States presidents be displayed in a gallery and made available to anyone interested. Here, as a compromise, they are accessible on computers via the Internet.

One room is reserved for a project called "Moral Maze" that has yet to happen. Mr. Gillick will invite people who have been peripherally involved in activities of politically and ethically fraught import — minor players in the illegal drug trade, for example — for public discussions in the gallery.

Mr. Gillick represents a model of the artist that is especially popular now in academic circles: the activist social critic who tries to intervene in mainstream currents of contemporary complacency and awaken politically critical consciousness by any means. It is easy to see the appeal of that model for today's ambitious curator, who, in turn, replaces the old model of the curator as a connoisseur of visual aesthetics. The new, professional curator is a globe-trotting intellectual sophisticate, attuned like Mr. Gillick to an ever-expanding field of ideas rooted in Marxist gospel. Under the new curatorial regime art becomes an educational and participatory experience often tied to newsworthy events of the day.

Artists whose primary concerns are social and ideological will appreciate this sort of curator. Those invested in aesthetically and metaphorically resonant objects of uncertain practical utility might feel excluded and misunderstood. But in a few years or decades the paradigm will change, as tenured faculty retire. New tread will be put on old rhetoric. The marginalized will be returned to the center and the favored cast out. That is just the way it goes.

*"Anti-Establishment" and "From 199A to 199B: Liam Gillick" continue through Dec. 21 at the Hessel Museum of Art, Bard College Center for Curatorial Studies, Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y.; (845) 758-7598, bard.edu/ccs.*

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# LIAM GILLICK
# SCORPION AND UND ET FELIX

EXHIBITION DATES: MAY 2 – JUNE 23, 2012
OPENING: WEDNESDAY, MAY 2, 6:00 – 8:00PM
CONVERSATION WITH Benoit Maître, SATURDAY MAY 5, 10:30AM

Casey Kaplan is pleased to announce Scorpion and und et Felix, an exhibition of new works by Liam Gillick (b. 1964, Aylesbury, UK).

The exhibition takes its title from an early unpublished manuscript of a comedic novel by Karl Marx, Scorpion and Felix, in which three characters Merten, the tailor; Scorpion, his son; and Felix, his chief apprentice, engage in a satirical narrative that abstractly references irresolvable philosophical polemics. In one chapter titled, Philological Brooding, Marx etymologically references himself within the origins of Merten's name. At the end of the fragmented narrative (only pieces of the text survive today and much of it is thought to have been burned by Marx himself), Merten attempts to save his dog, Boniface, from a miserable death by constipation - a fate that Merten compares to the agony of Boniface's inability to speak and to write his own thoughts and reflections. Merten cries out in the last line,"O admirable victim of profundity! O pious constipation!"

Incomplete, and therefore only open to a partial reading or misunderstanding, the novel is an entryway into Liam Gillick's exhibition and practice; its final point also open to interpretation as a self-deprecating, comedic reflection on the archetypal struggles of all artists, writers, filmmakers, poets, and others. Gillick's practice is a divergent one (including sculpture, writing, architectural and graphic design, film, and music) that resists methodological boundaries and constraints, and shows a fondness for discursiveness, distractions, and evasive tactics.

Since the late 1980's, Gillick has focused on production rather than consumption, examining how the built world carries traces of social, political and economic systems. Anticipating a forthcoming survey of Gillick's work from the 1990's at the Hessel Museum of Art, Annadale-on-Hudson, Scorpion and und et Felix continues a series of floor mounted rail sculptures that he began in 1988. Rails are typically a functional form that provide support or alternatively limit access to a space. Here, they are placed on the floor and at obscure heights on the walls, questioning their function (or nonfunction) to create a linear framework for the viewer's movement through the first two rooms of the gallery. In the third room, Gillick presents new, monochromatic L-shape forms that also traverse the floor and the wall. Reminiscent of office cubicles, barriers, waiting areas and processes of renovation, they operate as semi-autonomous abstractions and reiterate Gillick's interest in the legacy of "applied modernism", the two way movement between utilitarian design and modernist art and architecture.

Three large-scale graphic works derived from medieval woodcuts confront the implied contemporary vernacular of Gillick's wall-based and freestanding structures. Previously presented in past exhibitions as posters and graphics, the vinyl wall-drawings show a character spinning yarn and two dogs. Together, the works in the show pursue logico-formal connections in an ahistorical narrative about thoughts and material.

Liam Gillick (Born 1964, Aylesbury, United Kingdom) lives and works in New York. A survey of the artist's projects and installations from the 1990s, entitled Liam Gillick: From 199A-199B, curated by Tom Eccles, will open on June 23rd at the Hessel Museum of Art, Annadale-on-Hudson, New York. Gillick represented Germany at the 53rd Venice Biennale, 2009. Past solo exhibitions include: Liam Gillick: One Long Walk – Two Short Piers, Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik, Deutschland (2009) and the travelling retrospective Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario, Kunsthalle, Zürich, organized by Beatrix Ruf (2008), Witte de With, Rotterdam, organized by Nicolaus Schafhausen (2008), Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, organized by Dominic Molon (2009). Liam Gillick publishes texts that function in parallel to his artwork including: Proxemics (Selected writing 1988-2006), JRP-Ringier (2007); Factories in the Snow by Lilian Haberer, JRP-Ringier (2007); Meaning Liam Gillick, MIT Press (2009); and Allbooks, Book Works, London (2009).

For further information about the artists or the exhibition, please contact Loring Randolph or Alice Conconi, loring@caseykaplangallery.com and alice@caseykaplangallery.com.
Upcoming exhibition: NO. 17, JUNE 28 – AUGUST 3, 2012
GALLERY HOURS: TUESDAY – SATURDAY, 10:00AM¬¬ – 6:00PM
HENNING BOHL, MATTHEW BRANNON, JEFF BURTON, NATHAN CARTER, MILES COOLIDGE, JASON DODGE, TRISHA DONNELLY, GEOFFREY FARMER, LIAM GILLICK, GIORGIO GRIFFA, ANNIKA VON HAUSSWOLFF, BRIAN JUNGEN, JONATHAN MONK, MARLO PASCUAL, DIEGO PERRONE, JULIA SCHMIDT, SIMON STARLING, DAVID THORPE, GABRIEL VORMSTEIN, GARTH WEISER, JOHANNES WOHNSEIFER

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"Liam Gillick," Modern Painters, June 2012, p.34-35.


# Liam Gillick

TEXT BY DANIEL KUNITZ PHOTOGRAPHS BY KRISTINE LARSEN

AN ENGLISHMAN, LIAM GILLICK works out of a light-bathed, bookfilled apartment high above Manhattan's East Side, where he lives with his wife, the artist Sarah Morris. Acknowledged as an originator of what has come to be known as relational art, Gillick is the first post-studio artist we've visited for Studio Check. When asked how he works, he first claims to spend "a lot of time trying to find space to not work because I spend a lot of time lying down, to be honest." Still, he does maintain an area just off the kitchen devoted to artistic endeavors, and every object we inquired about yielded insights into his busy life. Although Gillick's activities include sculpture, design, architectural interventions, writing, and music, most require spending quite a bit of time in front of the computers on his immaculate desk. "I'm from the first generation that used computers without having any computing skills," he says. "So I grew up with the screen as the space of work, which creates a kind of equivalence between projects. Whether you are doing something for a big building or a small nonprofit, somehow mentally, because of the screen space, you treat them somewhat equally."

On June 23, CCS Bard Hessel Museum, in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, will open "From 199A to 199B," an exhibition looking back on many of Gillick's projects. Some engaged with in titutional structures (art centers, gallery spaces, and the like); some were collaborations with such artists as Gabriel Kuri, Philippe Parreno, and Angela Bulloch; and others were autonomous works Gillick adds that "they were also all produced in close relation to a new generation of curators who emerged at the time: Maria Lind, Barbara Steiner, Nicolas Bourriaud, and Nicolaus Schafhausen."

MODEL
“This represents the hubris of public projects, which are often done speculatively. Architects pitch ideas and do competitions, things that are dangerous for artists. They make you feel like you’ve lost contact with the potential of art. But they can suck you in. This was an example. I worked really hard on the project, forgetting that, of course, there was absolutely no possibility of this thing actually ever happening. I keep it around because it reminds me not to be an idiot.”

GLITTER
“Glitter is important stuff for me. I keep little jars of different grades of it on my desk. This is partly because with this kind of material. it takes much longer to really get a sense of it. I know what an eight-foot-long piece of aluminum is like, but a .002-inch glitter flake? I keep things around which are the least familiar-to the point where they are really in my head and I could say to someone ‘I need .002 PVC red glitter’ and know what I’m talking about.”

RAL CODE BOOK
“This is the basis of everything. The RAL code is an industrial paint system, which is usually for architecture. And it is quite limited-terrible purples and mauves. Few good grays. But if I specify RAL 7040 gray in St. Louis or Zurich, it will be exactly the same. My work is very binary. On one level it has these narrative threads and meandering logic: on the other hand, it’s got this very material relation to abstraction, and part of that is the use of the RAL code.”

FAILED WORKS
“I don’t keep work around. I don’t want to be surrounded by my work, because I’ll start to like it or believe in it. That’s when you start making stupid claims about your work. I have a fabricator in Berlin whom I see maybe twice a year. We keep a big distance. One of the reasons is to avoid the performative aspect of making things and being watched, as if that in itself is interesting. It also stops me from compromising. Artists often compromise but don’t call it compromise. They call it happy accidents. But when I say I need it to be RAL code 3020, I’ve made that decision and it shouldn’t be changed.”

MIDI KEYBOARD
“Like a lot of people who are suburban, I grew up playing music. I had years of sitting with a sadistic Hungarian piano teacher. At art school I pretty much stopped playing music. And that was the big thing about that British moment. We all decided not to have bands and to be artists instead. Historically everyone comes to art school and starts a band. Now I do a lot of the music for Sarah Morris’s films. There is a connection between the computer and the piano keyboard. I’m multi-fingered when I type-my hand makes these shapes, different key commands, and so on, It’s partly thanks to the music teacher.”

RULER
“This is crucial. It’s a memory stick in the true sense. It’s a two-foot ruler, a nonhuman dimension. One foot is close to a man’s foot, but two feet is harder to get your head around. I often use it in relation to me, to double-check. Just by changing the seat height by, for example, half an inch, you change the whole demeanor of the person, or the relationship between people.”

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# BR

MAY 2012

THE BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

Art
In Conversation
# LIAM GILLICK with William Corwin

**William Corwin sat down with Liam Gillick to discuss a recipe for creating public art that is neither grandiose, kitschy, nor dismissive of the public; the responsibilities of the contemporary curator; and the joys of lying face down on the floor. Gillick currently has an exhibition at Casey Kaplan (Scorpion and und et Felix, May 2 – June 23) and will have a survey at Hessel Museum of Art at Bard College's Center for Curatorial Studies this summer (June 23 – December 21) titled From 199A to 199B.**


Portrait of the artist. Pencil on paper by Phong Bui.

William Corwin (Rail): Your survey Three perspectives and a short scenario took place at four geographically separate institutions. Could you talk about the thinking behind a multi-city, multi-part retrospective?

Liam Gillick: After a while artists start to view time in relation to their work slightly strangely—in a way that's out of sync with how it's received. So, to me it feels like that project already took place quite a while ago and was part of a very different mentality than my concerns right now. I tend to view exhibitions that way: as an extension of the state of mind you're in when you are immersed in a project rather than when or where it was.

But that particular exhibition did give a strong indication of the way I work. It was part of an attempt to do a retrospective that moved across a number of cities. The exhibition started in Rotterdam, moved to the Kunsthalle in Zurich, made a pause in Munich at the Kunstverein, and ended up in Chicago. In each location the idea was to create a new structure rather than bring together old work. Within the structural design of the exhibition I created a plan that would allow me to give half of each space back to the institution and make it their responsibility to deal with the implications of that—to take responsibility for their actions. I was trying both to implicate the institution and to show something about my approach to working.

In each case, the venue decided to treat their obligation differently. In Rotterdam, they thought it would be interesting to show new exhibitions of much younger artists inside my retrospective, to put me in conflict with the next generation, as it were. In Zurich they thought it would be interesting to reanimate and replay some very early work I'd done, which tended to be participatory. In Chicago, the idea was to have a discussion together about what to do. In the end we did something that was integrated within the fabric of the building. So you had this strange sense of a very strong framework combined with a clear decision by the institution. There were two final components: a big display case that moved to each venue that had a lot of ephemera in it, bits and pieces I'd worked on that couldn't be accounted for in any grand narrative—editions, little books, posters, and bits and pieces that were given a very prominent position—and a big projected Apple Keynote PowerPoint type thing that read like a big hi-def movie, in which you could see the development of my work, images of work fading

into each other over time. As you saw each image in turn, a story started to build on top of them; a text gradually emerged on the screen. I wrote the overlaid text in real time as I put together the Keynote; it was a story about alternative models of production and work. In the exhibition as a whole I was trying to account for all these different aspects of my work simultaneously: the institutional aspect, the things that cannot be explained away, and the way everything I have done has an intimate connection with writing.

Rail: How did you feel taking a passive role in the curation of your work? Did you come to loggerheads with any of the people you were working with?

Gillick: No, it's the opposite—I gave them back fifty percent of the exhibition. I gave it to them as a gift.

Rail: Were you happy to see what they did with it?

Gillick: Well, I wanted to make it a problem for them. I wanted them to take responsibility for having invited me to do something. Three out of the four curators I had worked with a few times over the years. But I was trying to avoid this binarism that develops over time, the question of whether the artist is "happy" or "sad" or doing something in an appropriate way. I wanted to turn the problem away from the artist-centric perspective and make it their issue. I think it worked extremely well; there were cases where it didn't concern me what they were up to. For example in Zurich throughout the duration of the exhibition they re-enacted various moments in my early work, often quite simple things, that often just involved gathering together certain things and leaving them lying around. Then they would clear up and do another work. And, you know, I think they did it better than if I'd done it myself. I think there is a lot of misunderstanding about intentionality in relation to art, a lot of automatic assumptions about the kind of autonomous artistic figure, but I'm from a generation that really started to work a lot with curators as part of a new sort of formulation or new set of relationships. I occasionally want to turn that back onto that easy collaborative flow. Yet I don't want everything to be a kind of easy thing that's somehow always just about sitting side by side and working out what to do; I wanted to sort of turn the problem a little bit. The curators I worked with all seemed very happy to take over their part of the exhibition, which told you a lot about the power dynamics we have developed over time.

Rail: I'd like to focus on the work itself, though I understand that the presentation and curation of the exhibition are vital aspects of the discourse of your work—a transition from the macro to the micro, so to speak. What are you presenting this May at Casey Kaplan, and then this summer at Bard?

Gillick: But the retrospective was also the work. The exhibition itself is also the work. And with each presentation I have to rethink the relationships and the way the exhibition can be a site for the continued development of ideas rather than just showing off the latest "works." There is no concrete division between curating something and working on something—even when I work alone. Artists have always curated themselves if no one else is around. The two upcoming shows are perfect examples of this. For Casey Kaplan, I am at the beginning of something. I recently closed an exhibition at Eva Presenhuber gallery in Zurich, which introduced a new project that came out of reading Karl Marx's incomplete comic novel, Skorpion und Felix, that was written when he was 19 and maybe thought he could be Laurence Sterne. I am continuing this work at Casey's in May. It will introduce some new forms and invert the normal way I have been deploying graphic work in relation to my own imploded abstraction. For Bard I was invited to develop an exhibition that might make sense in relation to the 20th anniversary of the Curatorial Studies program there. I am showing work from the 1990s—the exhibition is titled 199A – 199B—and it will bring together work that required a strong curatorial context to function. There are a lot of misunderstandings about participatory art of that period. And this exhibition will show that there was much more of an institutional consciousness at work rather than an attempt to entertain or hang out with the public, as it were. I am working with current students and alumni. It will be extremely interesting to see how this works. Curatorial self-consciousness has increased a great deal in the last 20 years—whether you like it or not. From the beginning I worked alongside some of the first curatorial skeptical of the given system and created the groundwork for the dynamic situation you find today. The works at

Bard are from the early point of this meeting between artists and the new curators. It was an interesting moment where people were working out where they stood. It produced profound disagreements but many times a fierce coalition of interests between curator and artist in the face of intransigent museums and institutions that didn't want to change and had no interest in examining their strange working methods.

Rail: What is your relation with public art; how do you feel about presenting art in the public sphere where it can be viewed very passively by the public, perhaps not necessarily in a very intense way?

Gillick: Most public art is the realization of a kind of accommodation between public and private funding—that's just one of those compromises that's developed in post-industrial countries. Meaning there's an obligation on the part of people who are building things to put some percentage of their budget into some art, but it's not really "public" art as such; it should really be called a different name, like pseudo/public/compromise-work/structure or something like that, but that might not catch on as a term.

Liam Gillick, Three perspectives and a short scenario. Kunsthalle Zurich, 2008. Installation view. Image courtesy of the artist and Kunsthalle Zurich.

What public projects offer me is an opportunity to collaborate with architects. My conversation with the architects is usually a questioning one. They're often pretty sure they've worked out what the relationship with the public is going to be; it's quite interesting and that's their job. In the most developed cases their vision of the future is either participatory or experiential, so it's like, "Here's a plaza, everyone's going to sit here and have lunch, and have a conversation," or, "Here's a plaza, and everyone's going to kind of be, not overwhelmed, but like whelmed by this sort of optical experiential sort of soft abstraction that somehow is derived from the history of the site." So I'm often asking questions and I'm trying to get involved in aspects of the building, the structure, that they haven't viewed as being "appropriate" or "necessary" for public art, or introduce stories or abstractions that are not "derived" from something within the site. I'm working on a couple of things right now where I'm looking at neglected aspects of the project by studying the plans they've worked on and produced. I'm trying to identify dead zones, dead ends, parts of corridors which if you really walked down them in real life you'd end up hitting your head on the underside of a staircase. Things that have been overlooked.

Rail: Can you say which project this is?

Gillick: I'd rather not. [Laughs.]

Rail: That's all right.

Gillick: In order to work in a productive way, with an architect, a city, or just a group of people, I tend to keep it all to myself until it's completed. I don't allow, for example, anyone to use computer renderings of a project until it is done, as I don't trust that aspect of contemporary planning. Of course, this baffles a lot of agencies, corporations, cities, universities, because they often assume that artists just want to be visible. They're often a bit surprised that I'm the one insisting, "No, let's not use any renderings, let's not put out any drawings into the world, let's not do anything like that unless it's a real relationship." What we call public art is not

graduates in Europe. They were outside of the theoretical framework that I'm normally involved in; it's just one aspect of it—the oral exam version, as it were, of theoretical speculation. And as with the oral exam, sometimes you turn out to be much smarter than they thought, or much dumber. That's why I quite like doing these projects. I'm very interested in the idea of what I call the distracted viewer. I'm a distracted viewer myself; I'm not interested so much in these supposedly deep levels of engagement that people fantasize about. I want things to exist as a backdrop, as a distraction that may sometimes become effective because of the moment or the context, not because they have an aura or address something false and pseudo-profound. What you don't often see is the adjustment and the reorganization of a building that has been a result of my input during the architectural process. For something I'm working on right now in Scandinavia, they are changing the way the building meets the ground in order to make the work I want to do possible, and I would say that is actually a component of the artwork. I know damn well it's going to be pretty hard to get the city to explain that the way this building meets the ground is a component of the artwork. It's going to be too abstract to describe. But that's part of my involvement in a way. It will alter the public experience of the building.

I am interested in cultures that commit to the problem of art in public spaces, and I do not view it in the traditional way. I treat it with skepticism, but I'm not as harsh as I might be about other things. I've spent quite a lot of time in Mexico. There's quite a lot of public art in Mexico City in particular and there is a tradition of abstraction in public places. But you go somewhere like New Hampshire, you might get to a rotary traffic system and there will be like a kitschy thing in the middle. But I'm not going to treat it with the same level of critical awareness that I might have for an exhibition at 303 Gallery or the Whitney Biennial. I'm curious about it; I'm curious why a decision was made, why these places are viewed as appropriate. I think this is a realm that isn't completely sorted out yet. It's still a relatively recent phenomenon, and the thing that's really shocking is the way that the work is not being addressed in a hardcore way by a new generation of curators, despite the amount of resources that are available, because of legal and bureaucratic constraints. People sit around, and quite understandably complain about a lack of resources. But if you look around at the amounts of money sloshing around for these kinds of private/public projects, you'll see that the possibility of allocating that money differently really still has to be addressed. Someone still has to get a grip on that. The problem with a lot of these projects is that everyone apart from the artist, the architect, and maybe one or two curatorial minds, generally is just involved to get paid; it's like a sideline, a little extra thing. Therefore people aren't applying pressure politically, psychologically, and intellectually to redirect some of those funds so they don't always have to manifest as a sort of abstraction in a new building. And of course I am not even against abstraction in a new building.

Rail: One of the things that's interesting about your background is you had an activist impulse of starting up a printing house—creating projects that were then disseminated by the artists themselves. I'd like to talk about your beginnings in London, in the period of the so-called YBAs, when artists and curators often didn't get paid, they just produced.

Gillick: It's difficult to talk about these things in clear terms. Certainly it's very, very difficult to make any kind of statement about an ethics of production in relation to young artists, and I've worked with a lot of them since I've been in New York. You should never muddle up ethical positions with lack of money.

Liam Gillick, "Discussion Bench Platforms," "A 'Volvo' Bar + Everything Good Goes," Casey Kaplan, 2010. Installation view. Image courtesy of Casey Kaplan, NY. Photo: Cary Whittier.

Artists need to get paid for their labor like anyone else. That's not the same as talking about the art market with these fabulous and incredible terms people often do. My original studies were going to be in philosophy and law; I had a very strong desire to fix the errors of the past, if you could call it that, by getting involved in the Labor Movement as someone who could be an educated advocate for a very particular set of interests. But I changed my mind after working for a "good" lawyer one summer and thought I should go to art school instead because I felt I could always go back later from art to labor but I would never manage to do it the other way around. So I ended up at Goldsmiths but not on the same terms as some of the others. I had given up something to be there. Goldsmiths at that time had quite a lot in common with places like CalArts, where you felt there were teachers there that were real; they were actual artists, but they didn't have unified ideas or ideologies; basically you got to witness arguments between people in their early 40s at a peak of work and rhetoric.

Rail: Who are you talking about?

Gillick: They're not all going to be known so well here, but Jon Thompson was extremely important, Richard Wentworth, who was in the last Venice Biennale, and Michael Craig-Martin, who's usually given most of the credit, but of course was part of a discussion. There were a number of other people who would come in and out, Sarat Maharaj was there later on, but at the time there was also Yehuda Safran, who's now involved with Columbia Architecture School—he was at Goldsmiths around the time I was there. So basically, rather like an American high-end advanced sort of art school, I had the sense it was not about trying to instill a particular attitude or something, but it was really about asking why. Why did you do that?

Rail: Was that typical of British art schools?

Gillick: No, not at all, completely the opposite. There had been earlier interesting moments, like St. Martins, where Anthony Caro taught, and very good people had come through there, like Barry Flanagan, Richard Long, and Gilbert and George, for example. But their positions came from a reaction against the late-modern orthodoxy of Caro's belief systems and his way of teaching. If we were French we would say that Goldsmiths was a post-'68 kind of school. The teachers were people who had been in their 20s in the late '60s and were more of the generation of Richard Long and Gilbert and George. There wasn't one dogmatic position that was forced upon students. It was an open framework that was based on asking questions instead of reinforcing an orthodoxy. It was also a time of intense class reorganization; some classes were seeing the opportunity to enter higher education for the first time.

Liam Gillick, "Discussion Island Discussion Bells," 1997/2011. 10 stainless steel tubes, chains Tubes: 6'/ 180cm long each x various diameters: 1" (x3), 1.5" (x3) and 2" (x4). Image courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, NY. Photo:

The Goldsmiths environment was affected by three things, the first of which being a very democratized belief system which held that it was possible for anyone to be an artist. The idea was never to seek out talent or quality, although there was a sense that something should be interesting rather than uninteresting. There was a lot of discussion around the question of being interesting in the world versus being interesting in the context of art, and whether there was a difference. So there was a lot of applied philosophy, thinking about the nature of objects and how they get value. The other two things that were really crucial were the class clash and a big North/South divide. In the U.S. there are enormous differences in class, and geography, too, of course. But because Britain's much smaller and more densely populated it's much easier to be mobile. You can go to college wherever you want in the country. So you tend to get a collision between

people from the North and South suddenly taking place at the university level.

Rail: Where are you from?

Gillick: I'm from suburban London, so I'm therefore a Southerner. The North/South clash certainly marked that time and hasn't been thought through or talked about in any meaningful way. You could see people's ideas and thoughts start to develop in a very particular direction because of this combination of stresses. It produced a quite interesting set of possibilities and unique egos.

Rail: Can you characterize the perceived difference between the Northerners and Southerners?

Gillick: No, not categorically, but, if you look at the three most well-known artists in Britain whose names have travelled to the U.S., it's Henry Moore, David Hockney, and Damien Hirst, and they're all from within 10 square miles of each other, in Yorkshire, in the north of England. It's difficult to characterize, or make a set of stereotypes about these things, but one thing you can say is maybe it's connected to a different way of speaking or approaching the world. Therefore, literally a different voice. A voice that does not always necessarily echo the voice of authority but still speaks with authority.

There are a lot of self-mythologizing things, like the idea that they might speak clearly or plainly. If you look at some of those artists it seems to allow them to say quite pretentious things without it sounding that way. As if they are telling the truth about an untruth.

Rail: Sort of like talking about art sounds a little more down to earth when they say it?

Gillick: Well, you could also argue that it has an anti-intellectual quality but I am not completely sure. In the States there's this concept that if you go to both the very south and the very north you'll find plain-speaking people who will just tell it like it is and not get muddled up in bullshit—very different from what you'd get in New York.

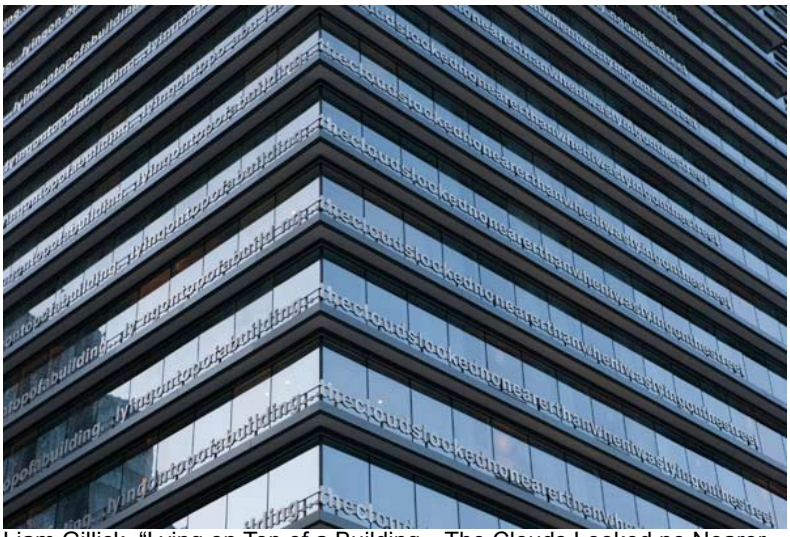
But you've got to remember that people of my generation were always very interested in music from the north of England—The Fall, Cabaret Voltaire, Joy Division; it's all a Lancashire/Yorkshire axis. So it's not like this was an alien group of people; it's just that, for most people, college was the first context in which these groups came together, and therefore their first exposure to different ways of speaking and addressing the world. Maybe it's made it easier when I've spent time in the U.S., because I'm very conscious of it here, too: I can hear accents, I can see when these similar processes happen in the U.S. Whereas we'd all like to keep the myth that we don't notice these differences somehow. I'm rather interested in the difference between an artist from Georgia and an artist from Washington State and how there are enormous differences in the way they address the world rather than what they do. I think there's slightly too much obsession in the U.S. with the coasts: people fixate on the differences between L.A. art and New York art. I'm fascinated by the axis up the middle as well, or going from Northwest to Southeast; these are distinctions we don't think about as much.

Rail: What else is coming up for you, aside from the public projects you mentioned earlier?

Gillick: Like a lot of people, I tend to work on a number of parallel projects simultaneously. I use the usual defense that most people use when someone asks them what they're doing, which is just tell people where I'm going or where I've just been, rather than try to really address the question.

Rail: What are you doing with your time now, outside of art?

Gillick: I'm about to publish a book in French, which is a translation of a small book I wrote about work, labor, and life in 2010, titled Why Work? It addressed the accusation that artists no longer provide an alternative way to live and addressed issues around precarious labor and assumptions about an artist's methodology. The book is produced in France using letterpress by the studio of Vincent Auger. Goatskin parchment covers. A lot of craft. But all the images are actually produced in Illustrator. I produced a new cut of Helvetica also on the computer. So in a way the book is an embodiment of the ideas within it.



Liam Gillick, "Lying on Top of a Building…The Clouds Looked no Nearer than when I Was Lying on the Street…," 2010. Stainless steel Each run of text 60 cm x 18.28m x 20 cm. Installation view. Fairmont, Pacific Rim, Vancouver. Image courtesy of the artist.

I'm also at the beginning of several big public artworks; there's one in Sweden, one in Texas, and one in Switzerland. If I can keep them separate I can avoid a collision where they'll all end up being done at the same time. Often, I'm not doing anything, and that is the situation to be in. I like to work, I'm interested more in production than consumption: I need to develop, I need to think. But the thing that's hardest to gain is a feeling of doing nothing—finding the empty space in between things. What I actually intend to do this week, as much as possible, is one of my favorite things: just to lie face down on the floor in my apartment and apparently do nothing. I don't actually know what happens in that process. It's sort of like thinking, a kind of weaker form of thinking, clearing your mind.

Liam Gillick, "Restricted Underlined," 2011. Powder coated aluminum. 5.9 × 39.4 × 5.9" / 15 × 100 × 15cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, NY. Photo credit: Cary Whittier.

People often ask, "Oh, can I come film you working in your studio?" or "Can I come photograph you in your studio?" and I don't really have one. I just tend to work at home; in a way, I never got out of the suburban bedroom. I'm either manically working on a drawing or on the computer; it looks just like anyone else in the cultural sphere. Or I am just lying face down on the floor surrounded by bits and pieces.

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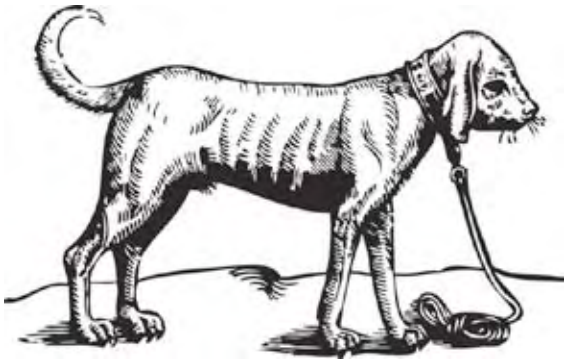
# GALERIE EVA PRESENHUBER

LIAM GILLICK | SCORPION OR FELIX | March 2 2012 - April 14 2012



Galerie Eva Presenhuber is pleased to present a new group of works by British artist Liam Gillick in an exhibition entitled “Scorpion or Felix.”

Since the late 1980s, Gillick has been working with texts and objects that seek to advance a constructive deciphering of the built environment, establishing relationships based sometimes on attraction, sometimes on repulsion. His oeuvre can be situated on the threshold between deliberate planning of architectural space and chance-based processes of adaptation and speculative change.

Accordingly, Gillick’s new works can be approached and viewed in various ways, raising questions, providing answers, and documenting simple elegance:

*Object*
A room is divided into two sections by a long wall. In the wall are eight openings placed at regular intervals, each of which can be opened and shut by means of a sliding door. Using these many-coloured sliding door elements, the space can be constantly varied, adapting to the different behaviours of its visitors and viewers. The simple, elegant architectural form of the sliding door becomes the catalyst and central element of an experience of hypothetical space.

*Words*
The text from which the exhibition takes its title, “Scorpion und Felix”, is by Karl Marx, the manuscript for a humorous novel of which only fragments have survived. Three central figures - Scorpion, Felix and Merten – are presented. The character of Merten in particular is developed in detail. Rather than straightforward description, Marx explores the possible meanings of his name. In a range of ways, from academic-cum-etymological to ironic, he examines the links between character traits and historico-philosophical speculations.

*Play*
Taken together, these elements create a play of possibilities and probabilities, of dislocation and reassessment, of trust and scepticism. It is these many and varied possibilities of meaning that Gillick is interested in, postulating assumptions and then rejecting them in favour of others, testing their value in multiple respects. Finally, it should be noted, in the spirit of Gillick’s work as a whole, that this description of the connection between the work produced by the artist and Marx’s text is only one of many possible versions and that it may be a total misunderstanding.

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Ulrichs, David, "Lawrence Weiner and Liam Gillick," *Modern Painters,* May 2011, p. 75


ANTWERP

## Lawrence Weiner and Liam Gillick

*Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen // February 3—May 22*

AFTER 20 YEARS OF artistic dialogue, word-art pioneer Lawrence Weiner and contemporary Conceptualist Liam Gillick are having their first exhibition together. As a starting point for "A Syntax of Dependency," curator Dieter Roelstraete has unearthed a quote from a 2006 conversation between the two New York-based artists in which they bemoan the fact that although they'd embarked on many projects together, none had come to fruition. Despite a 22-year age gap, Weiner, 69, and Gillick, 47, have great mutual respect and admiration, which make this collaborative—rather than merely double-billed—exhibition possible. The show consists of a single site-specific installation composed of 36 strips of linoleum of varying widths and five colors: black, yellow, red, white, gray. These cover the museum's roughly 17,000-square-foot ground floor in different patterns, some of them reminiscent of the Belgian flag—pure happenstance, according to the artists.

On top of this surface the pair have spelled out phrases in French, Dutch, and English. "Outside of any given context," for instance, is printed inside a speech bubble whose oval shape neatly mirrors that of the lighting fixture on the ceiling directly above it. This fragment could be read as a comment on the show itself, which shies away from explanation in terms of the artists' biographies or overall careers, operating on an aesthetic, rather than semantic plane. There is no hierarchy: Gillick's and Weiner's contributions appear inseparable, all brought to the same ground level.

When the exhibition is over, the work will not be sold but destroyed, a refreshingly grand gesture in the midst of economic crisis. **—David Ulrichs**

FROM TOP LEFT:
Liam Gillick and Lawrence Weiner
Installation view of "A Syntax of Dependency" at Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen.

Lawrence Weiner and Liam Gillick.

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THE ART NEWSPAPER Buck, Louisa, "There's a perversity in my method," *The Art Newspaper*, No. 229, November, p.54

# "There's a perversity in my method"

*With a biennial, two shows and a knitwear range on the go, Liam Gillick talks about the lasting effect of his Goldsmiths years*

**By Louisa Buck**

Of the much-vaunted generation that studied at Goldsmith in South London in the late 1980, Liam Gillick is undoubtedly one of the most cerebral. A writer as much a maker of objects, his practice is underpinned by a lot of theory. His long standing fascination with the way that visual environments affect human behaviour has resulted in him producing a plethora of quasi-functional and architecural structure using a minimal formal language. He has also made direct and sometime permanent intervention into buildings-most notably at the Home Office in London in 2005, which include a coloured glass canopy. He also produces texts, books, and films. In 2009, Gillick was chosen to occupy the German pavilion at theVenice Biennale and he has recently donated the resulting work, *How are you going to behave? A kitchen cat speaks*, involving pine wood module based on his kitchen and a stuffed talking cat, to the collection of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. He is currently participating in the Gothenburg Biennial (until 13 November), has a show at Air de Paris and one at Micheline Szwajcer in Antwerp (both until 3 December), and next month is launching a range of knitwear and accesories with Pringle of Scotland in a pop-up gallery in the Miami Design District.

***The Art Newspaper*: It can be tricky to get a handle on the multiple Gillick manifestations from your sound piece at the Göteborg Biennial based on Volvo's wortking practices to the painted aluminium version of Guy Debord's chess-variant, *Game of War*, recently installed at the Irish Museum of Modem Art in Dublin. Then there's the two exhibitions on new films and abstract structures that opened in Paris and Antwerp last month. Can you give us some entry points?**

**Liam Gillick:** There's a deep binarism in the work that used to concern people, but the division has now become very clear. There's this constant unresolvable battle between the idea of a commitment to a rigorous abstraction which is also mixed with this other component that's about the idea of production, how things gel produced and how things acquire meaning. This is incredibly important and generates all the longer narratives and examination of structure.

**The term "post-utopian" has been bandied round in connection with your work. Is that helpful?**

It's not straightforward as just taking an earlier form and reconstructing it, it is more based on the idea of discounting certain possibilities or certainties, of slightly altering or twisting the cultural DNA to end up with these forms. I've always had this interest in applied art and applied design, but not the grand narratives, not Mies Van der Rohe but more like the Greater London Council architect who did the dental centre. I'm not trying to depict those things or even borrow directly from them, but it's that kind of applied modernism, which is very rooted and grounded, mixed with this sort of unraveling of what you call the "post-utopian." I'm still interested in the problem of art-for me, the idea of what kind of art could exist and be useful is really fascinating, which is why I do it.

**You've just designed a new collection of knitwear and accessories for Pringle of Scotland. How does that fit in?**

It was the idea of Alistair Carr [the design director at Pringle] that we should actually make objects rather than clothes. So we started designing handbags. The whole thing ballooned and now we are making a whole range of things from littlewallets to large bags. I am testing a lot of my theories about work and production and distribution: the intensity of work and production suits my way of thinking

and matches my desire to see objects enter circulation with as little delay as possible. It is the opposite of my work with architects, which is productive for exactly the opposite reasons.

**In 2009, you were selected to represent Germany at the Venice Biennale. How did you find the experience?**
I really tried to continue my normal work - I didn't view it as a showcase. I wanted to do something new; I wanted to push something that's quite hard. You suffer a little bit when you do that, even if you know in the back of your mind it's the right thing to do. I left the pavilion on the day of the opening with the clearheadedness that you get sometimes after a breakup or after something's gone wrong, or after you've just witnessed an accident: It's not elation of satisfaction, it's the feeling that you know that this is the only thing you could do, but it's not going to achieve a certain satisfaction. It's my constant dilemma that I'm interested in setting up critical discursive structures and when you do that you are going to get a critical and discursive response, yet that's also quite punishing in a way. That's the perversity of my method.

**You graduated from Goldsmiths in 1987 and are part of that very high-profile generation that went on to put British art on the map in the early 1990s. How important was your time at Goldsmiths in shaping you as an artist?**
Oh, Everything! Because at that point you were coming into contact with people in their early- and mid-40s who disagreed with each other. The usual situation is that there's a solid core of jobbing tutors and then there are people who float in and out, but Goldsmiths was an incredibly divided school that was run by people with differing ideas who would argue them out in front of you. Michael Craig-Martin, Richard Wentworth, Jon Thompson were the three key ones. I just thought that this was normal, and it suited my way of thinking perfectly.

**This runs counter to the now legendary status of 1980s Goldsmiths as some kind of training ground for cool, sassy artistic wunderkinds...**
The probelm with Goldsmiths is that over time the stories have got too simple and too clear, whereas the whole point of Goldsmiths was that it was incredibly unclear and incredibly questioning how things are valued. People assume there was a coherence to it, but there was absolutely no coherence- and that's obviously why it was so successful. It was one of the few educational environments that mirrored the peculiarities of the idea of contemporary art. which of course always more and more subjective and more and more dispersed and capable of absorbing almost anything. It's a perpetual paradox: the more you try and find the edge of it and step outside of it, the edge just movees further away, or you are absorbed. This is why Goldsmiths was an incredible contemporary art place, whereas a lot of other places were still dealing with the legacy of modernism and not dealing with their time.

**Although you've been shortlisted for the Turner Prize [in 2002] and have had many shows in the UK, your affiliations both personal and professional seem resolutely international: you live in New York, teach in American universities and show more widely throughout Europe.**
I was interested in conceptual art as a student which- even though in the 1980s it was only ten years ago- was viewed as the past and felt like another country. What was fascinating for me was not so much the work itself or trying to reproduce the work, but the realisation that these people were still around and still working.

**You've had a long association with Lawrence Weiner.**
When I met Lawrence Weiner in 1987, or 1988, it was extraordinary because he treated me like another artist and not like an indulged student (of course I realised later that he does this for everyone and it was not that I was particularly special). This was the start of a hardcore, ongoing discussion that was not based on emulation, but that maybe we had similar working methods. It fitted my combination of delusion and distraction that I needed to find a context where people were less sceptical, or at least more curious, about the fact that my practice didn't seem to be resolved. Then, by the early 1990s, I was working with a lot of international "homeless" artists such as Phillipe Parreno, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster and Jorge Pardo- we were this stateless, mongrel band and the things I got out of Goldsmiths I found a way to realise as an adult. Not what to do, but how to look for a way to work. My internationalism is for a reason, but it does not exclude the place where I am from. My work was brittle and I needed to find places with a context as complex and fragmented as my own. To do this I had to become permanently displaced. If you look at the contemporary situation, it has turned out that I wasn't the only one.


From left to right: *Status following closure*, 2008; *How are you going to beahave? A kitchen cat speaks*, Venice Biennale, 2009 *Construcción de uno (a prequel)*, 2006, at the Tate Triennial

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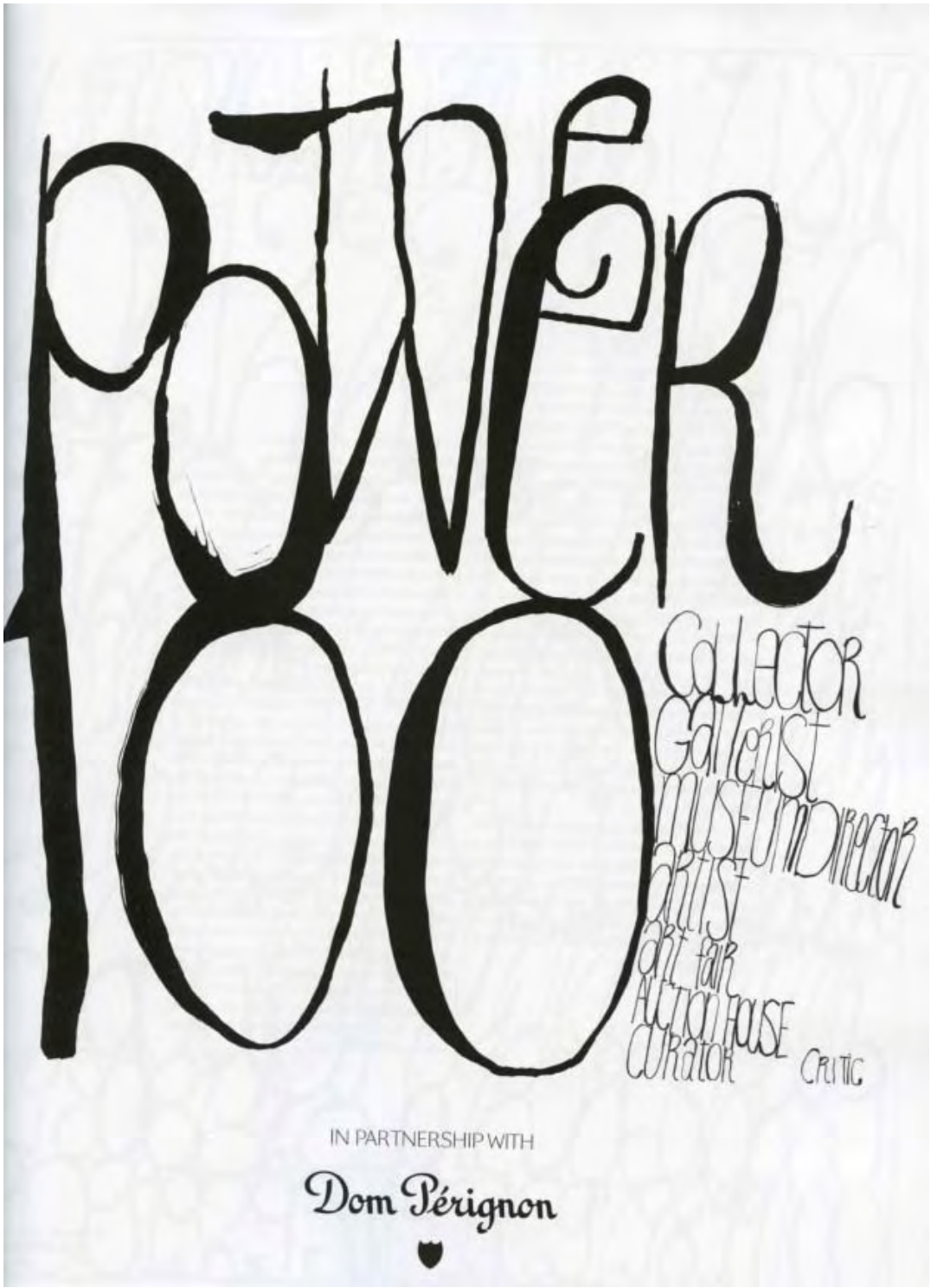


Art Review. November 2011. *"The Power 100"* p. 127

# 32 LIAM GILLICK

**Category: Artist**
**Nationality: British**
**Last Year: Reentry (34 in 2009)**

Complex and critical, Gillick's parallel productions of text and artworks have placed him increasingly at the centre of debates about what it is to be an artist today, trapped, he recently wrote within 'a regime that is centred on a rampant capitalization of the mind'. A new interactive installation, Game of War Structure - based on French theorist Guy Debord's chess variant-opened at IMMA, Dublin, in September. Collaborations, a key feature of Gillick's practice, have continued, most recently with e-flux (Gillick's text 'The Good of Work' appears in the collective's catchily titled and recently published book Are You Working  Too Much? Post-Fordism, Precarity, and the Labor of Art), with old friend Lawrence Weiner for an exhibition at Antwerp's MuHKAand with Pringle of Scotland for their London catwalk show (which featured Gillick-designed monogrammed benches) and a collection of bags, accessories and knitwear to be launched at this year's Art Basel Miami Beach. In addition to all that, Gillick teaches at Columbia University in New York City and the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College upstate.

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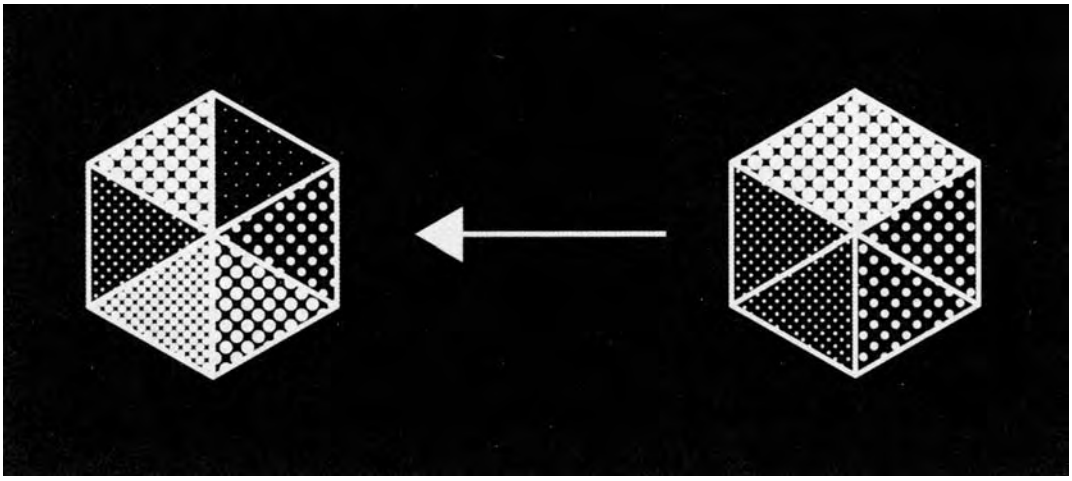
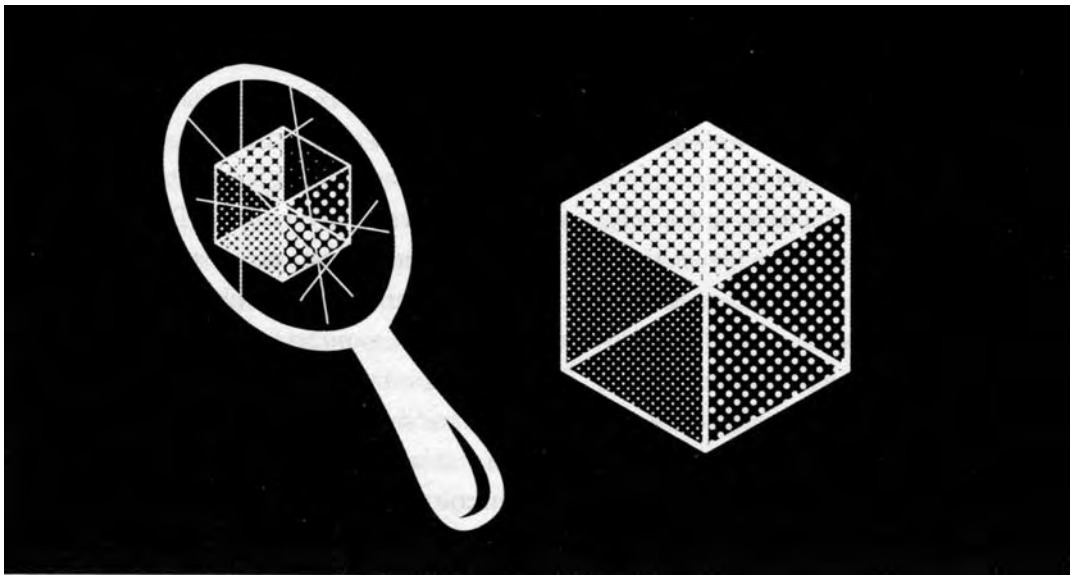
Lind, Maria, ed. "Abstract," *Micro-Historias y Macro-mundos Vol. 3,* Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura Reforma y Campo Marte, 2011, p. 157-166

LIAM GILLICK

# LO ABSTRACTO
ABSTRACT

By making the abstract concrete, art no longer retains any abstract quality, it merely announces a constant striving for a state of abstraction and in turn produces more abstraction to pursue. It is this failure of the abstract that lures and hypnotises—forcing itself onto artists and demanding repeated attention. The abstract draws artists towards itself as a semi-autonomous zone just out of reach. It produces the illusion of a series of havens and places that might reduce the contingent everyday to a sequence of distant inconveniences. It is the concretization of the abstract into a series of failed forms that lures the artist into repeated attempts to "create" the abstract—fully aware that this very act produces things that are the representation of impossibilities. In the current context this means that the abstract is a realm of denial and deferment—a continual reminder to various publics that varied acts of art have taken place and the authors were probably artists.



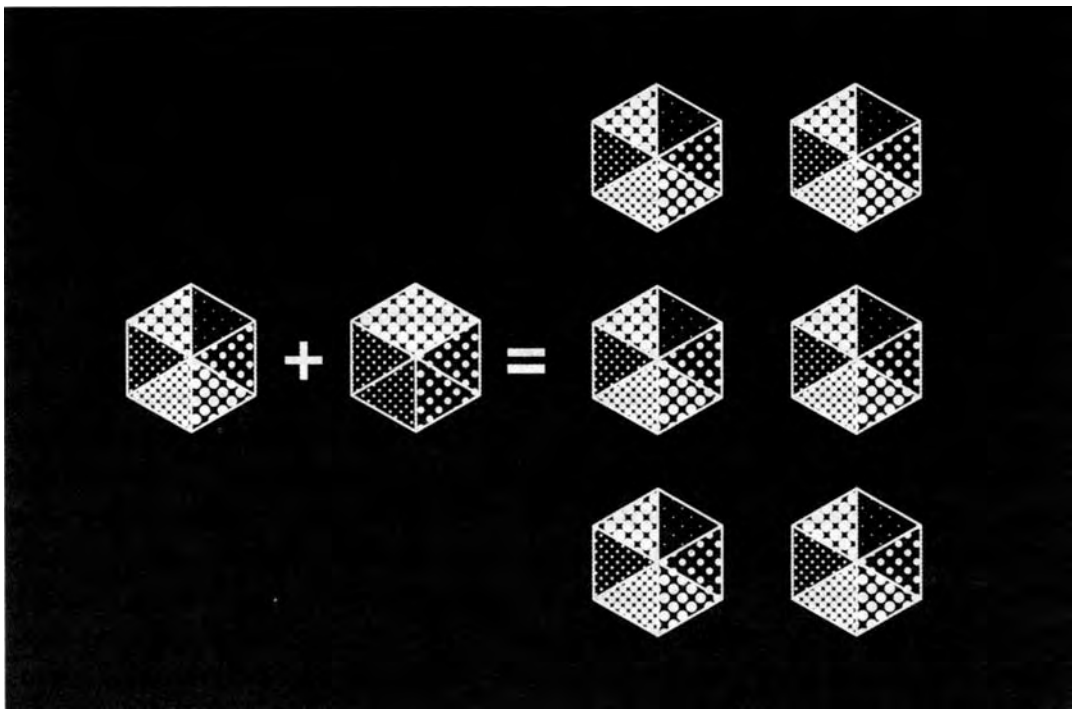


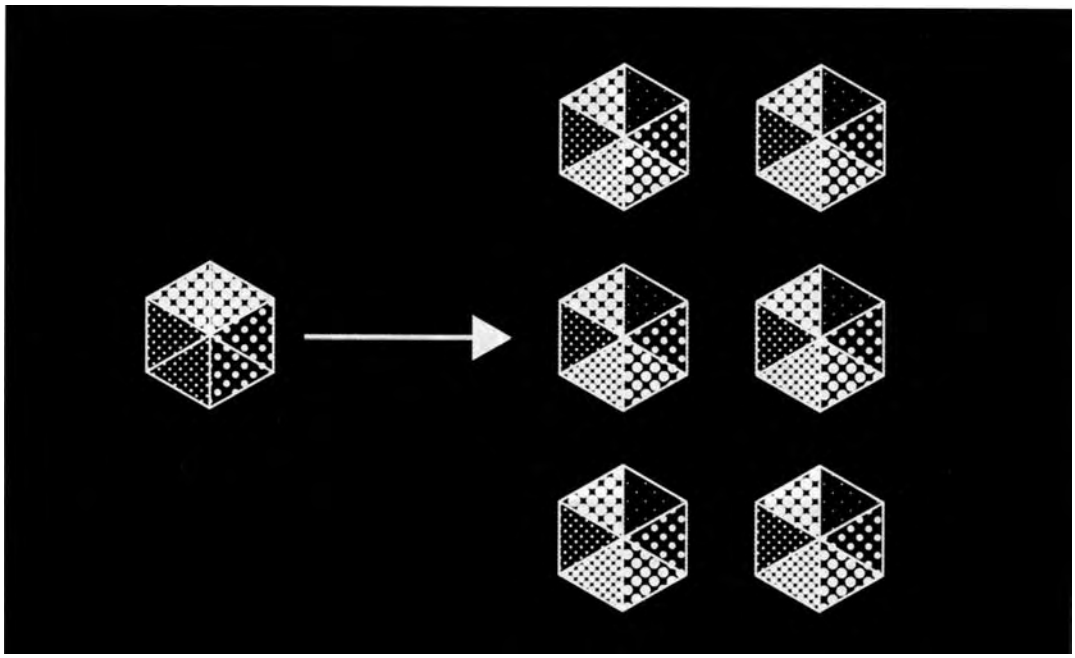
The creation of an art of the abstract is a tautology. It cannot be verified independently. We have to accept that the concretization of the abstract is a record of itself. It points towards something that cannot be turned into an object. But there—in front of us—is this non-existence. Even further this non-existence in concrete form can take up a lot of space, supposedly pure colour and variegated form. The grander the failed representation of the abstract becomes the more striking the presence of failure—at the heart of which is a very human attempt to capture an unobtainable state of things and relationships to the unknowable. The abstract in art is a process of destruction—taking that which cannot be represented and forcing it into an incomplete set of objects and images which exist as a parallel lexicon that form a shattered mirror to that which cannot be represented. There is nothing abstract about art that is the result of this destructive desire to create an abstraction. It is a process of bringing down to earth that which continues to remain elusive. It is this search that connects the desire to create abstraction with utopias and is at the heart of its neo-romantic ideology. It is the basis of the symbolic politics of abstraction and its parallel course as marker of hope and ultimate failure. It is the process of attempting to reproduce the abstract that causes the truly abstract to retain its place just out of reach.

The abstract therefore—in the current aesthetic regime—always finds form as a relational backdrop to other activities, terrains and interactions. By destroying the abstract via making it concrete, the ambient and the temporary are heightened and become an enduring associative abstraction that replaces the lack in the artwork. The abstraction that is produced by abstract art is not a reflection of the abstraction at the start of the process. The making of a concrete structure produces further abstraction—the art object in this case is merely a marker or waypoint towards new abstraction. Tackling the job of producing something concrete through a process of abstraction neither reproduces abstraction nor does it provide us with anything truly autonomous. It produces a lack and points towards further potentially endless processes of abstraction. It is this potential endlessness—that remains productive while reproducing itself—that is the key to the lure of abstract art. The procedure of producing abstract art does not fill the world with lots of abstraction—despite appearances to the contrary—

instead it populates the space of art with an excess of pointers that in turn direct attention towards previously unaccounted for abstractions. This is at the heart of the lure of the abstract—this explains why artists keep returning to the elusive zone. Abstraction is not the contrary of representation—a recognition of which is the key to understanding the complete failure of Gerhard Richter's work for example—rather abstraction in art is the contrary of the abstract in the same way that representation is the contrary of the real.

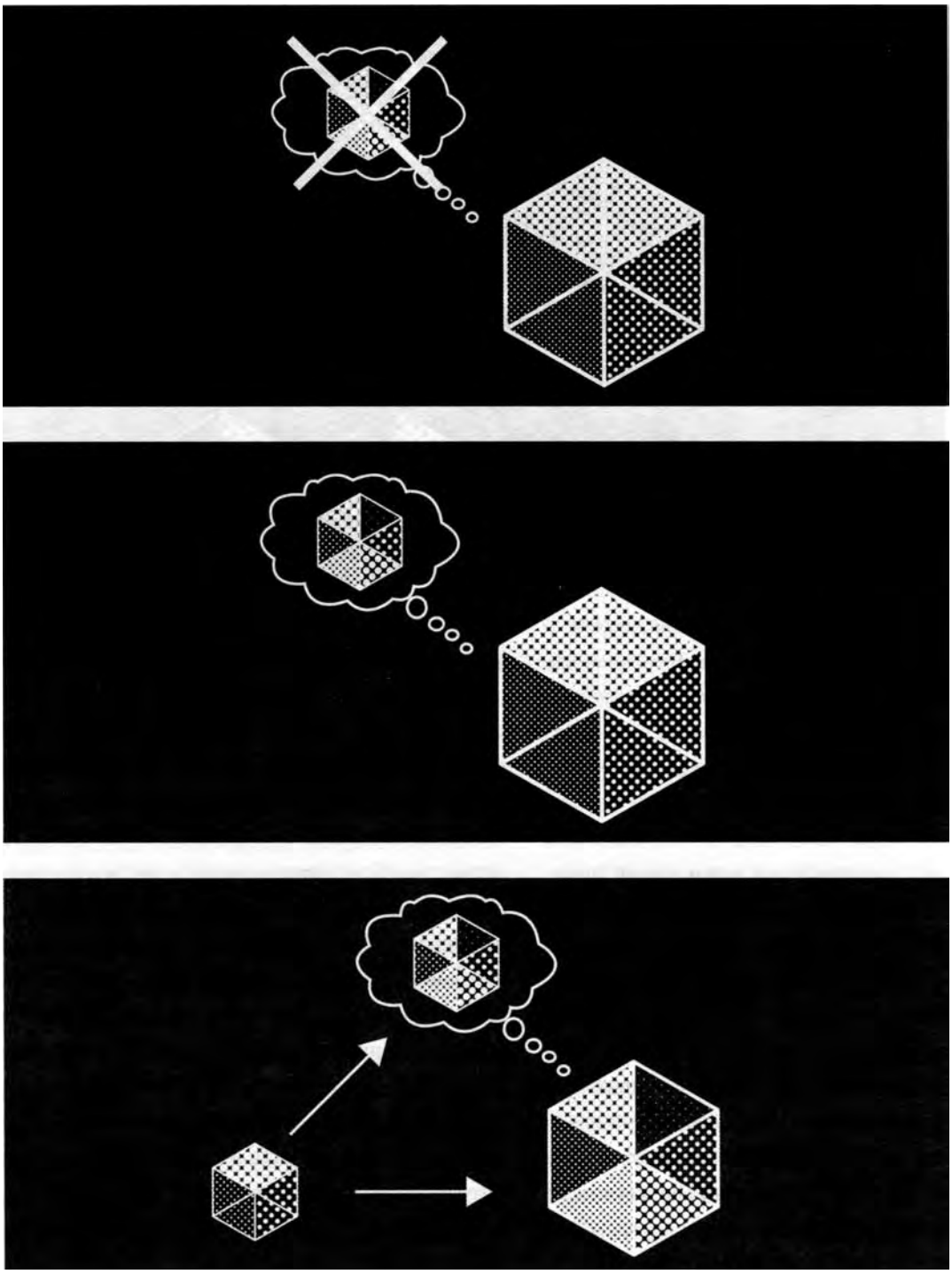
Concrete structure in this case also lacks. It does not hold a functional role within the culture beyond its failure to be an abstraction. The concrete structure becomes a marker that signifies art and points to all other art as structures that contain excessive subjectivities. Abstraction in this case has little to do with minimalism or formalism. Yet it can easily become either of these things with just a slight tweak in any direction. The intention to create a minimal or reductive gesture, object or environment requires a suppression of abstraction towards the deployment of materials that may or may not be in balance or sync with their objectness. This is not the same as the creation of an abstract artwork. The desire to develop a minimalist practice is a denial of the abstract and an attempt to concretize the concrete. Through this process there is the demonstration of a desire to ignore and go past the failure of abstraction. It is through minimalistic gestures that artists attempted to cut out abstraction's failure of transformation and invited us instead to focus on what we imagine is a material fact or set of facts about a material within a given context. The emergence of an identifiable minimalist practice more than forty years ago, while attempting to avoid the problem of abstraction, failed to truly trouble the problem of abstraction. Minimalism highlighted evasion. The minimal created a series of half-facts all of which continued to allude to the abstract of art. This explains the spiritualisation of the minimal in the contemporary context, its interchangability and absorption into the aesthetic of the wellness centre and the kitchen and the association of truth to materials with truthy relationships to cosmic,





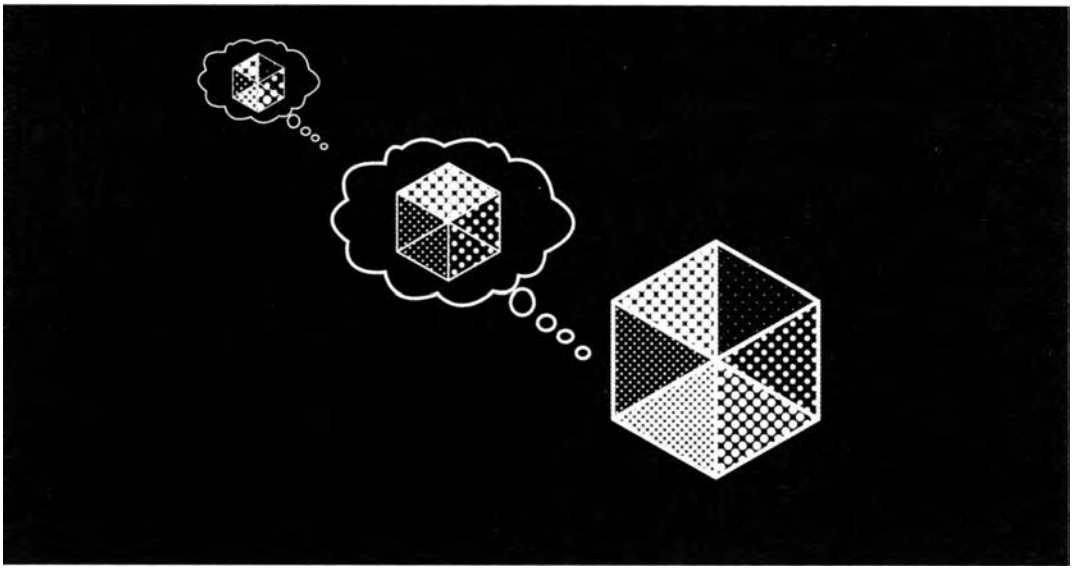
pick and mix spirituality.

The failure at the heart of the abstract is its enduring critical potential. The demonstration of the concrete brings down metaphors, allusions and other tools that can be deployed for multiple ends to a set of knowable facts. Any attempt to represent through art will always deploy a degree of artifice—this is not a moral judgment, just a state of things. The failed abstract reproduces itself. It does not point to anything other than its own concrete form. Its concrete presence replaces the attempt to pin down the abstract and becomes a replacement object that only represents the potential of the abstract. This process of looking at replacement objects is one of the most provocative aspects of some art in the twentieth century. The presence of replacement objects as key markers within the trajectory of twentieth century modernism



is what provokes confused and sublime responses. It is not the forms themselves that have this essential quality. The search for ever more "true" abstraction merely created and continues to create more replacement objects that scatter the globe as reminders of the failure of the concrete in relation to the abstract. This replacement function explains why the concrete in relation to the abstract is so vulnerable to being deployed for ends other than the progressive and neo-transcendental. The earlier concretization of the abstraction of corporate identity via the creation of logos and smooth minimal spaces can be viewed in parallel to the failure of the abstract in the late modern period—particularly in the US.

So the endurance of abstraction is rooted in this desire to keep showing the impossibility and elusiveness of the abstract. At the same time it reveals the processes of manipulation that take place within unaccountable realms of capital—the continual attempt to concretize abstract relationships and therefore render them into a parallel form that can be more easily exchanged. Where in the past the concrete was created from the abstract of the corporate now these processes of concretisation have moved into every realm of the "personal." The abstract art produced alongside such a period is a necessity. Forming a sequence of test sites to verify and enable us to remain vigilant about the processes of concretisation that take place around us in the service of capital. The transformation of relationships into objects via a mature sensitivity to a process of concretisation is tested and tracked when the most vivid current artists deploy what appears to be abstract but is in fact a conscious deployment of evasive markers.



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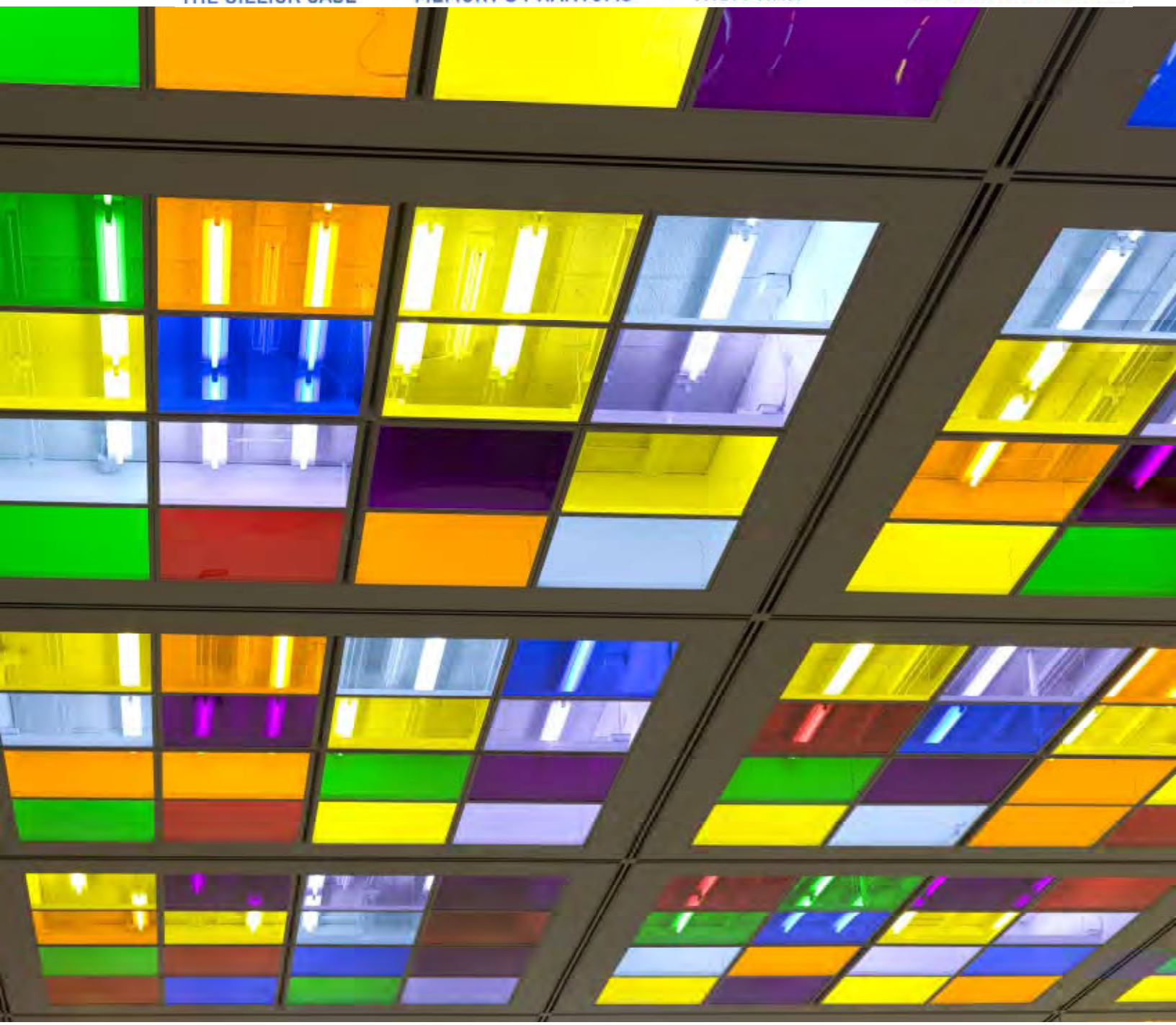
ART PAPERS





# You Couldn't Describe the Gaps as Windows. *Liam Gillick* visits Chicago.

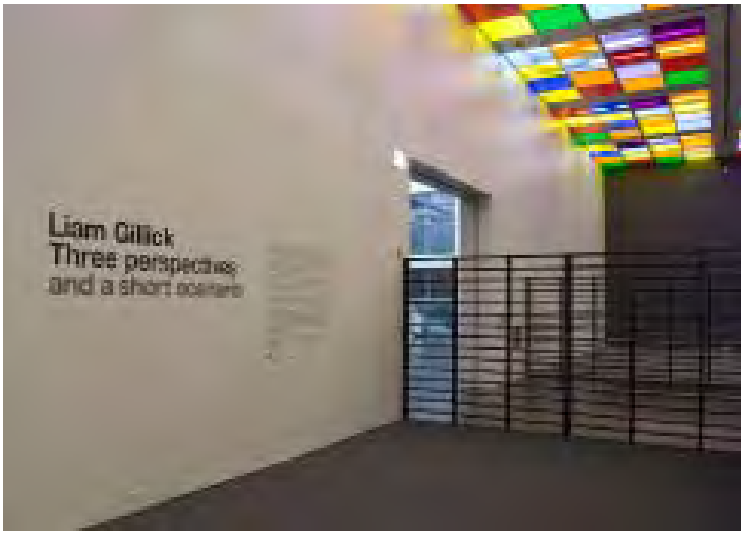
TEXT/ANTHONY E.ELMS

"We live in a time in which the language of creative thought has been appropriated by the most dynamic corporations, so it is often hard to identify the points at which artists become clear markers in society."[1]

Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) was the final stop for Liam Gillick's mid-career survey *Three perspectives and a short scenario.* Reading the scant three local reviews, the exhibition invited two responses: snide observations of Gillick's personal charm and smart attire--as if to be gentlemanly dressed makes the artist suspect, and more to the point, as if this mattered--or remarks on the difficulty of understanding Gillick's works without reading his writings--followed by dismissals sans reading.

It does not matter that the reviews were negative or equivocating at best. Nor was the point that ignoring Gillick's charming ways and doing homework leads one inevitably to praise him. Rather, what mattered was that this major project by Gillick could provide a chance to deal with the work of an artist whose impact is being increasingly felt in contemporary discourse. Chicago was the only U.S. venue for *Three perspectives and a short scenario*. In U.S. institutions, his presence has been relatively discreet: outside commercial gallery exhibitions and event presentations, there have been only three solo museum projects. Here was a crucial moment to consider how the work, familiar perhaps in European institutions, translates stateside, where we are more familiar with him as a writer. Here was time to engage a space. A moment to linger. And Chicago's critical community abnegated this responsibility.

Exasperating in their rashness, the critical responses share a discomfort with the balance of Gillick's combined efforts. Take, for example, his refusal to craft his sculptures to clearly illustrate the narratives and critiques of the writing. Or the fact that the texts set the stage for an awareness of social spaces and the evolving relation between the future and the past, without defining a clear role for the sculptures. This critical discomfort displays two dispiriting assumptions: that art cannot have any job but to mean or represent something, and writing's only job is to explain. What Gillick does not provide is a critique of institutions. Maybe, sometimes, art and writing do, and what Gillick does offer is critical space.




"If you try and use art as a fragmented mirror of the complexity of contemporary society you might try and develop a system of art production that is equally multi-faceted and misleading and that functions as a series of parallels rather than reflections of the dominant culture."[2]

PAGES 34-41: Liam Gillick, installation views of Liam Gillick: Three perspectives and a short scenario at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago,
October 10, 2009-January 10, 2010 (courtesy of the artist; © Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; photo : Nathan Keay)


At each of the tour's venues there have been constants: six-foot-tall slatted screens, described as black but appearing dark gray, set up as a series of spaces and passageways; two inkjet prints; expanses of gray office carpeting; a film/slideshow with stilted drum-loop soundtrack; and a vitrine holding some fifty-seven examples of books, LPs, calendars, posters, and various types of editions designed by Gillick. None of his past sculptures were crated up and shipped on tour. At each venue, he asked the local curator to choose an element to accompany his givens. For Chicago, Dominic Molon chose an enlarged variation of *Applied Resignation Platform*, created in 1999 for the Frankfurter Kunstverein: at MCA it became an installation of 576 multicolored panels of Plexiglas that replaced the normal white ceiling panels. Outside the materials in the vitrine, there were no wall labels, and if there was a title for any individual element, the exhibition handout provided none. This would seem to have offered a lot to take in--and it did--but still, it initially invoked a sterile, on-the-cheap, post-punk office worker corral.

"For those who would prefer art to speak for itself, the desire to avoid mediating structures can only be achieved through the abrogation of responsibility for expressing what cannot exist within the work itself and the takeover of that role by others. The notion of ceding control is central to much artistic practice, but the expression of that abandonment will find itself expressed at some point, assuming that the work of the artist is at any moment exhibited, discussed, collected, viewed, or displayed in any form or location."[3]

The MCA was the only collecting institution to host *Three perspectives and a short scenario*. Previous venues were the Kunsthalle Zurich and Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam. In turn, the titular short scenario was the performance of Gillick's play *A "Volvo" Bar* at the Kunstverein Munchen, which did not present the exhibition's traveling elements. In Chicago, *Three perspectives* was augmented with *The one hundred and Sixty-third floor*, an exhibition curated by Liam Gillick from the MCA's collection, as well as Artist-in-Depth: Liam Gillick, Jenny Holzer, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt curated by Molon. Gillick has always been interested in context, and while *Three perspectives* is not site-specific-whatever that threadbare term might mean in 2010--none of the local reviews even considered how this expanded context in Chicago might inflect the behavior of Gillick's *Three perspectives.*

Stepping into *Three perspectives* provided a self-consciously heightened eeriness. No sculptures? The polychromatic lighting, the spectral gray porous screens allowing you to scan the four walls and catch sight of a washed-out video projection, the flat side of the vitrine, the introductory exhibition wall credits, the modestly-sized prints in an implied hallway to nowhere, and that drum beat all telescoped an emptying confusion. Which nothing should I step to first? Of the four venues, I imagine the Chicago presentation provided the most problematic engagement. Solo survey exhibitions in collecting museums, at their very first level, communicate the value--in every sense of the term--of past objects made by an artist. If the artist is still alive, a requisite secondary narrative

will introduce us to the artist by illustrating how the newest works are a product of the growth and vibrant development that sets all the work along a path of--assured current and future--mastery. These conventions need to be set against those for solo exhibitions at kunsthalles--such as the other venues for *Three perspectives*--where we expect a certain risk, a focus on an artist's process now, though potentially based on his as-yet-undefined historical production. In a kunsthalle, the role of the objects as markers of established value is negligible. The kunsthalle seeks to set up a discursive dialogue with new terms or forms by which the exhibited work(s) may be found in the future to have claimed a critical stake. In crude shorthand: collecting museums exhibit the presence of the past, kunsthalles exhibit the prescience of the future. It is worth noting that Gillick's inclusion of the curator's intervention into his project is the opposite of the usual power dynamic for a survey exhibition in a collecting museum and even many kunsthalle projects. A solo survey exhibition in a collecting museum that includes none of the artist's signature "major" pieces, that is constructed more in keeping with the discursive model of an exhibition anticipated in a kunsthalle, will always be an ill fit.

As happenstance would have it, after visiting *Three Perspectives* I read the catalog for U.S. artist Martin Beck's film *About the Relative Size of Things in the Universe*. In his essay, Beck quotes Klaus Frank from a 1961 book on exhibition techniques:

> To exhibit means to choose, to display, to present a sample or an example. The imparting of information is the aim of every exhibition, and such information may be of a didactic, commercial, or representational nature. Aimed at man as a consumer of products and ideas, an exhibit is meant to teach, to advertise, and to represent--to influence a person. An exhibit differs from all other media of communications because it alone can simultaneously transmit information visually, acoustically, and by touch.[4]

There is not the space here to discuss the larger trajectory of Frank's statement. Best to simply note that Frank was not speaking exclusively of museums. Still, the convoluted litany of terms choose, display, present, impart, didactic, commercial, representational, products, ideas, teach, advertise, represent, influence, visually, acoustically, touch--seems pitched to Gillick's direction, providing almost the perfect combination of terms to balance in considering *Three perspectives* at the MCA.

"The role of the artist is to be as vigilant about the way exhibitions are put together, mediated, and understood."[5]

Why might a European artist actively involved both artistically and critically in short-circuiting the normal flow of functional definitions in formal and theoretical models choose to display a new structure advertised as a mid-career survey in a Midwestern U.S. museum filled with historically framed objects? That answer writes itself. And if, by chance, the answer does not commence writing, Gillick has been publishing about these relationships for roughly twenty years. Pushing out of this survey, the polychromatic aluminum structures with which he is

commonly identified in gallery displays made space for materials considered to be of secondary importance for someone of Gillick's stature and success as an object maker: books, graphic design, editions, disposable ephemera. The vitrine not only made space for these materials, but it gave them a place of primary importance, bestowing the value of the development in Gillick's practice on materials generally thought valueless or of less consequence to collecting museums and the collectors who largely sustain them. Of course, the materials were presented beyond reach and preserved under glass. But most of these books are readily available at modest prices, and his writing is easily accessible online. If the darkly humorous texts and pithy proclamations that could in fact be read on the posters, prints, tote bags, and book covers were not satisfying enough, there, in the same gallery space as the vitrine, was a film that unfolds as a photograph slideshow of works spanning Gillick's career, which an oblique narrative slowly fills, sentence by sentence, until the images are ultimately obscured by words. This story presents three nameless individuals as they reform the factory where they work, alternately changing the structure of their labor, their diets, their groupings, and their capability for productivity. It is compelling, not difficult; it explains neither the photographs in the film nor *Three perspectives*. Certainly the writing may be elusive and promiscuous in affect at times. Gillick's writing style in this film approximates that of J.G. Ballard, the late British author of speculative fiction, if Ballard had been interested in the social space of production rather than technology's psychological role in modernist sociology and, in particular, the normalization of pathologies. Reading Gillick's narrative gave reason to choose to spend time with a place seemingly emptied.

Gillick's exhibition set-up was undeniably aggressive, in a manner one generally identifies with his writing and polemical presentations rather than his sculptures, to the benefit of *Three perspectives*. The insistent mechanical drumbeat, the lack of seating for the film, the vibrant portion of visual incident laid flat under glass in a vitrine, the corralled dead ends, the palpable grayness--it cannot be stressed enough--all created smokescreens to be navigated. In recent memory, only one other exhibition at the MCA has dared to take such a forceful and totalizing position toward the visitor on both critical and formal levels: Jenny Holzer's masterful *Protect Protect*, 2009. This makes it even sadder that the MCA all but ignored Gillick's *Three perspectives* in spite of two accompanying exhibitions mounted by the museum. Looking for publicity information for the three exhibitions was a test in futility. Ads, banners, invitations or posters were missing or miniscule at every turn. Once you found *Three perspectives*, the scant photocopied handout--which on three visits had a copying defect rendering a section the entire length of

the paper smudged, distorted, and in places nearly illegible--hardly imparted a feeling that, beyond the curatorial choice, this institution was in full support of the exhibition or displayed any trust in its viewers.

"Sometimes I think that I am making work that operates best in relation to other structures and other art rather than standing alone. Maybe the work even functions best if you stand with your back to it and think about something else."[6]

The inclusion of four Gillick sculptures from the MCA's collection in the ancillary *Artist-in-Depth* presentation sadly diluted the pressurized rupture generated by the lack of sculpture in the survey exhibition. Sited across the atrium from *Three perspectives*, it issued a hedging of bets, as it were. Most tellingly, the placement of Gillick's sculptures close to Donald Judd's reminded me that, though Gillick's works are often compared to Judd's, Gillick's approach has more in common with Judd as furniture maker, interior architect, and exhibition designer than Judd the sculptor--not to its detriment. Then, why is Gillick's work always discussed in relationship to minimalism? Why is it so rarely--if ever--seen in relation to the British arts and crafts movement, the Bauhaus, or any theory/practice workshop that conceptualized social relations while dismissing functional forms of the past in order to invent aesthetic forms with which to influence a redefinition of the future?

A little over a month into the run of *Three perspectives*, a brilliant addition opened in two adjacent galleries: *The one hundred and Sixty-third floor*, a selection of forty-three works organized by Gillick. This was the most surprising and eclectic display of the permanent collection in many years. It rested largely on works not regularly seen in the MCA's collection exhibitions, and works by artists not often exhibited together at MCA. This grouping combined artworks which Gillick selected because he identifies with the artists or sees them as significant, and pieces that, in his view, reveal something distinct about the MCA's collection and its formation. With a few exceptions, the works were hung alphabetically by the artist's last name. Instead of the usual interpretive didactics, the wall labels for each work were written by Gillick: pithy, hilarious, and terse statements crafted by editing descriptions culled from an MCA curatorial department internal binder that tracks the museum's activities and exhibitions by year. These rewritten texts were linked with the works by simply synching up the chronology to the alphabetized artist list. For instance, Acconci, the first name in the exhibition, is coupled with 1967, the first year of the MCA's history, and so on. This tactic both highlighted the museum's factual exhibition history and the subjective nature of any historical narrative drawn from the display of a subset of objects selected from any collection. As such, I am tempted to assign tactical importance to the fact that the only label for


which the year corresponded to the year of the object's making was for U.S. collective Group Material, and the only artist represented by more than one work was the Belgian Marcel Broodthaers. Both were unwavering in their attempts to submit institutional spaces to critical discomfort through devilishly playful display techniques and political maneuvers.

"The work is not an installation and it is not site-specific but think ing has been applied to a specific place or set of concepts and vice-versa."[7]

The title, *The one hundred and sixty-third floor*, alludes to the height required to return Chicago's bragging rights as home to the world 's tallest building. Looking to the skyline, Chicago was undoubtedly an important U.S. center for the development of mid-twentieth-century international-style modernism, and as such should hold obvious attraction for Gillick, given his interest in utopian structures and the struggle between planning and speculation in the development of modernist ideals and aesthetics. Gillick's projects have never been advertised: Interactivity! Functionality! Social work! More accurately, he combines a broad cross-section of activities, theories, and structures that clearly display a relation to problem solving and a search to find productive, critical voicings. The point isn't to use Gillick's structures; it is to consider the type of problem--or solution--that their construction implies. He uses applied theory, applied systems, applied design, and applied display without stated representational goals or functional benchmarks. You might say that Gillick is a vertically integrated producer given the evidence of *Three perspectives*. It may be difficult to consider the combined actions, theories, and structures of social relations that Gillick references in relation to his built projects if you consider them solely in terms of the specificity of minimalist sculpture. But it isn't when you consider the physical effect of an asymmetrical bus shelter and a steel and glass airport corridor, and the results of commercialized lifestyle marketing on public space and speculative financing on production sites. Additive conjunctions are Gillick's stock and trade.

To think Gillick's three exhibitions at the MCA in relation to Frank's assertion that "an exhibit is meant to teach, to advertise, and to represent:' it helps to consider what this can mean for an artist who rankles against illustrating ideas, representing past solutions, and mirroring functional spaces in his applied practices. The answer would be that, taken together, these exhibitions taught the use of parallel--never entwined--constructions for critical exceptions that destabilize definitions, advertised that material reality is not made solely from materials, and represented the importance of producing a use for the uselessness in the past to generative effect. Three perspectives took the risk to put these concerns forward in an actively misleading frame, asserting that this was more sensible than constructing a narrative that would anchor the reasonableness of these concerns in a navigable row of more or less successful markers made through the years. In rethinking his history by displaying the applied designs--books, posters, and so on--of his practice, he asked us to question what behaviors our built environment both asks of us and insinuates into us. For example, what are we to make of a museum survey exhibition using applied designs to set us in a direction, causing us to arrive in delay, applied thought in hand, faced with designs, their functionality just passed, and the sculptural hidden in plain sight? As Gillick's film puts it: *This documentary is the last chapter of a book.* In turning his back on this narrative, Gillick offered a different story, a ventriloquist's act with the MCA's own institutional voice. Ultimately, the overcast feeling orchestrated amidst the *Three perspectives* screens,followed by the release in *The one hundred and sixty-third floor*, was not so different from the disorientation any number of us have encountered as we try to find our way in a nondescript convention center or state university en route to a presentation. The difference is that Gillick wants you to acknowledge some responsibility for the implications in your disorientation, to think what purposes are hidden in functional demarcations. What he has always refused to do is to remind you why you came to be here in the first place.

"I am interested in a populated environment, but not overly defining the relationships we are expected to play in relation to those environments."[8]

Gillick represented himself as expected, in keeping with what anyone with a passing familiarity with his writing and exhibitions might anticipate, beyond his approach to the execution of the exhibitions. He may have come off as gruff a time or two, but he did set the terms for his own survey, curate a group exhibition, write wall labels, speak to classes, give a lecture, take part in a public discussion, record an audio tour, make himself available to the press--including interviews with bloggers and for a podcast--and bring the tallest building in the world back to Chicago. In response, some who expected the privilege to engage with Gillick on his visit to Chicago clearly responded in the manner they thought these actions deserved. Let's paraphrase the question Gillick asked with his 2009 Venice Biennale German pavilion exhibition: *How are we going to behave?* It seems without consideration.

NOTES

1. Liam Gillick,"The Semiotics of the Built World," *The Wood Way,* London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2002, 81.
2. Liam Gillick, "Berlin Statement," *How are you going to behave? A kitchen cat speaks.* Deutsch er Pavilion LaBiennale di Venezia 2009, Rotterdam: Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art , 2009, 99.
3. Liam Gillick, "The Binary Stadium:Anton Vidokle, Intermediary or Locus," *Anton Vidokle: Produce, Distribute, Discuss, Repeat,* Berlin and New York: Sternberg Press, 2009, 50 .
4. Klaus Frank, *Exhibitions/Ausstellungen* (New York/Stuttgart: Praegerl Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1961) quoted in Martin Beck, "Sovereignty and Control,"*About the Relative Size of Things in the Universe,* London and Utrecht : Four Corners Books and Casco - Office for Art, Design and Theory, 2007, 55.
5. Liam Gillick, "The Semiotics of the Built World," 82.
6. *Ibid*, 81.
7. *Ibid*, 86.
8. Liam Gillick, "Berlin Statement," 102.

Anthony E. Elms is an artist, the editor of publications for WhiteWalls, and assistant director at Gallery 400 at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Most recently, he participated in Cosey Complex organized by Maria Fusco for the ICA London.

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# Liam Gillick

*Esther Schipper, Berlin, Germany*

At a lecture he gave in Vancouver in 2009, Liam Gillick suggested that his career as an artist was catalyzed by an inability to trust his own activity in the field of politics—his first career choice. In this light, his ongoing deferral to a strange lexicon of ciphers and fictions seems appropriate. Gillick's perennial coupling of historical interest with an aversion to conclusive statements reappeared in his sole exhibition '1848!!!', which took as its subject the revolutionary events that unfolded in Europe between 1846 and 1849.

Gillick lays out the development of this period in *1848!!! A Paper Banner* (2010), a timeline presented on two large pieces of paper and hung vertically so as to recall unfurled scrolls or tapestries. In the early 1840s, Gillick tells us, unusually poor crops brought about rising food prices, which led in turn to mass starvation. These events quickly triggered a complex domino effect, from calls for universal manhood suffrage to the massacre of more than 1,000 working class people by republican troops and Karl Marx's subsequent disillusion with democracy, eventually culminating with the fall of the Venetian Republic under 'cholera and starvation'.

Framing this abbreviated history lesson was 'Bar "Volvo"' (2010), a series of 16 medieval woodcuts enlarged as inkjet prints and captioned with dialogue from the eight-act play, *A "Volvo" Bar*, written —in German—as part of Gillick's fourpart travelling retrospective 'Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario' (2008). These prints inflected his research with graphic flavour. The aforementioned timeline was thus nudged into a historically disjointed fictional realm, which reached a macabre conclusion as two men at the bar are under threat of having their craniums cored by medieval corkscrews.

Gillick's work frequently references the proto-functional structures of bus stops and office cubicles, which often serve as backdrops for banal forms of communication—from office chit-chat to advertising. *Constricted Production* (2010)—the latest in an ongoing series of sculptures —nods to these representations of 'applied Modernism' as well as to Minimalist sculpture. Comprising an enclosed aluminium structure and long horizontal sheets of translucent purple Perspex, the work obliges viewers to look both at and through it; as visitors followed a route dictated by its imposing presence, their perspectives onto other works were alternately clear and momentarily filtered by the construction's skin. In this way, Gillick physically implicated so-called high Modernism—defined by a categorical disinterest in narrative —into his own idiosyncratic storyline.

In the film *1848!!!* (2010), a woman by the name of Clementine Coupau is presented reciting the transcript of a separate film, recorded by curator Ajay Kurian, in which Coupau and Gillick expand upon the events of 1848. Here Coupau is rendered silent, however, by the sound of Steve Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians* (1974-6), which has been looped. Here, the soundtrack—a customarily supportive but powerful filmic mechanism—functions to muffle rather than to accent dialogue. Persistently short-circuiting lucid communication, Gillick operates in a space of constructive ambivalence, where routes of discourse are not taken as means to a coherent end, but as complex systems in and of themselves, always subject to creative manipulation.

**Mitch Speed**

**Liam Gillick**
**"1848!!!"**
2010
Installation view

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

LIAM GILLICK
*DISCUSSION BENCH PLATFORMS, A 'VOLVO' BAR + EVERYTHING GOOD GOES*
EXHIBITION DATES: FEBRUARY 18 – MARCH 27, 2010

OPENING: THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 6 – 8PM
GALLERY HOURS: TUESDAY – SATURDAY, 10 – 6PM

Casey Kaplan is pleased to present an exhibition of new work by Liam Gillick (b. 1964 Aylesbury, UK).

*Discussion Bench Platforms* are a series of structures that continue the artist's interest in the legacy of applied modernism and the tension between functional and aesthetic constructions. Powder-coated aluminum benches accompany a sequence of new discussion platforms. The function of the discussion platform as a designated space for thought is amplified by this pragmatic addition.

On the walls and windows of the gallery, sixteen new prints present a narrative derived from the first scene of Gillick's play *A Volvo Bar*, that was the 'short scenario' part of his retrospective, "Three Perspectives and a short Scenario", first performed at the Kunstverein München. Gillick's eight-act play adapts the exhibition space as a stage on which social phenomena of a post-industrial society are played out, presenting a core aspect in Gillick's work - the negotiation of models of communality. The prints here combine early woodcut imagery from pre-industrial Europe with the opening lines of the play.

*Everything Good Goes* was first presented at the exhibition of the Vincent Awards at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, 2008. Earlier that year, Gillick was in the process of preparing and editing a series of texts, clips and recordings derived from a series of lectures presented at unitednationsplaza, Berlin in 2006. While reviewing the content of the lectures the artist built a 3D computer model of the set, a factory, from the film *Tout va Bien (Everything Goes Good)*, 1972, directed by French political activists and filmmakers, Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin.

A telephone call was made to the Fly collective in New York and recorded. The phone call outlined the issues that the film's producers should think about while documenting the process of building the 3D computer model of the factory. The resulting film is a portrait of an artist working and thinking while the original telephone recording is played as a soundtrack. The work is a reflection on a context, and an outline of the artist's main concerns over the last few years.

Liam Gillick represented Germany at the 53rd Venice Biennale, 2009. In April, an extensive survey exhibition "Liam Gillick: One Long Walk – Two Short Piers" will open at the Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik, Deutschland. The most comprehensive monograph of Liam Gillick's work to date will be published in accordance with this exhibition. His traveling retrospective "Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario", 2008-2009, recently closed its 'third perspective' at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, organized by Dominic Molon, after the first and second were showcased at the Witte de With, Rotterdam organized by Nicolaus Schafhausen and the Kunsthalle, Zürich organized by Beatrix Ruf, respectively. Liam Gillick publishes texts that function in parallel to his artwork including: ***Proxemics (Selected writing 1988-2006)***, JRP-Ringier (2007); ***Factories in the Snow*** by Lilian Haberer, JRP-Ringier (2007); ***Meaning Liam Gillick***, MIT Press (2009); and ***Allbooks***, Book Works, London (2009). Other recent solo exhibitions include: "Executive Two Litre GXL," 1 MAK: Austrian Museum of Applied Arts / Contemporary Art, curated by Bärbel Vischer, Vienna through March 21; and "Everything Good Goes," Meyer Kainer, Vienna, through March 13. Liam Gillick lives and works in New York and London.

For further exhibition information please contact Loring Randolph, loring@caseykaplangallery.com.
Next Gallery Exhibition: GABRIEL VORMSTEIN Gallery I and JEFF BURTON, ***Portraits***, Gallery II, April 1 – May 1, 2010

GALLERY ARTISTS: HENNING BOHL, JEFF BURTON, NATHAN CARTER, MILES COOLIDGE, JASON DODGE, TRISHA DONNELLY, GEOFFREY FARMER, PAMELA FRASER, LIAM GILLICK, ANNIKA VON HAUSSWOLFF, CARSTEN HÖLLER, BRIAN JUNGEN, JONATHAN MONK, MARLO PASCUAL, DIEGO PERRONE, JULIA SCHMIDT, SIMON STARLING, DAVID THORPE, GABRIEL VORMSTEIN, GARTH WEISER, JOHANNES WOHNSEIFER

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NUVO
SUMMER 2010

# UP IN THE AIR

## The latest project from *world-renowned artist* **LIAM GILLICK** has *people looking up*--**WAY UP.**

STORY BY **STEVE BURGESS**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **HUBERT KANG**

Some weeks before the opening of the new Fairmont Pacific Rim, two people happened to be standing on the sidewalk, looking up at the facade. Wrapped around a corner of the downtown Vancouver skyscraper are letters forming a long sentence that's repeated on floors five to 22 of the 48-storey structure: "lying on top of a building the clouds looked no nearer than when I was lying on the street."

Down on the sidewalk, one bystander turned to the other. "Looks pretty cool, eh?" she said.

The man shrugged. "Um, sure. I guess so," he mumbled. "It's okay."

"What could I do?" Liam Gillick says later. "I didn't want to be an asshole."

That anonymous woman can be forgiven for putting Gillick in an awkward situation. She could hardly have known that the guy hanging around the sidewalk that day was responsible for the artistic flourish they were both admiring. Still, as they say back in his old London stomping grounds, Gillick was well chuffed. "It was nice, yeah," he says, grinning.

Gillick's enigmatic work has been lifting gazes at the corner of Burrard and Cordova for months now. And as the story suggests, he is perfectly happy to let those eyes stay on the work while he quietly sneaks off for a cigarette. He may have been a former classmate of determined art-world super-celebrity Damien Hirst, but the two men obviously learned different lessons about personal brand management. "It's a different thing than what I was interested in," Gillick says. After being selected by Fairmont Pacific Rim's search committee, Gillick decided on the nature of his installation shortly after his first visit to Vancouver. "It's a very striking city. The idea of using the text came to me within an hour of being here."

The Fairmont Pacific Rim is something of a statement itself. At over 800,000 square feet, the hotel/condo development is one of the city's largest. It's yet another design from architect James


ABOVE: LiamGillick's Fairmont Pacific Rim installation.

Cheng, already reigning champion of downtown Vancouver courtesy of the Shaw Tower and the even-more-towering Shan gri-La.

Gillick worked with Cheng and his team, and found them almost frighteningly cooperative. "I got the impression if I'd said, 'Let's turn the building upside down,' they might have said 'Sure,'" he says.

Gillick may not have turned the Fairmont Pacific Rim on its head, but he nonetheless feels his work might subtly undermine its foundations. "There's something about the text that is a little bit resigned, melancholy, and also a little bit critical," he says. "Saying that no matter how high you make the building, the sky is no nearer than when you're lying on the street--to me that's a kind of politics. It's about forms of address. Who is speaking to whom? Is that me saying that? Is it some guy in a bar? Or is it the corporation saying it because they're going to build it twice as high next time?"

Liam Gillick was born in a London suburb in 1964. His Irish grandfather was a coal miner. "It sounds more romantic than it should. It's actually a well-paid job," says Gillick.

"Growing up with an Irish Catholic name, I was never bullied in school. I always thought it was my natural charm, but I realize now they were worried about having their knees blown off."

Despite early dreams of becoming a crusading lawyer, Gillick took a detour into the art world, enrolling at Goldsmiths' College in London in 1984. Gillick and his schoolmates shared a dream. "The decision we all made as students," he says now, "is that we were going to leave art school and become artists."

It's not quite as obvious as it sounds. The most famous products of British art schools have always tended to be rock stars. The Rolling Stones, Pink Floyd, Roxy Music, and numerous other pop music giants emerged from the art-school scene. (Gillick's own classmates included "half of Blur," he says.) It was a reflection of the fact that, rather than fostering future artists, British art schools had long been the catch basin for creative misfits not cut out for the usual upper-crust professions. "You'd see some of these people like Jagger and Ferry--they used to turn up at our openings and take an interest," Gillick recalls. "There was no way for them to continue their art-work--they would help make it possible for us to stick it through."

He has realized his ambition of an art career. But the path of the modern professional artist is not a straightforward one. Some of his ideas for public art have been developed thanks to the luxury of near-certain failure. "I spent three or four years in the late nineties/early 2000s doing speculative projects [along with other work]," he recalls. "They'd pay you a little fee for an idea. And you knew you were never going to get [the commission], because it would go to the local artist from Monchengladbach or wherever. But you could spend your time thinking about this real place that was not a gallery and not a museum. It was a kind of school. It was a way of avoiding that big problem artists have--I am often trying to avoid the feeling that there's a direct relationship between what I do and being paid. It gets in the way."

"The big problem for me," he admits, "was when someone would turn around and say, 'Okay let's do it.' And I'd think, 'Oh shit!' That's when the stress starts, and the anxiety. I'm much more interested in pre-production and post-production than in actually doing the thing."

These accidents do happen. Self-effacement notwithstanding, they have happened for Gillick with some frequency. One prominent example is the new Home Office in London's Marsham Street, headquarters of British bureaucracy. "That became an incredible learning process, working very closely with an architect [Sir Terry Farrell] for three years who wasn't that interested in contemporary art, " he says. "By the end of it, we had almost swapped roles, where he would have a lot of conceptual ideas and I'd be the one saying, 'No, no, we need to look at the way the structure is functioning and the way we're sending the stress down the pillars.'"

His collaboration with Farrell , completed in 2005, resulted in the look of the building, including a multicoloured glass canopy and a giant entrance screen made up of geometric designs, providing extra visual impact to Farrell's low-rise modernist design. No one looking at the building would be likely to identify Gillick's contribution as a separate artwork, which is exactly the way Gillick wants it. "I have to find a way to make these things normal," he says. "Not like a big event, not like a groundbreaking object. Increasingly in the modern age, art has become someone to look at. That's quite a recent phenomenon. Usually art was a backdrop for another activity--praying, or thinking, or admiring someone's grandparents, or even trying to understand a war or a battle.

"It's very different from the Anish Kapoor artwork in Chicago [Cloud Gate, a.k.a. the Bean, a mirror-like stainless steel sculpture in the city's Millennium Park], where you've got this big centrepiece, and people go to it and get photographed with it, and it becomes a marker. I'm very interested in what you might call the 'disinterested viewer.' I want to make work that is a backdrop to daily life."

"There's this feeling of wanting to work in a more **PUBLIC** space, ***but not necessarily*** while everyone's **STARING** at me. "

So then, how about the big blue raindrop created by Berlin-based artist group Inges Idee for the plaza of the new Vancouver Convention Centre? "Well, I think you need these things in combination," Gillick avers. "I would never speak badly about a big raindrop."

He is willing to offer an opinion on the hot local issue of government arts funding. Although this particular project is corporate, Gillick believes government support of all the arts is crucial. "You can't rely on private corporations to do it. It's really easy populist politics to cut back on arts."

Liam Gillick may be hype-averse, but developers and architects who commission such projects like to get attention for them. The unveiling of the new Fairmont Pacific Rim facade featured the expected reception, press releases, and news cameras. Gillick knows it's part of the job. But still. "I was one of these people in school, if the teacher asked me, 'What's two plus two?', my mind was blank. So there's this feeling of wanting to work in a more public space, but not necessarily while everyone's staring at me."

It's not all bad, though. The Fairmont people have not overtaxed him, and there have been local delights. "Ian Wallace came to the reception, and I'm a big fan," Gillick says. "He's someone who has influenced my work. That's part of why you do it."

Gillick was not present for the actual installation of the steel letters. "Once I had established a relationship with the people doing it--it was done [assembled] in B.C.--once it was clear they understood how to execute the idea, I wanted to leave them alone," he says. "The last thing they need is for me to turn into that teacher who stands there and asks, 'What's two plus two?' They need to find their own way to achieve what needs to be done."

Besides, Gillick believes it's best if he stays away. "I'll compromise before anyone else," he insists. "There's this stereotype of artists as free and uncompromising. But when they ask me, 'What should we do?' I'll be the one who says, 'Well, let's make it half the size, or use cardboard .'

"My component is part of the building. It's not unique or special. They need to take care with the bathrooms and take care with the artwork. It all needs to be executed properly."

Gillick describes his obsession as "the semiotics of the built world. Which sounds kind of pretentious," he admits. "A good example is the column I used to write for an Australian magazine. [The column] was called 'Lobby.' I meant it in the political sense of lobbying, and also the idea of the lobby as the place where the corporation rebrands their identity or tries to make a kind of interface. I was always wanting to hang out in the foyer of the ational Theatre or a big insurance company."

The Fairmont Pacific Rim project--a lyrical phrase constructed from stainless steel and wrapped around a skyscraper-seems to represent an odd juncture of poetry, visual art, and architecture. It reflects the man. Gillick's art practice incorporates many forms, including writing, installations, architectural collaborations, and music. He has also published an extensive body of critical writing on other art. So planning for this project was not just a matter of writing a catchy phrase. "I'm actually drawing the building with the text on it," he explains. "I'm not just drawing the text. I spent a lot of time looking at the plans for the building and working with 3-D modelling."

Since the mid-nineties, Gillick has been based in New York with his wife, artist Sarah Morris, and their seven-year-old son ("who has somehow developed a New York accent, even though neither of us has one"). His body of work marks him as one of the most successful young artists of his generation. And yet Gillick's desire to create works that will become a seamless part of everyday life rather than stand-alone objects has perhaps resulted in a lower profile, certainly when compared to his most famous classmate .

Damien Hirst is the most notorious of the 1980s Goldsmiths' alumni group, and Gillick says it was not by accident. "He always wanted to be famous, and worked very hard at it. And it worked. It's very Oprah Winfrey. He works his nuts off because he wanted to be like that. What's fascinating is that almost every idea that he's done, he spoke about in art school 20 years ago. And he's been doing them ever since. It's something, to have that degree of self-possession." Considering Gillick's aversion to hype, his own work also seems to flow naturally from his personality. He can even cite a theory about this. "Barbara Kruger, a very interesting American artist, wrote an article saying that all male artists are either creeps or assholes. And I think he's an asshole and I'm a creep," Gillick says with a grin. "We represent the two edges of the Goldsmiths' years."

As he said after encountering that stranger on a Vancouver sidewalk, Gillick doesn't want to be an asshole. He just hopes you might look up once in awhile, near the corner of Burrard and Cordova, and say, "Wow--that looks pretty cool."

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ARTFORUM

# Liam Gillick
# MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, CHICAGO
# Sean Keller

View of Liam Gillick, "Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario," 2009, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. Photo: Nathan Keay.

NO ONE CAN DENY Liam Gillick's ambition. Here is an artist who wants to take it all on: global capitalism, corporate identity, product design, institutional critique, modernism and its aftermath, Minimalism and its aftermath, literary conventions, the linearity of time itself. The forms of Gillick's engagement are equally diverse, including sculpture, installation, print, video, and curatorial projects, as well as prolific writing of criticism, manifestos, and fiction. All of this is guided by an unresolved combination of the Marxist desire to explain everything with a single system (centered on economics) and a post-Marxist realization that no system can ever achieve this goal. And so Gillick often emphasizes the gaps within systems, or what he has described as "the peculiar sense of disorder that accompanies any visit to an apparently well-ordered bureaucratic setup."

It is no surprise, then, that a "midcareer retrospective" of Gillick's work could not be just that. Instead, this rite of passage was reworked as "Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario," a sequence of three varied shows at the Kunsthalle Zürich (spring 2008), the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam (spring 2008), and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago this past fall and winter; and an event at the Kunstverein München (fall 2008). Each of the three "perspectives" featured an installation of black horizontally slatted screens and gray carpet; a block of vitrines that resembled converted Donald Judd sculptures, containing graphic-design work and books; a video summary of Gillick's work along with text from ongoing writing projects; and one or two posters. The screens, made of MDF and at once suggesting office partitions, library shelving, and IKEA furniture, were arranged to define loose subgalleries within each show. The "short scenario" in Munich was a performance titled A "Volvo" Bar (recently revisited as a series of prints at Casey Kaplan in New York), which took place on a gray carpet among a different group of screens.

Each of the "perspective" venues also included a unique piece of programming: in Zurich, reenactments of early works; in Rotterdam, a program of shows by other artists. In Chicago, this supplement took the form of a separate exhibition, "The One Hundred and Sixty-third Floor: Liam Gillick Curates the Collection." The title mockingly suggests a fictional level that would surpass the 162 floors of the Burj Khalifa in Dubai, thereby allowing Chicago to once again have the world's tallest building. For the exhibit, Gillick paired works from the museum's collection (arranged more or less alphabetically) with labels that each included a year from the museum's history (1967–2009, but not the year of the corresponding work itself), excerpts from the museum's internal records (again unrelated to the work), and, lastly, the actual object information for the work. The result was less institutional critique than curatorial dada, opening up an enjoyably speculative space between object and label, as well as an unsettling gap in intentionality. (For example, is the combination of "1974," "Propaganda. The east is red. Life size super realism. Eight musical performances. A holiday playground. Theater, dance, puppets, mime and magic," and John Baldessari's 1987 Three Eyes [with Gold Bug] purposeful? Meaningful?)

In the main gallery, Gillick's own works were the semiotic equivalents of Apple products (which appear prominently in his 2008 video Everything Good Goes): Embedded within the sleek exteriors were remarkably intricate and far-reaching systems of meaning. Take, for example, one of the two posterlike prints that seemed to serve as icons for the exhibition (the only items hung on the walls, they were aligned with the entrance). What one saw was a square black field recalling an album cover (not incidentally, as we will see), within which rested a geometric pattern of squares and rhomboids, each given a distinct, slightly cool color. The pattern read as a set of rectangular volumes performing synchronized optical flips between concave and convex. Above these figures were four words in white lowercase sans serif: deferral, detour, discussion, and documentary. The overall effect was of a vaguely nostalgic institutional or corporate identity. As such, the work generated mood but not much immediate meaning.

The exhibition wall text and brochure provided clues to what lay behind the surface, noting that the graphic was a "reworking of a 1976 poster by Herbert Kapitzki (German, b. 1925) for the International Design Center [IDZ] in Berlin" and that Kapitzki was associated with the famous Ulm School of Design, the most direct postwar German successor to the Bauhaus. Following this lead—likely only after one has left the exhibition—one stumbles upon an entire field of associations that are indispensable for a full understanding of the object and of Gillick's practice in general. Founded in 1968, the IDZ describes itself as "a communications platform connecting business, society and culture"—a latter-day Werkbund pursuing that particularly German reconciliation of commerce and culture through quality. Kapitzki's original poster (not reproduced anywhere in the show) features the same geometric construction in different colors, but a far more didactic text. Translated, it reads:

Design should optimize functions, make transparent, visually transport, make comprehensible, make manageable, represent aesthetically, make economically effective; not conceal, decorate, ornament, imitate, corrupt, level, plagiarize. Design not as seeming reality but as an integral component of objectifiable reality. Design between seeming and being.

In place of this manifesto of transparency, Gillick gives us only his four dithering d's as watchwords for the exhibition. Here, as in much of Gillick's work, references to the forms and ideologies of modernism are simultaneously embedded, deflated, and concealed within an object that relies on visual abstraction and verbal opacity to frustrate access to the sources that underlie its meaning. The goal seems to be a dense, even mystified, iconology of modernist design requiring a hermeneutics of its own.

Given his obsession with institutional structures, Gillick has an oddly casual approach to the ways in which the sources and references behind his work are—or are not—communicated. In Chicago, for example, it was left to curator Dominic Molon to provide clues in the exhibition's supplemental material. Within such a highly theorized practice, this gap suggests that Gillick may consider the specific references to be necessary only to his own productive process and that he intends reception to take place on a more ambiguous, even atmospheric, level. And yet he does not actively suppress the revelation of these references, so he might intend for them to trickle out via "discussions" such as this very review.

Perhaps the sparest example of this strategy is the percussive sound track that projected from a ceiling-mounted speaker toward one corner of the gallery. Its nearly uniform rhythm suggested a factory environment similar to that described by the text projected nearby, taken from two of the artist's ongoing writing projects, Factories in the Snow, 2006, and the unpublished Construcción de Uno—Construction of One. The museum's information sheet and a published interview with Gillick add far more specific references. We learn that the audio is meant to recall the drum track of the 1979 Joy Division song "She's Lost Control," creating a half joke about control and industrial production that resonates more deeply with the projected text. The Joy Division reference is further meant to evoke the album covers of Peter Saville, graphic designer for Factory Records, who was himself influenced by "the cool, disciplined 'New Typography' of [Jan] Tschichold," an important advocate of modernist typography and design in 1920s Germany. This is, then, the audio equivalent of the geometric poster: the apparently meaningless thump, thump, thump, thump standing in for a very specific line of associations that carries us deep into Gillick's obsession with modernism and its legacy.

Above this all hovered the show's single grand gesture: the glowing, candy-colored ceiling grid that Gillick created by simply replacing the museum's standard white light covers with a random pattern of brightly tinted transparent ones. The result was a large-scale version of the gridded "discussion platforms" that are Gillick's best-known works—a fittingly retrospective gesture linked to the poster's suggestion that the entire gallery should, or could, become a Socratic space. Yet while the architectural impact of the intervention was strong—revealing the conduit and fluorescent fixtures usually hidden above the ceiling while focusing attention on this plane and its rationalizing grid—the effect was, again, not directly critical but ambiguous. The gallery's white box was not so much challenged as repurposed.

But to what end? Gillick's work should be distinguished from the more overtly participatory practices of an artist such as Rirkrit Tiravanija. The fact that Gillick creates works called discussion platforms does not mean he intends anything so direct as for them to be places to talk. Indeed, his slick aesthetic suggests the opposite: His works function more as chilly icons of unrealized interaction than as vehicles for interaction itself. Writing about the ambitions of more utopian work, Gillick has said, "My interest is far more grounded and potentially disappointing than this. And could be described as an ongoing investigation of how the middle ground of social and economic activity leaves traces in our current environment." "Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario" effectively captured this interest in the physical traces of graphics, objects, and environments. Generated by complex reflections on both grand themes and specific precedents, the real strength—the truth, even—of Gillick's practice lies in his capacity to produce things and places that mirror and distort the opacity of contemporary markets, economic and artistic alike. Which is to say that Gillick's practice intentionally remains representational, not operative. Or, as the reductive sound track suggests, no one here has lost control.

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# *Liam Gillick*
# Three perspectives and a short scenario

OCTOBER 10, 2009–JANUARY 10, 2010

British artist Liam Gillick asks more than he answers. Since emerging in the late 1980s, he has routinely questioned how and why systems of social and political authority have shaped our cultural environment.

Like other artists of his generation, such as Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Philippe Parreno, and Rirkrit Tiravanija, Gillick creates works that extend the legacy of conceptual art by using strategies and techniques that incorporate the viewer as a potentially active, engaged participant. This unconventional mid-career survey, the largest US presentation of the artist's work to date, explores the roles of artists and museums in presenting an exhibition.

*Three perspectives* is divided into two parts, with one half determined by the artist and the other half by the curator. While the artist's half has remained consistent from venue to venue, the curators' "perspectives" have ranged from the inclusion of other, more emerging artists' projects in Rotterdam to the presentation of Gillick's more ephemeral works in Zurich—and at the MCA, a site-specific installation by Gillick that will replace the white glass panels of the gallery ceiling with opaque and transparent multicolored Plexiglas.

The MCA will also present a concurrent exhibition of works from the MCA Collection by Gillick and other artists, including Jenny Holzer and Donald Judd, as well as another collection-based exhibition curated by the artist himself.

8 Exhibitions

Liam Gillick. *Three perspectives and a short scenario*, 2008. Installation at Witte de With, Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Bob Goedewaagen.

ABOVE
Liam Gillick. *Lapsed Reduction*, 2008
Powder-coated aluminum and Plexiglas
78 3/4 x 118 1/8 x 11 13/16 in.
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, gift of Maryand Earle Ludgin by exchange

Liam Gillick. *Rescinded Production*, 2008.
Powder coated aluminum and Plexiglas.
78 3/4 x 94 1/8 x 94 3/8 in.
Collection Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, gift of Maryand Earle Ludgin

*MCA Curator Dominic Molon, who organized the MCA presentation of Three perspectives, spoke with the artist about his development as an artist as well as past, present, and future projects.*

**Dominic Molon**: When you chose Chicago as the one city in the United States where this exhibition would be presented, you cited its history of applied design and architecture as a factor in that decision. How do you see your work in relationship to that history?

**Liam Gillick**: I have always been interested in the gap between modernist art and the history of applied modernism, with its various “post" forms. This exhibition was specifically developed for Zurich, Rotterdam, and Chicago. These are all places where modernist design was deployed actively in the city both as a way to try to make things better and to signify modernity and exchange. None of these are "capital" cities but they have each been major centers of trade for their respective nations. While they have deepening historical roots, they are essentially modern in outlook.

**DM:** You've mentioned that aspects of the exhibition were inspired by your interests prior to your formal art training. What were some of those interests?

**LG**: When I was thinking about how to put together some form of retrospective, I was struck by the fact that for my generation it is often hard to locate any originating moment. I realized that a key turning point in my work was actually rooted in a moment before I thought about art as the focus of my life. And that realization informs the look of the exhibition: a combination of a fascination with the modern architecture of postwar Europe; a longing to see the expression of that in terms of infrastructure in the US-in the airports, highways, and city centers; and an interest in post-punk graphic design, particularly Peter Saville's work for Factory Records. These influences are the show's aesthetic DNA. So the exhibition is also a portrait of the artist, a combination of old and new, stories and material facts, traces from the past and pointers toward the future.

**DM**: When Three perspectives and a short scenario was presented at the Witte de With in Rotterdam, projects by other, more emerging artists were included as part of the exhibition. You are also an adjunct professor at Columbia University in New York, where you are directly involved in the artistic development of your students. How do you see these artists either extending or departing from aspects of your work?

**LG:** As the feminist theorist Juliet Mitchell pointed out, children are influenced as much by peers and siblings as they are by their parents. The same is true at Columbia. It has been a wonderful experience meeting such a diverse and complex group of young people over the last 12 years. My role is to try to get them to talk and think about how to be an artist now. The question of what they do is not something I try to overly influence. They teach each other. They fight against what I represent. We find a way to have a discussion but

I am not trying to influence them in any way other than encouraging them to find new models of practice and to find a way somewhere under the sun, as Lawrence Weiner used to say. They depart from what I do in radical ways but they also depart from each other. It has also been a challenge to try and reinvent my role at every moment. That is the key to how I approach things there: radical inconsistency.

**DM**: You studied art at Goldsmith's College in London in the late 1980s. Were there instructors or other, already established artists or even fellow students who had a significant impact on your development as an artist?

**LG**: We were all deeply competitive but supportive at the same time. This seems like a contradiction but it really was a competition of ideas rather than an ego battle. And even to this day, when we can clearly see such a complete schism between what I do and, for example, what Damien Hirst does, there is still a way for us to communicate. This is fairly unique and mainly due to the influence of a deeply committed teaching staff who were allowed to work without the hindrance of bureaucratic obligation for the most part. Michael Craig Martin, my teacher, was particularly important.

**OM:** While you were born in England and live in the United States , you occupied the German Pavilion at this year's Venice Biennale. How did past artists' contributions to the pavilion for other national pavilions) inform your process of developing this project?

**LG**: It is one of these complicated things where, of course, you are interested in what has come before and you remind yourself of what has been achieved, but essentially you become a passive subject once you agree to take on the project. You symbolize the embodiment of an unachievable process of "representation." It puts you in an impossible role. So you try and work with what you have, and you know you will be punished and lauded for it in equally meaningless ways. For my work in Venice, I attempted to remain independent and implicated at the same time . This is extremely difficult to achieve, but for some people it worked. What I actually hope is that the work is creating new questions and problems for people in the future rather than right at this moment.

*Support for LiAm Gilfick: Three perspectives and short scenario is generously provided by Marilyn and Larry Fields, Jack and Sandra Guthman, The Chauncey and Marion D. McCormick Family Foundation, Julie and Larry Bernstein, The Danielson Foundation, Helyn Goldenberg, and Roberta and Michael Joseph.*

ABOVE RIGHT
Photo courtesy of Steffen Jagenburg

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GUGGENHEIM

## THE WRIGHT OPENS IN NEW YORK'S GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

(NEW YORK, NY - December 8, 2009)—Celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum's Frank Lloyd Wright–designed building, The Wright, New York City's newest restaurant, opens to the public on December 11, in the famed museum. Named in honor of the great American architect, the intimate Upper East Side destination is located in an elegant and modern architectural space that is sure to dazzle trendsetters, fine diners, art lovers, and world travelers. Additionally, a site-specific sculpture by British artist Liam Gillick was commissioned for the space, creating a truly unique dining experience.

### The Art

In summer 2009, the Guggenheim commissioned British-born artist Liam Gillick (b. 1964) to develop a sculptural installation for The Wright. Gillick navigates across a broad range of disciplines, developing his ideas through texts as well as object-based installations. His commissioned work, The horizon produced by a factory once it had stopped producing views (2009), traces the restaurant's distinct architectural space. Conceived as a sculpture that can be expanded or contracted to fit any designated space, this piece comprises a sequence of horizontal planks of powder-coated aluminum mounted to the walls and ceiling; a similarly constructed transparent screen marks the entrance to site. The resulting room-size installation creates a modular skin on the interior's surface, its parallel beams meant to be understood, according to the artist, as "a series of horizons."

The horizon reflects Gillick's interest in "modes of production rather than consumption" and is part of an ongoing narrative begun in 2004 that centers on a future post-capitalist society. With this work, Gillick invokes the horizontal vista as a space where visitors can reflect and discuss how the built environment structures and patterns everyday lives.

The horizon produced by a factory once it had stopped producing views (2009) was purchased with funds contributed by Restaurant Associates and the International Directors Council of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and is a partial gift of Casey Kaplan and the artist.

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LIAM GILLICK

# PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

AN INTERVIEW BY SAUL OSTROW

*For over 20 years, Liam Gillick has addressed the question of how art has been used to advance a broad range of social and ideological agendas, and to subvert and exploit the material and political structures that order contemporary life. During this time, he has developed a situated practice, one that is site specific in both conceptual and physical terms. Having no studio other than his laptop, Gillick determines what he will do at a given location by employing "scenario thinking," a methodology that permits him to focus on how the contingencies of a given site corporate headquarters, institutional space, the public domain-offer differing opportunities for him to exercise his relational and comparative critical processes. The works that result subtly underscore the indeterminacies and uncertainties that inform both Gillick's own practice and the forces that sustain a collective or social reality.*

*In 1996, Gillick-along with Jorge Pardo, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Philippe Parreno, Pierre Huyghe, Carsten Holler, Christine Hill, Vanessa Beecroft and Maurizio Cattelan-was included in French criticlcurator Nicolas Bourriaud's exhibition "Traffic" at CAPC Bordeaux in France. In his essay for the show, Bourriaud coined the terms "relational esthetics" and "relational art" to describe the strategies of these artists, whose works he understood to be resisting the closure and instrumentality of standard accusatory social critiques by instead probing social relationships. The highly charged program for "relational art," which takes the whole of human relations and their social contexts as its subject, would appear to be at odds with the minimalist sculptures made from colored Plexiglas and aluminum (they recall room dividers, bookshelves, storage units) for which Gillick is perhaps best known, though they amount to only a portion of his diverse production.*

*Indeed, there seems at first to be little that is critical about Gillick's installations of these "sculptures," which reference the work of Sol LeWitt, Donald Judd and Dan Graham, and seem more concerned with mixing the classic modernist principles of De Stijl and Constructivism with Pop-ish color and a corporate esthetic. But by installing these sculptures so that they have a precise spatial relation to one another, and through the titles he gives to each series and the individual works within it, Gillick seeks to expand our reception of the works to include a consideration of issues of production, distribution and consumption. In other projects, Gillick employs graphic design, wall painting, architectural and curatorial interventions, films and animation, art criticism, novellas and collaborations with artists, architects and writers, all to create situated works that reference and reflect the social, ethical, political, and ideological conditions and dilemmas that circumscribe art, artist and audience, and-by analogy-society as a whole. He has also published a number of books that function in tandem with his artworks.*

*Born in 1964, Gillick graduated from Goldsmiths College, University of London, in 1987. Having shown extensively in Europe and the U.S., his first major solo show in London, "The Wood Way," appeared at the Whitechapel Gallery in 2002. That same year he was a nominee for the Turner Prize. Today, though seemingly constantly traveling, he lives and works in New York. In January 2008, a retrospective, "Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario," opened at the Witte de With, Rotterdam, and the Kunsthalle Zürich. It will travel to the Kunstverein München in September 2009 and to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago [Oct. 10-Jan. 10, 2010]. This interview took place in the artist's New York apartment in the early spring, just as Gillick was preparing to leave for Venice, where he will be exhibiting in the German pavilion at the Venice Biennale.*

**SAUL OSTROW** How is it that an Englishman who lives in New York ends up in the German pavilion at the Venice Biennale this year?

**LIAM GILLICK** Well I think to a certain extent it comes down to changes in curating that have happened in the last 20 years. The fact is that I'm part of a generation of European artists who really move freely across the borders of Europe, and this also happened to coincide with a new generation of curators who maybe in the past might have become writers or critics. To a certain extent I'm viewed by curators as representative of that generation. I've worked in Germany a lot, and I've shown in Germany more than any other place. I also think it's a bit of a test, like a moral or ethical game. A little bit like saying, okay you feel so comfortable here, you feel it's such a generative and productive context, what happens if we actually put you in such a symbolic situation? Will you just carryon like normal or are you going to have to change something? So, to a certain extent, it's a test.

**SO** Nicolaus Schafhausen [curator of the German pavilion] is based in Rotterdam?

**LG** Yes. And that's quite interesting. The relationship historically between the Netherlands and Germany is quite complicated, to put it mildly. Nicolaus was viewed with some skepticism when he arrived in Rotterdam to direct the Witte de With, and understandably so. Here you have someone coming to Holland from a very well-funded-I mean they're both well-funded-and historically complex cultural terrain. [Schafhausen had been the director of the Frankfurter Kunstverein.] There can be some tension, but I'm quite impressed by the way he seems to function there without becoming what you could call a typical person who goes to live in the Netherlands because they want to become part of a certain model of liberal society. He's not that. He's still trying to keep some antagonism there, a little bit.

**SO** He hasn't become polite.

**LG** No, definitely not.

**SO** And you first knew him as an artist?

**LG** Yes. I met him as an artist. That background does make him rather different from most other German curators who are on a high level. Curators' salaries were linked to an academic scale, so that if they don't have a doctorate in art history

Right, Liam Gillick unlocking the door of the German Pavilion during his April 2009 visit

Gillicks's snapshot of the German Pavilion

they don't get paid properly. Nicolaus comes from a more improvised and mutable background-he started as an artist and then opened a private gallery, Lukas and Hoffmann, and he showed people like Olafur Eliasson and Henning Bohl when they were young. It was a rather self-conscious Cologne gallery in the early '90s. Later, he took over a space in Stuttgart called the Konstlerhaus, which is a bit like a non-profit; it's much less of an institution and more of an equivalent to something like White Columns in New York. Konstlerhaus always operated at a slightly different level. Nicolaus doesn't come from an academic background. But he has a very precise relationship with artists and he likes artists. Maybe that's a stupid thing to say.

**SO** We all know curators who just like art and would rather the artists go away.

**LG** Absolutely. The artist for those curators is an impediment to the trajectory of critical theory. What's crucial to understand about my relationship with Nicolaus is that it has always been rather fraught. I think that's the case partly because he was an artist and because he's been in so many situations where I have been. There's an assumption that long-term relationships always mean conspiracy or collaboration, whereas, in fact, in personal relationships there's a kind of frustration. I think that Nicolaus views some of my trajectory as being a parallel life he could have had, and vice versa. And he's very conscious of the dangers of it, the delusions of it, the weaknesses and strengths, so he's often trying to put me into situations that are quite difficult. It's like giving someone a gift that's a pain in the ass.

**SO** You worked with Nicolaus at Witte de With. Has it become more collaborative with you two? Is it a call and response relationship? Does he throw this challenge at you?

**LG** No, but you know that feeling you get when there's a hidden agenda. You do a show and you work with someone, and people have certain modes of behavior that indicate a degree of freedom, for example, and gradually that's moderated by whether they really like that work you did then, or they're really interested in this aspect of your work, and that's what they really want to put across. You gradually work out with this person the hidden agenda, and you either fight against it or you don't, or you let it wash over you. The weird thing about working with Nicolaus is that he does not do any of those things. And sometimes he'll even disappear.

**SO** Is that the reason why, when we first exchanged e-mails, you still didn't know what you were doing for Venice?

**LG** Yes, but now that it's me who's doing the "disappearing," I'm making him anxious, because I have a basic framework and a structure that I can describe a little bit, but it's absolutely incomplete at this stage. I have decided to leave many aspects unclear until the last minute. If it has to be a secret to others, then it ought to be a secret to me, too. We started to work in April. So I can turn it around. I think he's conscious that people often try to give me a context, or they give me a job, or they have, say, an understanding of a dichotomy that might be in the work that they want to be there-extend one side of it, or reduce another one, or resolve it, or something, whereas with him, it's interesting. He has a kind of strange ambition for someone to do something new, which in a way seems quaint, the idea that you could do something new.

**SO** So this becomes an opportunity for you to extend your work?

**LG** Yes, every time I've worked with him I've done something that's been a major shift in the work. But he has not manipulated me into doing that; he has somehow created the productive environment where I end up stuck, or I end up thinking. I enter into a different critical relationship with my own work, and strangely enough he does that through offering a very complicated idea of anything being possible.

**SO** What has become imperative with the pavilion, with it being Venice, your own work and this relationship with Nicolaus?

**LG** I had to ask myself a lot of questions that I think people have always asked themselves in the postwar German art context, but also as someone who has happily worked there for 20 years. I definitely suffered because I want to do something serious, but I can't make a parody of being serious. I mean, what's serious? But I think my work's reasonably serious anyway. I've been invited because of what I do, so if I suddenly make this whole project an exception to what I do, as it were, then that's not why I was invited. But the question is, is this an exception? So is this the moment when you knock down the building, and you start again?

**SO** That's been done.
**LG** Well one of the early ideas I had, which I still like, was when I went to look at the building in October last year. It's a bit like buying a used car-I'm not really sure what to do on these site visits. There's an architect who looks after the building-he's a very nice, elegant German architectural historian-and he is the guardian of the building. So I'm wandering around, and I looked at the floor, and I said, can I drill into the floor. What about these bits here? What's behind that? And he said, well, we'd rather you didn't drill into the central room floor because it's new-ish, but in the four side rooms you can do what you want. And I thought, that's a really odd thing to say, because surely it's normally the other way around-you can't touch the original floor but you can touch the new one. And then I realized that Hans Haacke hadn't dug up the whole floor in 1993. It's funny how much that's an enduring myth. I even read it in a magazine the other day. But he only dug up the central room. I thought, well, as an exception maybe I should step outside the normal, rather convoluted track of my work, and just call Hans Haacke and say, do you want to finish the job? And we'd go over to Venice together, and dig up the rest of the floor that Hitler and Mussolini walked on. And that would be a serious project, maybe not one for me but there could be some logic to it. Because whatever you think of Hans Haacke, for a lot of people that's seen as a very important work after the Berlin Wall. It's the first postWall statement, and it's a troubling one. It's partly saying even though the wall's come down and even though things are getting fixed there's still a big problem. Do you see what I mean?
**SO** At least in my reading, your work never enters that symbolic realm.
**LG** No. But it did occur to me that maybe it should. Maybe this is the exception. I thought, I'll talk to my dealer in London at Corvi-Mora Gallery. He's Italian, and I said to him, if I wanted to knock down a building in Venice, how difficult would it be? And he said, in the winter time, everything's possible. Someone gets the wrong papers ... everything could be done.
I know it's very rude to be a guest and then smash up the room. But, you know, you have to think about all these possibilities. If this is so bad-and every German critic and journalist who has talked to me has only asked me initially about Nazi buildings-and if it's such a horrible symbolic site, maybe something should be done about it, and it shouldn't be tolerated. When I was there in October, I looked around and I thought, if I knock down this one, then I better knock down the British pavilion, too, because it looks like a colonial building in a way. It's got a lavatory, it's got a kitchen, it's got all the things you'd need to survive when the natives are surrounding the building. Then I thought, well I'd better knock down the Italian pavilion as well, because that's real Fascist architecture, not just renovated. And you wouldn't know where to stop. If you took it to its logical conclusion it would be horrific. What I did instead is I asked a rhetorical question in a way, because I half knew the answer. I got a reply from the guy who looks after the Documenta archive, and he said there was a plan by Arnold Bode, the guy who started Documenta. Bode designed a building in 1958 to replace the original German pavilion. But because money was tight and it was a difficult time, what he proposed was to use the basic concrete framework of the building-it's actually a modern building underneath all that stuff-and turn it into a standard postwar German modernist building. So the first thing I did for the whole project was make a 3D computer model from Bode's drawings. I'm working on producing what's going to end up being an edition. It's kind of a red herring in a way, but it's an edition that for the first time builds an actual model of this building that he wanted to do.
**SO** Then what we're talking about is a scale model?
**LG** Yeah. The edition of Bode's proposal will be about 50 cm by 50 cm [roughly 19% inches] by 30 cm [nearly 12 inches].
**SO** It's an object.
**LG** Exactly, a thing. But that's a good way around the problem sometimes. What you do is you imagine. What if I didn't have to deal with all of these questions everyone is asking me, especially in Germany, about this Nazi building? What if, in 1958, they'd done another building that looked just like the Scandinavian pavilion? Would it have been any different? Would Joseph Beuys have been the subject in 1976 of an amazing series of photographs of a man who looks absolutely devastated standing in a rubble-strewn building, attempting to do something? Would Richter's portraits in 1972, which are very precise and very stark within this rather churchlike building, have been there? None of this would have been there. It would have been a double-level kunsthaus. None of this has got anything to do with what I'm doing in the end, but I found it productive in a strange way to start by doing something that isn't really what I'm known for.
**SO** So the first imperative was the history.
**LG** It was more of a slightly belligerent response to repeatedly being asked what I think about showing in this building. Sometimes, to be a bit glib, I'd say you know I've shown in Fascist and Falangist buildings all over Europe. I've shown in Malaga in Spain; I've shown in the Haus der Kunst in Munich. I'm an expert at showing in these kinds of spaces, along with all the other people who have shown in them.
**SO** What's interesting here is doing away with the building. A kind of erasure.
**LG** What I thought I would do is to switch off the building. How do you switch off a building? Well, I'll be surrounded by Steve McQueen [in the British pavilion], Mark Lewis [in the Canadian pavilion],' and Haegue Yang [in the Korean pavilion]. Maybe I can just join these people and make a film, too. That's a good way of switching off the building. You don't have to see it-you walk in and it's dark, there's nothing there. I haven't talked to anyone about this before. Partly because of you asking to do this interview-I started to think, how can I control the sound in a building like this, which would be a dark building. So I looked at various soundproofing techniques and different soundbaffling structures to break up the sound rather than carpeting the place. I don't see a carpet in a Fascist building. I don't want people lounging around on the floor or feeling too comfortable. It's just like that Kippenberger painting with the title With the Best Will in the World I Can't See a Swastika. I found myself up in the middle of the night doing renderings on the computer of this sound-baffling system that I'd worked out for the walls. It involved my standard lexicon of geometric hard-edged applied modernism, and I was looking for swastikas in the shadows that were being cast in the gloom and I thought, I have to stop, I'm losing my mind, what am I doing? So after working on it for months, I abandoned this attempt to switch off

a science-fiction film, because in the postwar period the one thing Germans can't do is make a science-fiction film. It doesn't exist-maybe it cannot exist. I started to think, what can I do that cannot be done in Germany? If they invite a fellow European to do something, what can I bring and show them how to do? So I embarked on this process of thinking somehow it's possible to make a very complex and serious science-fiction film without any actual planning, or a crew, or script. I went to Chicago, bought a camera, this fancy camera, and filmed the snow. I thought if I do enough establishing shots I'll end up with something. I even came up with a title-it would be episodic, 10 episodes, 12 minutes each, and it would be called Trick City. It just seemed like a good name for a science-fiction film.

**SO** A sequel to Alphaville.

**LG** Yes, that's exactly right. When I'd exhausted the Greek alphabet and the word "stadt," I realized I had to move on to a different thing, so yes, the Trick City is like the Alphaville of 2009. I even scouted out Roosevelt Island. The primary master plan was done by Philip Johnson. You've got the American who was influenced by European high modernism but somehow is a complicated character with rumors about his past and all the complicated stories. Then you've got this attempt to make a kind of European style instant housing project. It's the most European part of New York that I've ever been to. But again, it's not my work. And·then, of course, I thought, I should just not do it. I should say I'm sorry, I can't. I have no ideas. Why not? This would be quite interesting. You send out an e-flux announcement saying, the German Ministry is pleased to announce that Liam Gillick has no ideas.

So I ended up writing, which is often the way I work through things. I wrote a long text that I gave as a talk in Berlin in March. Given several of the things I'd said about Nicolaus being a very complicated but very generative noncollaborator, I'd had some pressure to do the typical contemporary thing, which is create a series of panels, or discussions, or something around an event. I kept slipping into becoming a different person. I had good ideas for other artists for the pavilion. I realized part of the problem was this looming discourse, and there's this notion that I'm supposed to be interested in discourse. But it doesn't mean I want to have one. It doesn't mean I want to be programming one. Then I said, I'll do one event, and I'll try to account for myself, I'll try to talk about what I'm interested in, in a very simple way, and that unlocked a lot of things.

**SO** Readers of your work can range from those who don't like it at all, who consider it opportunistic in how it moves about, to others who see it as highly political but can't identify how. In my reading, it's an attempt to understand the difference between coming from discourse and being part of discourse.

**LG** I completely agree. I need a context to work within, so what seems to be opportunist is in a strange way a correct reading, because in fact the work didn't evolve and then find a site-it evolved alongside the sites and the contexts. Also, I don't think every artist has to deal with their biography, but I come from a background of strong identification with Irish Republican politics, which is full of subterfuge, misleading statements. It's not imbedded in my way of seeing things, but when I'm told that the correct way to be a politically conscious artist is to have transparency throughout everything you do, I'm not sure that I think that every politically conscious activity is surrounded and best served by transparency. So while I have moments of clear positions, they're often muddled by this distrust of transparency, distrust that the good artist and the good political artist is always a transparent artist, who will always reveal sources, desires and needs.

**SO** How do you think the politics of Venice will come to circumscribe you, or is that a consideration?

**LG** I never think that national pavilions are that interesting, frankly.

**SO** No, I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about the notion of English artist, German pavilion, this curator.

**LG** It's not a radical move, frankly. I mean if you really wanted to do something, there are people or groups or individuals within the society who would have much more symbolic capital by doing this. It comes back down to this question of, can I just continue like normal? Maybe this is a big problem. Maybe it means that the German self-conscious postwar agonies are being marginalized. Or maybe this is a difficulty, and if it is, it doesn't necessarily fix anything. For sure, it's got nothing to do with fixing anything. And I'm not a group of Kurdish activists, where I'd have a daily need to be on the street, an urgent political requirement to function in a certain way.

It's more about, if everything seems to be fixed, and everything seems to be rolling along very nicely, and every few weeks another new space opens, and we all welcome Angela Bulloch and Olafur Eliasson and Jonathan Monk to come and hang out and live in Berlin and cycle around on their bikes and have a good time, what happens if you put someone like me in the German pavilion? Does it mean that this is all fine? That the new Berlin life is all fine? That everything has been working out just great, and this is just another German building?

I'm not sure. I'm convinced that what will happen is that ... I don't know what will happen. That's the answer. I'm surrounded by questions. One thing is for sure: one thing that's very interesting and very productive about working in Germany for years has been the fact that people ask questions. So for an artist like me who started with no vision, deliberately in a way, and no ideas, in a strange way-lots of ideas but no idea, singular-it's been very productive to work in a context where people ask questions. And then also when you respond, they might return to the question again, but in new form. Let me put it another way. One of the first questions I had from a mainstream journalist in Germany was, "when you win the Golden Lion for Germany, how will you feel?" Such a great question. And of course I revealed my background by saying, "I didn't know it was a competition." And they looked slightly horrified when I said it. But you know, the biggest danger is to be sucked into what is a very possessive and very serious cultural context.

**SO** Okay, so given that you decided not to make the sequel to Alphaville , what comes next as a possibility?

**LG** Well, I can't be too precise about it, but ... I'm very interested in the history of applied art and the his-

Gillick: Developmental, 2008, painted aluminum and Plexiglas, four elements, each 11 'le by 47V. by 3Va inches. Courtesy Casey Kaplan Gallery, New York

View of Gillick's Mirrored Image: A Volvo Bar, 2008. Courtesy Kunstverein Munich.

tory of applied modernism. I became very interested in Margarete Schutte Lihotzky [Austrian architect and designer, 1897-2000], the woman who designed the Frankfurt Kitchen. Schutte-Lihotzky lived in Russia, she was a good Communist and a good Marxist, and she did good work. She designed a kitchen to make life better. She designed kindergartens. There's only one book about Schutte-Lihotzky in print, containing the drawings and the thinking about the avant-garde that I find interesting. It shows you how to use a kitchen. There's something everyday in this, and I think in a way this is a great anti-Fascist book. Now, it's not a great anti-Fascist book in the way the anti-Fascist collages are great, but it is because it claims the domestic in a different way.

I'd always joked with people about the fact that in a Fascist building there's no toilet, there's no bathroom. And in fact the German pavilion technically is not up to code for a German public building. It has no rest area for workers, no lavatory, and nowhere to make tea and coffee and keep the beer, and so on. So I went through a number of other deracinated Michael Asher possibilities, like getting the budget and giving it to a bunch of contractors in Italy, and just giving them a little list that says it needs a toilet, it needs a rest area, bathroom, but without specifying what to do and just seeing what happens. I'd arrive in Venice and who knows, they might have done a very nice thing. But in fact the answer is to stop thinking about art in a way, to stop thinking about the recent history of German art, and stop thinking about what gets done in that pavilion, and start thinking about it as a working environment, and what had been done in the past to make things better, and how they'd failed or succeeded. So that's where we are. That sort of brings us up to the beginning of April. I'm making a workshop there to a certain extent. I've worked with a fabricator in Berlin for the last 10 years, and we work very closely on things, but we hardly ever meet. Basically they're all heading out on Apr. 12, and we'll convene in Venice and we'll start to work. There is a belief that the pavilion idea has to be embargoed until the last second, because somehow there's this myth that they open the doors and everyone gasps when they see the Bruce Nauman video, as if they didn't know what it would be. This is really counter to my working method. The worst thing is that you're not supposed to talk about it until it happens, until the morning of the 3rd of June. People have said things like, "How are you going to deal with this?" or "What project are you working on?" But they view it as an exceptional moment, so I'm trying to find a methodology that allows me to still have ideas. If I'm not allowed to really talk openly about it, I can talk about some ideas. We've rented apartments in Venice, and amongst us we'll create our own kind of semi-commune, where ideas can be generated and can be executed quite fast. A lot of people e-mail and say, oh you must be really deeply stuck in working on Venice and so on. And I say, oh yes, I am. Because I am thinking about it. But the question really is how do you find a working method or a working, productive context within which ideas can be produced? And that's really the key. It doesn't help you to know whether you'll arrive and there'll be no building, or there are great toilets, or a large number of rather mute, corrupted formalist artworks. I became truly free-in fact I'm not stressed at all-when I realized the problem wasn't what to do, because if I'd asked myself over the years, what should I do, I probably wouldn't have done half the things I've done. I would have done a different kind of art.

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> INTERVIEW

**Liam Gillick** interviewed by **John Slyce**

# Recuperating MODERNISM

**John Slyce**: *SHALL WE BEGIN BY LOOKING AT THE RETROSPECTIVE? How did things come together at the Kunstverein in Munich? I understand you staged a play?*

**Liam Gillick**: The Munich aspect of the show is really the production part of the retrospective project.

Everything else - in Zurich and Chicago and Rotterdam - had a somewhat dark quality, and I didn't get my hands dirty or get deeply engaged in the execution of the structures. In Zurich, and Chicago and Rotterdam I gave back 50% of the space to each institution to deal with and use to address the work over the last 20 years. For Munich I thought it would be a good reflection of my practice to make one part of this retrospective absolutely production-orientated. And, of course, a play is literally a production. It's the aspect of the retrospective where I asked for certain elements to be put into place, including people - I worked with 15 actors. I had a basic outline of what this play would be and I had a basic structure in the gallery, but beyond that I didn't know the precise details until I got there.


**Liam Gillick**, A Volvo Bar Kunstverein Munich

That's taken me back, really, to my original way of working, which is a developed form of the Seth Siegelaub idea of sending artists to shows and not art. I put myself into the position I was in back in 1990 when I'd go to Nice and I'd work out what to do when I got there. It put me somewhat on the spot. I had to find a way to stage a play - in German.

**JS:** *To produce a production in a post- production mode?*

**LG**: Yes, exactly. It went on for two months or so, a longer run than a lot of real plays get.

The idea was to use the play as a way to introduce various characters I have worked with over the years. I've often used the idea of the person who carries a narrative, or carries an ideological component within the work, and in this case I saw each of the characters in the playas potentially having multiple functions. They were, in a way, a group of people that I might have worked with over the year (or certain curators and artists), but at the same time they were also all one person and they were also all me.

**JS**: *And what is the historical time of the play?*

**LG**: It is set on the day of the birth of the main character, not a birthday but literally the day of birth. But it is also set in the present, in a bar next to a Volvo factory hence the title *A Volvo Bar*. Some of the locations are also the Kunstverein itself. So the director's office, for example, is one of the locations - not literally; it is just one of the places that gets talked about. The basic outline is: there's a bar next to a Volvo factory and a man arrives on the day of his birth and interacts with various characters in the bar. They describe power relationships and locations which are the location of the play: the Kunstverein in Munich and at the same time the discourse is generated from the perspective of a bar in Sweden.

Structurally, it makes perfect sense in relation to my work - the idea that you are both forced to address the current surroundings (because that's where the work is), but you also have to accept, at some level, that the focus of the work is displaced. So you have a doubling of reference points in relation to the site and this causes tension that mirrors the way my work often functions. There's a concern, sometimes, in the way that people deal with the physical work that I make - that the work doesn't match my rhetoric, or the work doesn't seem to match the words. I've always wondered in which period of history art has literally matched what was said about it, in a precise way. I mean, that's what is interesting about art: the att empt to constantly redescribe the artwork, or redescribe what it is doing.

**JS**: *Can we look more closely at the issue of avoiding the transparent message or direct access in the meaning in the work. I've never had the sensation that there's a mismatch or disconnect between word and object in the work. In fact, that's the relationship set up. Can you talk about your wish to avoid that kind of transparencey, even as far back as 1990 when you were looking at documentary forms?*

**LG**: There are very dear reasons for this apparent avoidance. On an idealistic level, the only way you can use art is as a fragmented mirror of the complexity of contemporary society and you try to produce a system of art production that is just as multifaceted and potentially misleading, based on a serie of parallels. This was my main revelation at art school - the idea of art production as a series of parallels. Michael Craig Martin used to talk about the idea that instead of his work having a style within a trajectory of late Modernism, he - the artist - would be the common factor in his art. This would free him up; allow him to do many different things. Now, of course, his work has become more consolidated and recognisably his - but initially it jumped around a lot.

Yet, if you emerged during a period of difference - of revised forms of identity and new understandings about relativism in relation to cultural meaning and social structure - then of course you wouldn't be happy with just saying, Well, I'll be the common factor and I'll let the work fmd its own way.' You must also dissolve a little bit, too, as an author. While the work is always heavily authored up to a point, the sense of responsibility for authorship, or the level of authorship, is questionable. The location of the art moment does not reside with my consistent presence. It can exist at different moments within the work.

In early Modernism you can see a quite urgent exchange between the process of modernity and the critical reflection of Modernism but, as time goes on, these processes get further and further apart. And it's that gap that I'm interested in: the gap between modernity and the critical potential of Modernism and Postmodernism.

And that's how I might end up designing a shelf, for example, which is what I have been doing recently. It is not because I'm interested in design alone, and it is not because I'm interested in art and architecture. It is because the act of designing a shelf has a very particular meaning if you are operating in this gap between modernity and Modernism. This explains a lot about the work, I think.

I always used to say that I was more interested in Anni Albers than Josef Albers, and this remains true. I am more interested in the applied forms of Modernism, the attempt to have a much more functional role in relation to daily life; but I also want to operate in an art context. I don't want to operate in the textile world or in the world of applied art. I was quite influenced

even as a student - by Swiss artists like Richard Paul Lohse, who might make posters for the public transport system and produce reductive abstract paintings, both as equal aspects of his practice. This seemed extremely interesting to me: the idea that you could operate in a terrain where it might be normal for you to be doing these different tasks but operating from the perspective of being an artist.

People describe me - as they did during the Vincent Award at the Stedelijk Museum the other day - as, 'critic, writer, designer, artist'. And I think this is odd because these things they are referring to are all part of my art production. The problem, historically, is that this might be a big claim to make. So I don't necessarily mean it in a profound way. I just mean that my artistic practice includes these approaches as different forms not supplemental activities.

**JS**: *Yes. But it is a condition of that polymathic exisitence that people have to understand what one does- if you do multifacted things - as a hyphenated kind identity. Maybe it is related to the problem of why people feel that they have to "get it', or at least should be able to "get it" that there should be a one- to - one relationship with what is before the viewer - whether that be Liam Gillick as artist or the work that Liam Gillick produces.*

**LG**: Just for the sake of argument, if you try to describe what art could be - drawing only on extremes of artistic practice now - and you cut out all the bits that are ambiguous and annoying the extremes would be a kind of transparent documentary form on the one hand, and a form of super self-consciousness, super subjectivity on the other. When I meet with my graduate students in New York, for example, they seem to be loosely divided into these contemporary camps.

**JS**: *Neither pole of the art practices you describe dodges the problem of "getting it."*

**LG**: Yes, because I make use of both strategies, in a way. There's an acute super subjective element to the work and there is also an extreme clarity about certain things, but the work as a whole is not intended to fulfill either of those two extremes of contemporary art fully. It steps a little outside simple binarism.

I've just been writing a text about the idea of the discursive as the basis of dynamic art production in the last few years. I think this is a better way of describing relational practice than ta1king about some kind of interactive or social component. The idea that art comes out through negotiation, not through sitting alone at home with a piece of paper and how this discursive potential of art can be sustained over time.

**JS**: *I think there's more access to the subjective content in your work through your writing. Maybe the real interest of this play is that it will make visible, in a non-writerly exactly those kinds of writerly activities and subjectivities. It strikes me as a kind of Erasmus Is Late proposition, but as a play, not directly as a text.*

**LG**: Yes, and it has shifted to the recent past because I am looking at the idea of 'the moment' that could have been - the ultimate postwar moment. For example, take a random date like June 17, 1974, when the mode of production in the Volvo factory was perfect, when the idea of new forms of teamwork hadn't yet turned into a form of flexibility that led inevitably to redundancy. I am interested in 'setting' my work on the day before this all dissolves into a neo-liberal farce.

So my play is set on that day. It is set on an ideal day in Sweden when Calvinist, good, hard working low church values have produced a system tllat is viewed as exemplary, as a way of retaining forms of honest capitalism, good production, teamworking and flexiblc working practices. But the action takes place in a bar. And they don't have bars at Volvo factories. I've been thinking about this a lot recently, the idea that certain modes of thinking and certain modes or models of art production even curating and critical writing - are really deeply steeped in some of the postwar structures that led to Volvo's teamwork and flexibility. Starting at playgroup, through to the way you're taught to work in team at school and on to the workplace with its projects and projections. I am trying to look again at some of these questions. If we assume that the post· war period is a completed moment - historically - then how do we reengage with the better aspects of ameliorated working conditions? How can we continue to work in a discursive manner if its basis merely prepared everyone for redundancy? Can we find a way to accept difference and work collectively?

**JS**: *Those are fundamental and very heavy-questions. How would you describe our strategy or approach to posing - let alone answering such questions?*

**LG**: Most of my work on this question came from looking through Brazilian academic paper about progressive working practices in Scandinavia, which tells you quite a lot about my working method. In a fairly undirected way, I just read South American academic papers about innovations in Volvo car production in the 70s. The work was made while thinking about

**Liam Gillick** *Quarter Scale Model of a Social Strucutre for a Plaza in Guadalajara* 2005

>>The only way you can use art is as a fragmented mirror of the complexity of contemporary society and you try to produce a system of art production that is just as multifaceted and potentially misleading. This was my main revelation at art school -the idea of art production as a series of parallels.

these things. Sometimes works are produced under the innuence of thinking about something when I made them, though this innuence never manifests itself in a direct, didactic way.

**JS**: *Yet it doesn't come forward as a decoy? Many practices position work as research, but what comes forward is fundamentally a decoy that even sends you back to the original research, only to spiral off somewhere else.*

**LG:** Yes, but in the press release for my show in New York - I quite enjoy writing press releases, they're getting more and more ludicrous - I mentioned some of this stuff and in the more mainstream reviews of the show, of course, people simply didn't get it. I didn't say that it was an exhibition illustrating the conditions of car production in Sweden in the 70s - far from it. I said the work was made while considering these ideas—that's a totally different thing. Even then, however, you are faced with shiny metal objects and overreaching statements, which in my mind is quite a precise parallel to car production and consumption.

**JS**: *What is the function then of the original research material, or even a press release, or critical writing on the work by yourself or others, if not an extension to the experience of the art?*

**LG:** It is interesting. There's always a subtext in the work - and it is not just in my work, I think you see it in the work of some of the other people of my age - there's a mixture of clarity and ... almost a petulance at some levels. It is connected to a fear of being sucked into an instrumentalised art practice. It is a suspicion of being sucked into a responsible Habermasian art practice that is all to do with everyone having perfect information and contributing to an even-handed dialogue about how to produce a better society.

I am also interested in artistic autonomy. I think that people like myself, who were bom in between the end of the Second World War and the fall of the Berlin Wall, saw a lot of other things happening that made us not entirely 100% sure about anything. The period or the IRA, the Red Brigades and the permanent threat of nuclear annihilation led to a distrust of transparency. It was a time of subterfuge and conspiracy and the last thing you might want to do is telegraph your intentions to the dominant culture by rnerly parroting or mirroring the worst of it We wanted to make use other products or the postwar period as social spaces and spaces for art and so on, but not necessarily to go along with that completely. We wanted an interventionist strategy, whereby sites both literal and metaphorical could be appropriated. Production would be the focus or critique, not consumption.

I wanted to look at all this and to make the complexity of the built world and its manipulation the subject of the art. And I think that's true throughout my work from the beginning - even when I was collaborating with Henry Bond in the early 90s on documentary photos in response to daily updates from the Press Association. We used our self consciousness about our backgrounds, gender, appearance and access to higher education to get into dosed events. We didn't want to separate ourselves from the production of events within society in a postmodern way. We were always silent at these events. We never asked any questions. I remember at the time thinking that we were not happy to just go away and make art that was purely an ironic response to the ecstasy of communication or the imploded quality of signs within the culture. We were very conscious of the fad that things were still being decided. Countries were still being formed. Governments were still collapsing. People were still gelling poorer. Other people getting richer. People were still being jailed for their beliefs. We wanted to go and check.

As artists we did not take up the accepted role in society, which was to go away and be involved in increasing diversity and increasing production of difference. Instead, we wanted to go - for a short while - to what might be called the centres of power and to see who was still there and how they were working. And of course we found that the power structures were rolling along quite nicely thank you and hadn't succumbed to the 'matrix.' We were also of course following on from people like Allan Sekula and others, who had already been working in this way for a long time. But we were doing it without the structural integrity that they might have had in connection to critical theory.

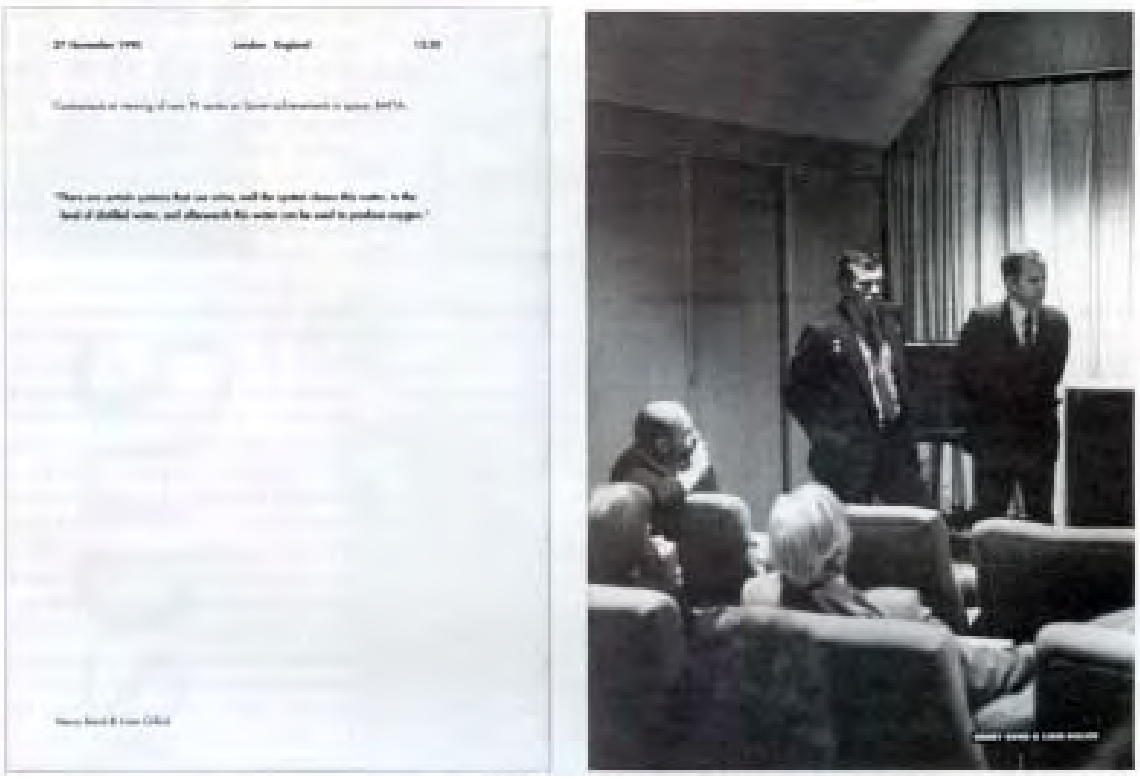
**JS** *It's important to clarify that you were not attempting to reinvent a documentary mode.*

**LG** No, not at all.

**JS**: *Nor to facilitale the implosion of Modernism.*

**LG**: No, and it is very significant that at the time Henry often viewed himself as a photographer, and not as an artist using a camera in order to carry out an agenda. He had an interest in, and knowledge of, the history of photography- of modem photography - and this was crucial. But of course he is also an artist with specialist knowledge and we spent a great deal of time arguing about art while attending a video link between Bill Clinton and the TUC or waiting for ELO in the Soviet Embassy. We wanted to be there at nine o'clock in the morning at the PLO Headquarters in London finding out what was happening, so we needed a photographer - and we had one, as it were.

I'm not trying to totalise the work. I've tried hard to avoid a c1ear trajectory. But I



**Liam Gillick and Henry Bond** Cosmonauts 1990

do think there are some common and recurring factors within the work, and they are connected in equal measure to some scepticism and to some enthusiasm for the products of the postwar period.

**JS**: *Do you think that this mode of life is signaled through these elements of soft modernism that you access in your room.*
**LG**: Yes, because I'm interested in applied modernism. But the thing that doesn't get talked about very much is the idea of autonomous art. Obviously this is a big area, but I'm interested in the potential of art as an exception within the rulture. I'm also interested in the production of something that does not necessarily carry enormous claims within its resolved structure, but still occupies a similar territory to things that, in the past, have done that.

I have always been interested in how to be an artist when you don't have any ideas at the beginning - or when you don't have any work to show. I didn't see why that should be an impediment to being involved in the art world or functioning as an artist. The same thing applies to this retrospective. Because the further you go back with some of my work the more unclear and collaborative it gets, and the less you're going to find an originating moment - which is normally what you need for a retrospective. Just because there is no original revelation or breakthrough doesn't mean I can't have a retrospective, but I want one that looks at things structurally rather than historically. I still retain an interest in the art system. The systerns of art dissemination and the spaces for art interest me just as much as the spaces for building a Volvo 2.40. I view them as another form of construction within the society that also needs to be looked at.

**JS**: *As spaces structured by captial?*
**LG**: The machinations of global capital and social structures, in my adult life, have been centred on capitalising the near future and the recent past This has been a constant subject of my work. If you can find a way to recuperate and recapilalise the recent past, you're onto a winner. If you can keep recuperating the recent past. you can get closer and closer to the present and find a way to really send it again - just after it has happened.

This is not about nostalgia. It is literally about recuperating and reorganising. And, of course, the near future is also the terrain of contemporary capital and contemporary organisation, which is why they don't bother building a new building anymore unless there's a real boom. Instead you renovate the foyer or you re-signify the building but you leave the structure the same. You can exchange spaces this way. These are the terrains that I'm really interested in. How the near future is controlled in a chaotic, displaced socio-eonomic environment.

Even the work with Henry was about getting a fax from the Press Association at nine o'clock saying that at eleven o'clock today Margaret Thatcher is expected to resign. We already knew that the press - with Henry and me tagging along - were going to gather in two hours' lime to wait for her to resign. And it is that speculative zone - and a reclaiming of it away from people who use speculation purely to capitalise on things in an antisocial way - that I remain interested in, stretching those two hours into something more complex. I didn't see why only certain people should be left alone to address ideas of projection, speculation, and the near future. I realised that this could be the subject of my work.

**JS**: *Those are the strategies that lead, in some way, to the cricism of your work as being corporate.*
**LG**: I can understand that. As a student I

>>The interesting thing about Venice is that it tells you more about the curator than it does about me. Being selected to work in the German Pavilion is a gesture by the curator Nicolaus Schafhausen to make a point.

was always a big fan of Donald Judd's artworks. I've read the reviews from the time he was working and of course he was constantly criticised for echoing late Modernism and for being conveniently in sync - or even in cahoots - with the aesthetics of corporate modernism. I'm very conscious of that. It's a proximity that I want. It's not a mistake. For the last ten years I've lived in Midtown Manhattan - that's what I look at every day. I operate in proximity. The work doesn't necessarily sit comfortably in the spaces that you would it should do, nor does it necessarily sit comfortably with a reductive late-Modernism like Judd and Carl Andre and so on.

**JS**: *Can we talk about the Venice Biennale? What is your take on being thrown into the national model of the pavilion just as national brands decline?*

**LG**: Well, my first shows were as the Berlin Wall was coming down and I was on the boat as quickly as possible. I made use of the European context as the last of the old soldier presidents and chancellors were trying to leave it as they'd imagined it - to put it back together again for the frrst time, as it were. I was very conscious of that negotiation between President Mitterrand and Jack Lang, the way they decentred cultural policy. I was also conscious of the legacy of the federated model of Germany. These were very generative terrains for me to operate in. It meant a lot to get away from a centred culture and go to places that were decentred, where they have repetition and multiple iterations of similar things.

The interesting thing about Venice is that it tells you more about the curator than it does about me. Being selected to work in the German pavilion is a gesture by the curator Nicolaus Schafhausen to make a point. In the recent coming together in Berlin of a new international art community and a consolidated identification of a new German art that is complex, professional, successful and public, there have been people who decided to operate within that system without living there - Living there - being a resident - does not make you a German artist. What do we do with the people who operate within this terrain without living here? What do we call them?

I think for Schafhausen, this question of whether you live somewhere is one of the complicated issues of instrumentalised postwar society building. The desire to accept the people that come and live among us is a very strong drive of progressive people in Germany - that we accept our Turkish or Kurdish brothers and sisters as our neighbours and that they should be here and be welcomed. Yet I think he was trying to confuse things even further. The correct thing to do would be to ask a Turkish or Kurdish German art collective to do something. But to ask a straight white Anglo-Saxon man to do something means I have to take on board the idea of showing in this building on behalf of another country, I have to ask myself questions about how to continue. Maybe I have to ask myself questions I should have been asking all along. It is a test and a challenge that I cannot answer with my symbolic presence alone. I have to do something. But on another level the invitation does refect something precise. The very fact that it is tolerable, or it can even be done. shows that in the last 20 years there has been a shift. You could say that, in a way all the major pavilions of Germany since 1960 have really been about the postwar period. But maybe now ... it is not that we think that the past is hidden but that to continue in that trajectory might become parodic. To put Neo Rauch in the Pavilion or Jonathan Meese they're both artists who are deeply attractive to the system - would be to continue the endless renegotiation of the postwar period: in Rauch's way, by jumping backwards to a kind of pre-war condition on an allegorical field in the middle of nowhere between Frankfurt Oder and Lodz, and, in Meese's way, by both parodying and making fun of earnest postwar performance art while forcing us to keep remembering something.

I'm thrown into that still-quite-tense discussion. And of course Berlin, for example. is also peopled by a large number of successful, well known, non-German artists who choose to live there. But I'm not one of those either. I think it is a deliberate act on the part of the curator and is a test. It's like: 'You've worked here a lot and you've continued to be productive here, so here's another German space, see if you can continue in these conditions. Here's a 1938 Nazi building. Are you going to have a discussion or something? What are you going to do?'

And of course the problem now is showing in Italy. This is difficult. If you want to be really tough, you do something about Italy, now. While I was in Venice for the architecture biennale, there was Lega Nord rally on the waterfront. So while looking around the German Pavilion, I could hear someone ranting about immigrants and gypsies - and this is disturbing. So, whether it is a situation where I can continue as normal, or whether this has to be an exception is very hard to say. This is why I think they asked me - because I have to make a decision about how to function. In a way. I have to ask myself whether I should emphasise the interest I have in the legacy of modernist autonomy that I don't think is complete - an almost Adorno-like belief that you should continue to produce a form of heightened art, a kind of melancholic art of refusal and abstraction - or do you use it to try to continue a dialogue in a place that maybe requires a little silence?

Liam Gillick, German Pavilion, Venice Biennale, June to November; Three perspecitve and a Short Scenario continues at MCA, Chicago October and MAK, Vienna October. Forthcoming publication Allbooks, An Anthology of writings, Book Works, London this June.

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frieze
Issue 114 April 2008

# Liam Gillick

## WITTE DE WITH, ROTTERDAM, NETHERLANDS

The first part of Liam Gillick's mid-career retrospective opened at Witte de With, acts as an inquiry into several key components of art discourse, including the role of the institution, the value of artistic collaboration and, of course, the notion of a retrospective itself. As suggested by its title, 'Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario', the exhibition takes place in four parts: three separate exhibitions (the 'perspectives') at Witte de With, Kunsthalle Zurich and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, as well as a performance element (the 'short scenario') to be held in June at Kunstverein Munich.

The work at Witte de With, established the basic framework for the two exhibitions that will follow: a robust conceptual underpinning that orders and contextualizes the core material elements that physically occupy the space. Organization is central to the notion of a retrospective, which implicitly acts as a catalogue of a given body of work, and Gillick enacts that organization on multiple levels: most immediately evident is the way he arranges the exhibition space into zones, using precision-cut MDF boards and sombre tones of grey. This division of the space is both conceptual and physical: half of the area is dubbed an 'institutional zone', to be interpreted and filled by each institution to which the show will tour. Witte de With filled this with a sequence of small exhibitions by artists - including Manon de Boer, Keren Cytter and Claire Fontaine - who were chosen without prior consultation with Gillick. Kunsthalle Zurich will use the same space to stage a series of Gillick's performative works, while the programme for the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago is still under discussion.

This ‘institutional zone’ helps delineate Gillick’s own intentions for the display of his work, and the imperatives imposed upon artists by institutions. But it also allows for the expression of each organization’s distinct identity and agenda, emphasizing the diversity of establishments that are herded together under the moniker of ‘institution’.

The remaining gallery spaces outside of this ‘institutional zone’ are occupied by elements common to all three exhibitions: a pair of vitrines displaying Gillick’s printed matter, from posters and catalogues to skateboards and canvas bags; a couple of posters haphazardly affixed·to a corridor wall; and an untitled film offering a literal retrospective of Gillick’s work. Using a PowerPoint-style presentation, the film shows photographic documentation of the artist’s past work while a seemingly unrelated text accumulates line by line across the surface of the screen, to the incessant beat of the film’s soundtrack.

One of the key phrases in this text is ‘A desire to account for everything’. The film turns the frustration of clear documentation into a virtue. Elsewhere the exhibition is similarly concerned with resistance - persistently creating barriers between the viewer and the work at hand, whether in the panels delineating the gallery space, in the glass vitrines containing the printed objects or in the very flatness of the film screen. This consistent two-dimensionality becomes so strong that even three-dimensional elements - such as the architectural units dividing the space - bear a distinctly two-dimensional quality, resembling digital renderings as much as three-dimensional components. The effect is one of learning to see the world in two dimensions, and through the filter of the computer screen on which Gillick creates his work. Indeed, the language of clusters and networks that has long been of interest to Gillick finds its literal representation in the film, which is in many ways the core element of the exhibition. Across the screen, text gathers in pre-delineated boxes, moving in different directions and forming distinctly visual clusters.

The text, which relates the story of an abandoned factory and its workers, is surprisingly melancholy. The effect is achieved as much through the slow accumulation of words across the screen as through the direct meaning of the story itself. In the context of the retrospective - however much an anti-retrospective it may essentially be - that sense of accumulation and retroactive interpretation seems indivisible from the assessment of an artistic career. Gillick has stated that he is more interested in the production of an art work than in its consumption, but here he seems, at least momentarily, to stage the manner in which the story of production is constructed and consumed. The effect is surprisingly moving, and heightened by the rigour - both visual and conceptual- of the exhibition. For all that he resists the notion of the retrospective, Gillick remains keenly attuned to the emotional weight of meaning construed after the fact.

Katie Kitamura

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ARTFORUM
JANUARY 2008

## Liam Gillick

WITTE DE WITH CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART, ROTTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS
January 19-March 24
Curated by Nicolaus Schaufhausen


With a practice that moves between installation and text, sculpture and architecture, Liam Gillick has long been invested in creating the basic situational and spatial conditions for communicative encounter and exchange. In keeping with this modus operandi, the London- and New York-based artist's exhibitions are often designed to investigate institutional and social relationships as well as their own structures. Aptly, then, the year long project inaugurated by this show at Witte de With is less a traditional retrospective than a series of self-reflexive shows devoted to this Vincent- and Turner-prize short-listed artist. The title of the endeavor, "Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario," illuminates its premise: After the Witte de With, a second "perspective" is offered by a show organized by Beatrix Ruf at the Kunsthalle Zurich, opening later in January; a last view, organized by Dominic Malon, will take place at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago next year. In the interim, for an exhibition this summer organized by Stefan Kalmar at the Kunstverein Munchen, Gillick is establishing a "scenario": Among other events, including talks, discussions, and seminars, this "site of production" will feature the performance and filming of a play written by the artist and intended to shed light on the relationships and forms of cooperation relevant to his work. The script will be published in a book timed to coincide with the MCA exhibition, which will also present a collection of Gillick's key writings in addition to texts by art-world figures who have collaborated with or influenced him over the-past twenty years. As the entire project makes clear, the processes of pre- and postproduction often playa more central role for Gillick than do his works themselves; Nicolas Bourriaud argues in *Postproduction* (2002) that this is a characteristic strategy for artists of Gillick's generation.

For the three main shows, Gillick has created architectural points of departure. Each has the same basic components: corridor like spaces constructed from dark gray dividing walls, which define - a route through the exhibition space and lead to two elements designed by the artist - a film that literally serves as a "review" of his work, documenting projects from 1988 to the present, and a number of display cases presenting objects, books, texts, and posters pertaining to Gillick's practice. The space not required for his show has been designated a "gray zone" by the artist, who has returned the responsibility for determining its use to the curatorial staff at the hosting institution. This gesture, which mirrors the shared responsibility of institution and artist in designing exhibitions, constitutes a central and certainly a playful element of Pillick's approach. Witte de With has chosen to understand it as a gestute of both generosity and provocation, and is responding by placinig exhibitions of its own in the space originally assigned to Gillick's solo show. In Zurich, meanwhile, Ruf has decided to return the space to the artist once more. (As of press time, it remains unclear how the MCA will respond.)

In addition to the processes that take place before and after the creation of both work and exhibition, Gillick is interested in institutional and social power hierarchies, which he has increasingly been investigating, sometimes casually, sometimes emphatically-in his structures and, in particular, in his recent exhibitions at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London. There are clear advantages to Gillick's long history of close collaboration with curators: Communication over a period of years has led to a reciprocity of influence that has had positive effects both on the artist's work and on the institutions concerned.

*-Lilian Haberer*
Translated {rom German by Oliver E. Dryfuss.

"Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario" is also on view at the Kunsthalle Zurich, Jan. 26-Mar. 30; Krmstverein Miil1chen, July 26-Sept. 21; Museum o{Contemporary Art, Chicago, Feb.-Apr. 2009.

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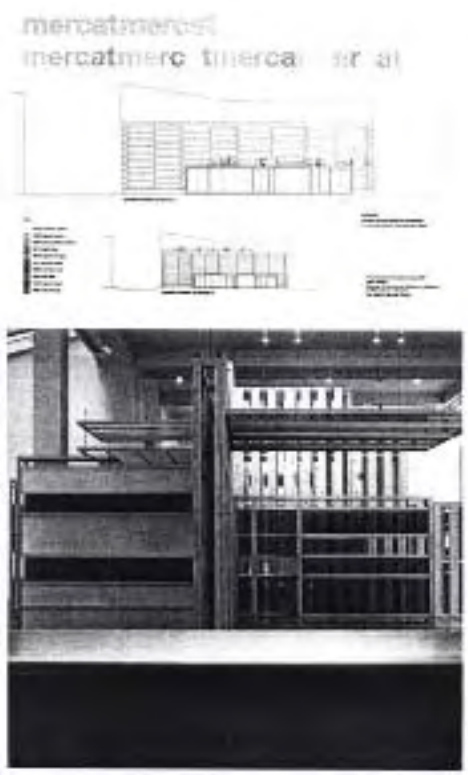
**An exhibition of work by the shortlisted artists. 30 October 2002 - 5 January 2003 at Tate Britain**

## The Turner Prize 2002

# Liam Gillick



Mercatmercatmercatmercat 2002
Signage for Mercado Central de Abaslos. la Vila Joiosa - Alicante. for Soto & Maroto. Spain
Courtesy the artist

Installation view of The Wood Way at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, london, 2002

**1964** Born Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire
**1983-4** Hertfordshire College of Art
**1984-7** Goldsmiths College, University of London
Lives and works in London and New York

"I absolutely believe that visual environments change behaviours and the way people act. I'm not prescribing certain thinking - it is a softer approach than that - I'm offering an adjustment of things, which works through default. If some people just stand with their backs to the work and talk to each other, then that's good."

Through interventions into specific architectural spaces, whether a gallery, public housing estate or airport, Liam Gillick encourages people to negotiate and experience differently the environments he has manipulated. Gillick's practice is underpinned by rigorous theorising: he is as much a writer as a maker of objects. However, his work is shaped by a very visual awareness of the way different properties of materials, structures and colour can affect our surroundings and therefore influence the way we behave. His work employs the formal vocabulary of an updated Minimalism, recalling the work of Donald Judd for example, in its use of bold colours, off-the-shelf industrially produced materials, and repetitive, geometric forms. Gillick's visually seductive abstract and semi-functional elements might be a screen, a room divider, a large work table, a display case, a ceiling panel. vinyl text on a wall, or a floor sprinkled with glitter By combinations of these he endeavours to create an intellectual as much as a physical dialogue with the viewer.

In the work *Coats of Asbestos Spangled With Mica* (2002), created specifically for the Turner Prize exhibition, Gillick pursues this desire to inform both our bodily perception of a space and our intellectual response to an altered environment. Here, the large suspended ceiling of brightly coloured Perspex panels held in place by an anodised aluminium framework dominates the entire space, transforming it into a glowing array of coloured reflections bouncing off the walls and floor. Echoing the mood that might be created by stained glass in a church, the work does not obstruct the visitor's movement within the space, but gives it energy and resonance. The title of the work is a reference to The Underground Man', by Gabriel Tarde, published in 1905, which describes a world in which 'the sun has gone out' and people have gone underground to create a new society of art and culture.

Gillick has commented on earlier works, 'There is something quite apparent about the idea of working with overhead panels and platforms as these tend to designate space. They withdraw from your eyeline when you are closest to them, so that they float overhead while projecting a subtle presence that alters

the colour of shadows. They operate quite delicately with important residual effects: Gillick does not wish to obscure the existing space, rather to articulate and redefine it. In Coats of Asbestos Spangled With Mica the precise geometric grid of the false ceiling, a version of the ceilings found within most offices and work spaces, reflects the ordered thinking behind the design of the galleries at Tate Britain created in 1979 by the architects Llewelyn Davies, based on a 9 x 9 m modular system. The dominating pyramidal ceiling design of the gallery is sometimes visible through Gillick's mixture of transparent and opaque Perspex, drawing attention to it while its harsh angular edges are gently softened.

Gillick's interest in how environments are constructed arises, in part, from a fascination with the way the formalist aesthetic and ideology of modernist architecture and design has informed the development of twentieth-century societies. In his writings, he comments on how late-modernist ideas of progress were applied to the problem of housing after the Second World War, only to be defeated, at least in Britain, by low budgets and bad management. Once this failure became apparent, the same thinking, often indeed by the same architects and designers, was applied to the corporate world, where the legacies of the modernist formal aesthetic are still found today in office blocks, business hotels and shopping malls. Given this state of affairs, Gillick investigates how 'planning,' that is, socially responsible ideologies, has been compromised by 'speculation,' essentially the way in which market forces determine the shape and function of a scheme or place.

Gillick's signature screens and platforms, made of aluminium frameworks and coloured Perspex panels, are reminiscent of ready-made architectural units found in both council estates and corporate architecture. Two celebrated series of works from the 1990s, THE WHAT IF? SCENARIO and DISCUSSION ISLAND/BIG CONFERENCE CENTRE, initially came out of Gillick's writings investigating the recent history of social and economic development. These texts explore the way in which peripheral events and secondary figures may influence our perception of history as much as the main characters. ERASMUS IS LATE, published in 1995, is centred around Erasmus DarWin, the elder brother of Charles, as he wanders in an opium-induced haze around central London in 1997, late for his own dinner. party taking place in 1810. Other secondary people, such as Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defence under the US President H. Kennedy (the main character of an earlier project, McNAMARA,1994) and Elise McLuhan, mother of the writer Marshall McLuhan, wait for Erasmus as he encounters, at first hand, the effects on present day London of the social thinking and activities of his nineteenth-century era. This work displays Gillick's keen interest in time, in particular how notions of the recent past and the near future are shaped.

DISCUSSION ISLAND/BIG CONFERENCE CENTRE (1997) looks at the impact particular incidents can have on an ensuing sequence of events. The text examines how three people, named Denmark, Lincoln and Ramsgate, interact with their built environments, taking them through a series of related scenarios and shifting moments in time. As a way to expand and test the ideas presented in his writings, Gillick makes striking objects and installations in the form of screens and platforms designed to provoke negotiation and debate by the viewer. However, Gillick does not wish to predetermine the nature of these potential discussions so that they relate specifically to his own writings. Rather, he aims to provide a visual stimulus and trigger for ideas prompted by the works' titles, for example.

DISCUSSION ISLAND DIALOGUE PLATFORM (1997). or LOCALISED DISCUSSION SCREEN (2001). He points out, The work in the gallery is not a resolution of form and content, but is associative, discursive and parallel to text.

Gillick has consistently extended his practice into other disciplines, acting as designer, critic, author and curator. The display case presented in the exhibition, also designed by the artist, houses computer plans for recent public art projects and design work, offering a chance to encounter the breadth and diversity of his work. Gillick has always simultaneously worked on numerous plans and proposals, as varied as a new traffic system for the Porsche headquarters in the middle of Stuttgart, Germany, a new set of tinted windows for an airport in Florida, or a graphic design for a bookshop bag. His commitment to dedicated research and the energetic generation of new, interlinked ideas and proposals lies at the root of understanding his work. This belief in speculative thinking means that there will ineVitably be some lines of enquiry that do not go anywhere or will reach a dead end, yet Gillick is not looking for conclusions or resolution but opportunities to experiment and play.
**KS**

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*LIAM GILLICK*

# *Literally No Place* An Introduction

Reframed and reworked around a number of false starts and three short stories. *Literally No Place* will be a book that attempts to address the revised aesthetics that accompany certain types of softly communicated nebulous ethical shifts and exercises of conscience that have, recently left their traces around us. Reorganized socia-economic structures have sought out new homes for their mutable transfers of meaning. In doing so they have created new visualizations of activity. In this book there will be three stories which develop situations that could be described as significant and marginal simultaneously. Three moments that carefully position and then unpack specific microenviroments where the seeds of recent socia-economic revisions and reassessments could have found germination points. Three locations in a series of scenarios that were initially considered to be starting points for radio plays. Some things to be heard, not read or seen. These are some notes towards how to begin with the focus stalled and turned backwards to an antecedent for a moment.

Stuck in a commune. It was then that I turned in the ravine and climbed to the top of the bank and saw the place again. I had been gone for three days and had walked about a hundred kilometers. I felt fine. The stiffness and soreness had been walked off 'and my legs had been growing strong and my step was light and I could feel the ball of each foot pushing the earth down from me as I walked. Walden 2 by B.F. Skinner is a clunkily written vision. It is one of those superficially problematic texts that have formed a subliminal model for certain socio-economic developments and manifestations of branded activity that circulate, half-digested, around post-corporate and postindustrial environments. The idea could be re-framed as a beach towel, with the last sentence of the book printed or woven in: MYSTEPWASLIGHTANDICOUL FEELTHEBALLOFEACHFOOTPUSHINGTHESANDDOWNFROMMEASIWALKED

The idea of a commune, or a functional campus-style workplace that can be described as a semi-autonomus self-sufficient place; isolation towards the distribution of ideas. A book and a text that could only be produced in an immediate post-war environment, an American environment that was on the verge of excessive sentimentality in place of a particular memory for socialist or Marxist potential and change. The head of the American Communist party died in the year 2000, maybe waiting for a round number before giving up. He had sent a letter

*LIAM GILLICK, EXPANSION SCREEN, 1999*
*anodized aluminum, Plexiglas, 24 x 144 x 12"*

to Gorbachev during the late changes in the Soviet Union. Never repenting from a particularly perverse form of Stalinism, taking his style-book, even to the end, from a dour fifties model, all fedoras and homburgs and large, boxy, union built cars. *Walden 2* is a book that is somehow divorced from that ossified ideological lumpiness. A book produced in the gap between the Second World War and the first Cold War.

The projection of a place, a sketching of location, some idea of a commune, a functional rationalist commune that can really work and be productive through its focus upon the production, not just of better "things" but better "relationships." Prescient in its gloss over what should be produced. Vague in its description of relationships between the site and nature of production and everyone else. A place that is not really sub-cultural or communistic in tone but something more complicated than that. "My step was light and I could feel the ball of each foot pushing the earth down front me as I walked." It's the moment of re-engagement with the land; it's the moment when the main character expresses some belief in the world of the commune through its ability to make him feel the earth again. In touch for the first time, a Californian sense of touch, feeling the sand, not the sand of Omaha Beach but of a burgeoning desert place of Neutra Houses and exiled psychiatrists waiting for patients. *Walden 2* is a place where the trays are better designed than they were before the global conflict swept some histories away, where people are free because they cannot really communicate with the outside world, where they are free because they are stuck. *Walden 2* is a place where art is ten steps behind design, where focus on classical music is a reflection of the real values of the author, and a nice quasi-communistic touch. Any play with the idea of *Walden 2* is kind of complicated. It is no accident that the working model of the new technology companies of the late-twentieth century bore some relation to the legacy of Walden. Dusty location, flat organization and the residual potential of shady finances veiled behind initially content-free exchange and the rhetoric of functional utopia.

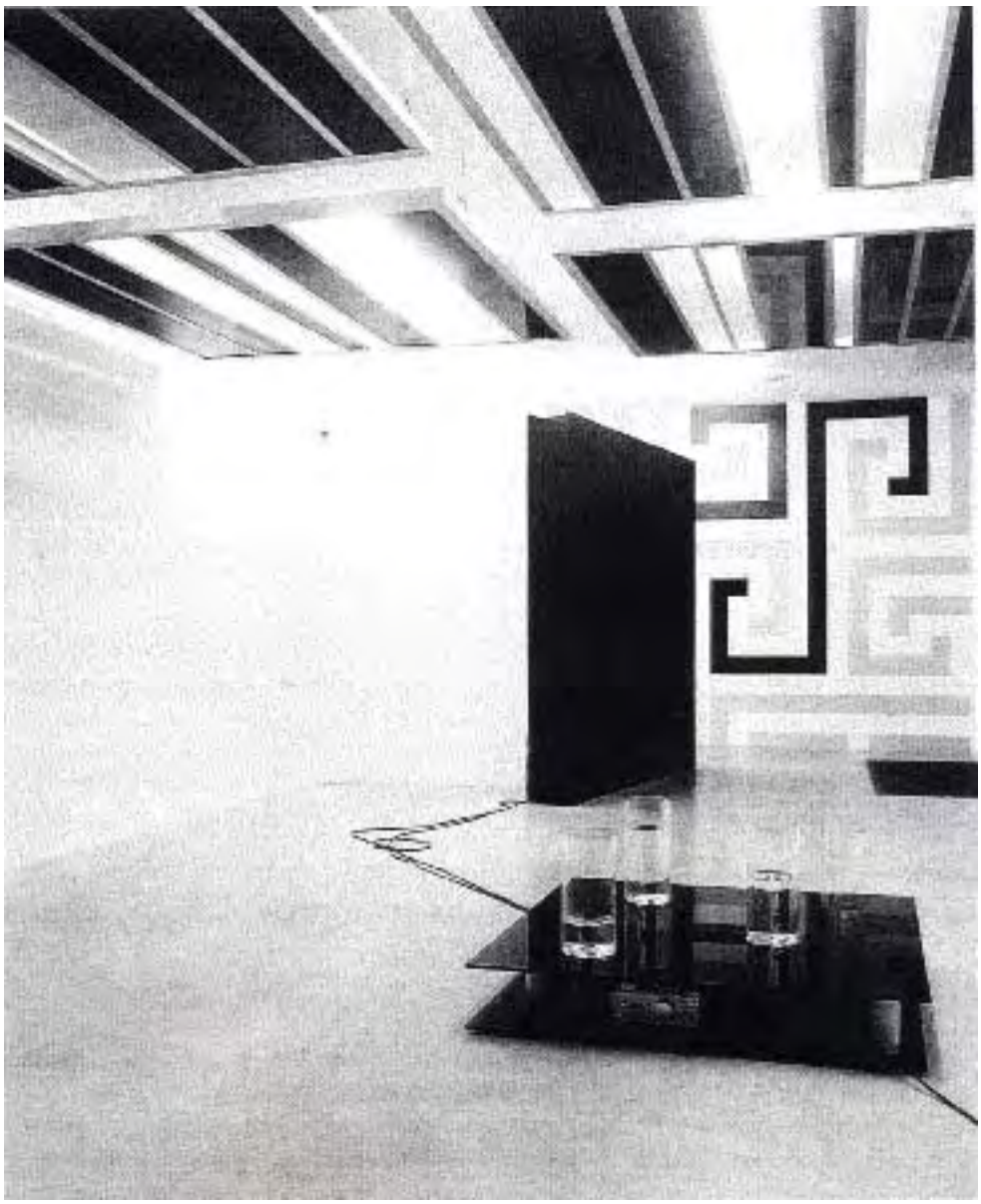
In *Walden 2* a group of outsiders join together to visit a new community and they are absolutely an American group of post-war people. They are from that moment where many were involved in action before education, the people who

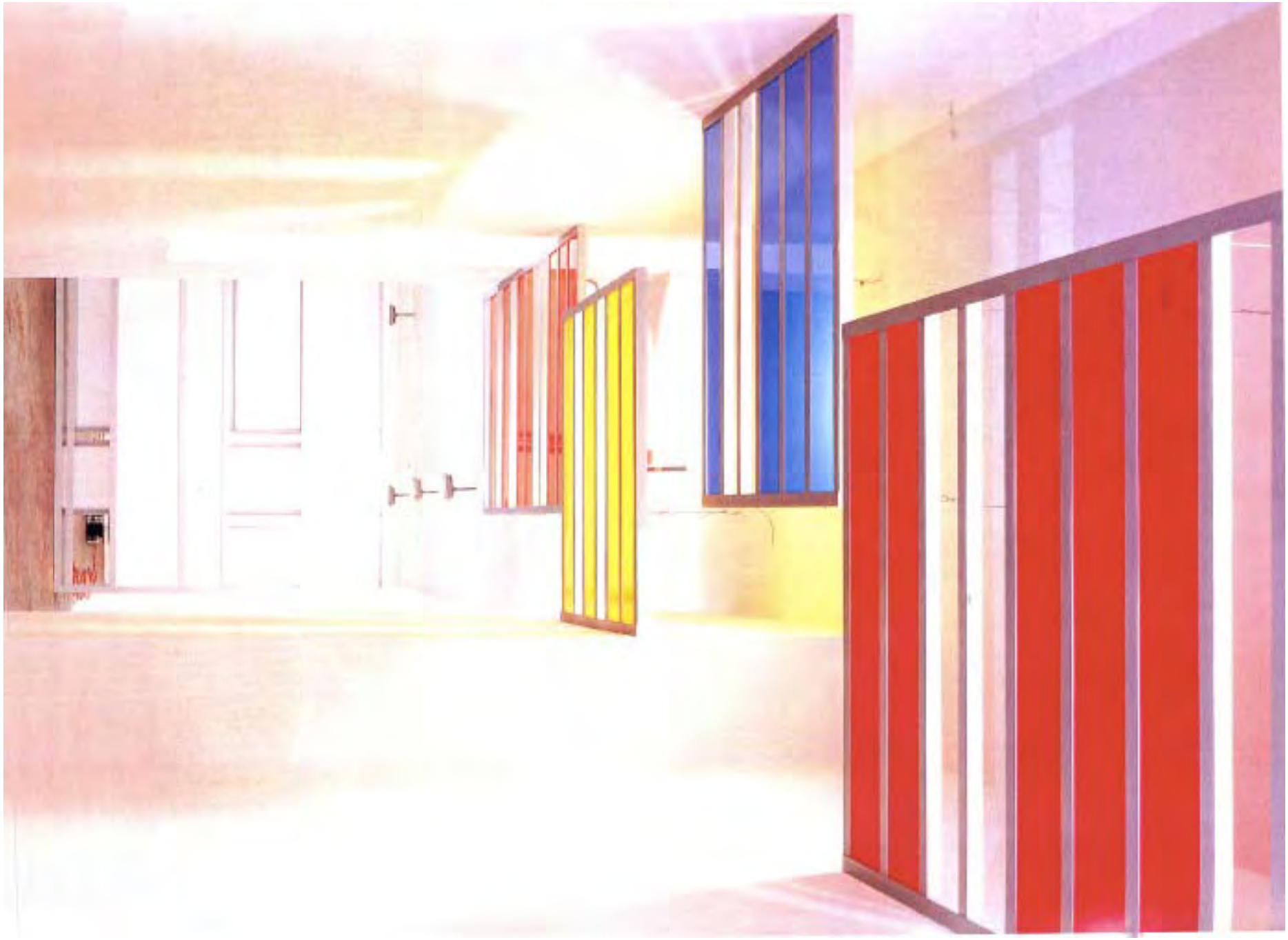
are coming back from war with ultra-experience and stunted reflection. Those who have been engaged without necessarily thinking that they are implicated in what might come next. Which is not to downplay their moral imperative, but to accentuate their desire for Waldenistic potential. It is an acceptance that can only cut in after some serious skepticism and middleweight questioning. A form of utopia necessarily de-ideologized and experiential. The seriousness of their war-time actions reflects back on them only once they have returned home. A heart grabbed by a freezing hand every time it snows, reminders of huddling alone in the mountains of Italy, waiting to move forward. *Walden 2* can be transferred in time, the groups of people joining together have a functional relationship; they have a research necessity. They have a need to come and somehow project a place where they can be controlled and free simultaneously. Where their sense of ethics and sense of conscience can be collectivized, where it can be pulled together. A place that can be communal without being communist. A nostalgia point, but one that functions in a pioneer framework. The young pioneers of the Soviet model undercut by the legacy of the old (real) pioneers of the American model and the projecting towards technological pioneers of our recent past. One that provides all the potential of post-conflict reconfiguration, both literal and social.

A model for living and working, a model of appropriation; of a certain form of language. A desire for a certain lifestyle and a certain creativity without the attendant problems of control or prediction or planning. A speculative situation, where speculation alone replaces other collective action. Speculation as collectivism. You have it in *Walden 2* from 1948 as a kind of unwitting projection. It only functions as a fully formed ideal at the point of the Internet boom of the mid-nineties.

In *Walden 2* projection exists as a non-planned idea, as something that can only happen as a result of a collective desire and search for content-free research without revolution and as a result of a clumsily overwritten set of ethical revisions and shifts. This connection between the idea of a communal place that is based on desire within a rupture away from a fully planned communistic system has a fluid connection to a contemporary environment. It is a model of collectivism that challenged the Soviet model; it is a model that relied upon the presence of other models within a pluralistic, post-war American federal system. Not Federal central government, but the over-identification with a collection of semi-autonomous states and therefore semi-autonomous states of mind and self-images. “Where are you from?” replacing “Where are we going?” It’s a connection that permits exposure to shifts of strategy towards the appropriation of apparently better or notionally conscience-based and ethically driven idea structures in the language of the consultant and the design detail. The use of a global-computer network that was never envisaged as a way to generate income looping round a story of a place that could never possibly be self-sufficient. The appropriation of an ethically derived language within a fractured sense of progress combined with a strange localist neo-conservative nostalgia. It is a situation that leads to ashrams and Microsoft; neo-conservatism and casual Fridays. For the small group of people living in *Walden 2* their world appears initially as a description of rationalist heaven, a perfect place, an organized place, a place that shows how things can be. The way they live through the conditions described in the book is connected to the proliferation of soft analysis; the excess of context that surroundsour contemporary decision-making; the escalation of attempts to predict a situation where prediction has come loose from the

idea of planning. Looking ahead has become a form of second-guessing wrapped in analysis, which really does plan the future but always claims to be reactive to the desires of the desired consumer. A situation where projection has begun to shimmer. *Literally No Place* will play with this completely revised sense of the relationship between the individual and place; the individual and the nature of production; and most crucially the function and use of creative thought as a fetish rather than a tool towards a paradigm shift in the relations between people and production, time-off and time running out.





*LIAM GILLICK*, installation viewa t Kasey Kaplan Gallery, New York, with *TRAJECTORY PLATFORM* (red), *LAPSE PLATFORM* (light blue), *NECESSITY PLATFORM* (yellow), DIFFERENT PLATEFORM (orange) and FLUCTUATION SCREEN (back wall), all anodized aluminuma nnd opaque Plexiglas, 2000

LIAM GILLICK, DISCUSSION ISLAND MODERATION PLATFORM, 1997, anodized aluminum, Plexiglas, cables, fittings, installation view, Schipper & Krome, Berlin