

## Checklist/label texts for Literature, Language, Words

Robert Barry (American, born 1936)

*Untitled*, 1978

transfer type and silver paint on board

11 1/2 x 11 1/2 inches

Collection of the Honolulu Museum of Art, gift of the Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection: Fifty Works for Fifty States, a joint initiative of the Trustees of the Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection and the National Gallery of Art, with generous support from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Institute for Museum and Library Services, 2009 (31511)

Conceptual artist Robert Barry's work avoids the usual physical limits of the art object by focusing on one central idea--language. Barry decontextualizes language and places isolated words, which appear randomly selected, randomly placed, not seeming to carry a specific meaning, nor referring to anything in particular, in spaces that range from a piece of paper or canvas to directly on walls, on floors, or scattered throughout several spaces/rooms. The words shift constantly in their relationships to each other, giving the viewer the sense of experiencing a narrative in fragments. The critic Robert C. Morgan has written about the artist's work: "Barry remains one of the most reflective of conceptualists in the sense that language is not finalized as an abstract concept. Rather, language constitutes a transport system, a kind of reflexive circuitry in which the process of engaging with the work draws the viewer into his or her own experiences."

[no image]

Mel Bochner (American, born 1940)

*Silence!*, 2012

monoprint with collage, engraving and embossment on hand-dyed Twinrocker handmade paper

33 3/4 x 26 1/8 inches (framed)

Courtesy of Quint Contemporary Art, La Jolla, CA

Language as a subject was a new frontier in art in the 1960s, and Mel Bochner, looking to make something that had never been made before, became a pioneer of language-based conceptual art. Throughout his career he has explored the intersections of linguistic and visual representation. Bochner first made works related to *Roget's Thesaurus* in the mid-1960s, creating word or text portraits of friends. In the past decade, he has revisited the idea of the thesaurus, using as a source a Yale University edition which includes vernacular and even obscene words and producing a large body of thesaurus-inspired paintings and works on paper that reveal his interest in language, meaning, and systems. *Silence!* is from a recent series of unique mixed-media works in which Bochner's attention shifts to a more formal exploration of form, color, and texture. Lively and amusing, each work is a list of synonyms, beginning with formal and sophisticated words and evolving into humorous, even vulgar phrases. As art critic Roberta Smith wrote in a 2006 *New York Times* review, "The new [Bochner thesaurus works] unleash something malicious, sharp and funny that has always lurked beneath the surface, conveying the rage of life while maintaining the artist's characteristic surface of elegance, intellect and formalism. In a sense they are Expressionistic works, filled with pain, and grinning and bearing it."



Nancy Dwyer (American, born 1954)

*Deep*, 2005-2006

poplar, edition of 3

9 x 13 x 9 inches

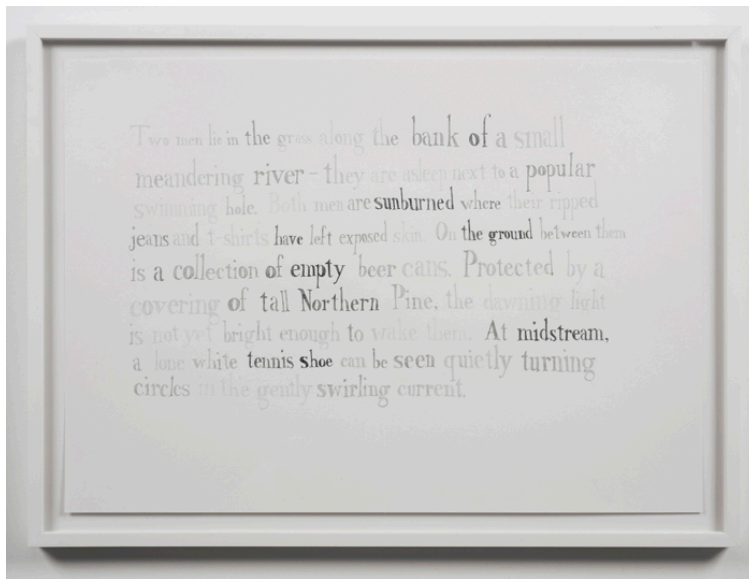
Courtesy of the artist

Nancy Dwyer's art has included sculpture, painting, video/digital media, and installations, but the frequent common denominator is text. She sees a continuum throughout her career: "I was dealing with language all along...trying to distill the picture to its essence and to its implied meaning, almost iconic meaning...kind of making icons out of pictures. So, what's the most common icon in our world? It's a word." Dwyer explores the area where art history and advertising, art objects and corporate logos overlap. As in ads, Dwyer transforms words into seductive images in their own right, taking advantage of the computer's ability to manipulate letters and words into complex spatial configurations. Dwyer aims for the obvious, making her work accessible and capturing the physical and mental engagement of the viewer. "I'm really satisfied," Dwyer says, "with bringing you to a space in which to think about something, but not telling you what to think. People have to make their own valued conclusions about what they look at." Most of Dwyer's works comprise one-word concepts in forms that visually or symbolically embody the meaning, thereby giving them added resonance. In *Deep*, the word has been cut into a laminated stack of wood. The letters are legible at the top, but they are cut down to the bottom of the stack, evoking visually, as well as metaphorically, the whole word.



Joe Hardesty (American, born 1952)  
*Small Meandering River*, 2009  
graphite on paper  
19 3/4 x 27 1/2 inches  
Courtesy of Western Exhibitions, Chicago, IL

Joe Hardesty uses text to describe what the viewer is experiencing. Rather than draw or paint an image, he draws a series of sentences that “depict” a scene, evoking the subject of the work. As such, his drawings inhabit a space somewhere between text, image and the mind’s eye. By focusing viewers’ attention through the use of text, the drawings work both as a concrete reality created on the page and as a changing series of interpretations as each viewer “reads” the text differently.



Jim Hodges (American, born 1957)

*Untitled (Double-sided Blanket)*, 1998

twill damask-woven wool with cotton edges

52 x 72 inches (work will be displayed open and flat)

Collection of the Honolulu Museum of Art, gift of George and Nancy Ellis, 1998

Jim Hodges is known for transforming mundane materials into works of art inspired by natural forms, especially his cascading curtains of deconstructed silk flowers and delicate spider webs of thin metal chains. The work exhibited here takes the form of a woven blanket, pale blue on one side and tan on the other, the dimensions of which are the exact size of the artist's bed. Spread out it is meant to suggest an imaginary pool, and the poem woven into it on both sides, *If there had been a pool it would have reflected us*, written by Hodges, is intended to be read in reverse as if the words were reflected in water.

This work was commissioned by the Peter Norton Family as part of their annual Christmas Project. Each year, beginning in 1988, the Nortons have commissioned a contemporary artist to design a work to be produced as a large-edition multiple which was sent as a gift to the Nortons' list of contacts in the art world.



Jenny Holzer (American, born 1950)

*Survival Series*, 1985

LED sign, green diode

5 1/4 x 30 1/2 x 4 inches

Collection of Sharon and Thurston Twigg-Smith

Although trained as a painter, Jenny Holzer looked for new ways to make narrative or commentary an implicit part of visual objects, and the main focus of her work became the use of words and ideas in public spaces. Originally utilizing printed-text posters, Holzer ultimately chose to work primarily with illuminated electronic displays with LED signs, although her work has also included sculpture, projections on buildings and other architectural structures, and, more recently, a return to painting. The work on view comes from Holzer's *Survival Series*, on which she worked in 1983-85. Written by Holzer, the aphorisms, which continuously scroll and flash across the LED screen, deal with the circumstances and demands of living in contemporary society, ranging from the poetic and touching to the ironic and disheartening.



[image of a similar work]

Roni Horn (American, born 1955)

*When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes, No 1214, We Introduce Ourselves*, 1993

solid cast plastic (black) and aluminum

6 units, each 2 x 2 inches x variable length from 18 3/8 to 56 inches

Collection of Elizabeth Rice Grossman

Fascinated with poet Emily Dickinson's solitary lifestyle and her poetry's ability to create an intense sense of presence, conceptual artist Roni Horn created a series of sculptures and installations inspired by her readings of Dickinson's letters and poems: *How Dickinson Stayed Home* (1992-3); *When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes* (1993); *Keys and Cues* (1994); and *Untitled (Gun)* (1994). Horn's homage to Dickinson investigates the possibilities of language as sculptural form, combining physical and mental sensuousness and placing the viewer in dynamic relationship to the words. Horn's series *When Dickinson shut her eyes* comprises square aluminum poles of different lengths, each bearing a line from an Emily Dickinson poem embedded in black plastic, leaning casually against the gallery wall.

The work on view here incorporates Dickinson's poem No. 1214:

We introduce ourselves  
To Planets and to Flowers  
But with ourselves  
Have etiquettes  
Embarrassments  
And awes



Joseph Kosuth (American, born 1945)

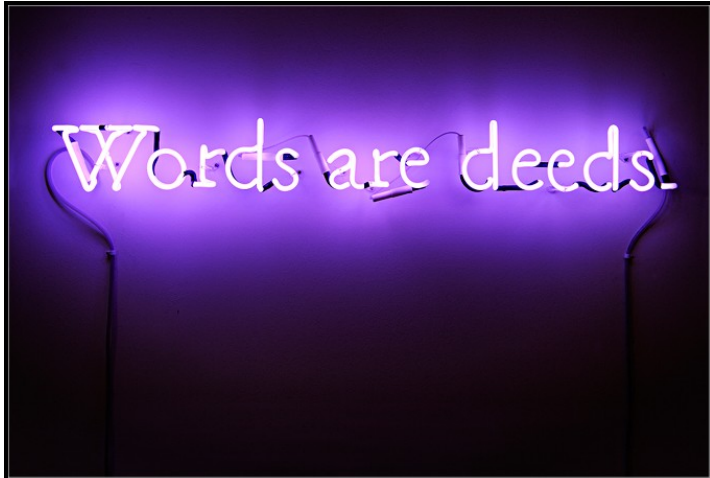
*Words are deeds*, 1991

neon

5 x 45 inches

Collection of Dawn and Duncan MacNaughton

One of the key figures of conceptual art, Joseph Kosuth in his work has long waged an assault on conventional aesthetics and questioned the nature of art, focusing on the primacy of ideas rather than on art *per se* (accompanying all of Kosuth's works are certificates of documentation and ownership, which are not for display and indicate that the works can be made and remade for exhibition purposes; thus the work is the certificate rather than the physical object). Kosuth was also influenced by Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of language published in 1953. In the mid-1960s, Kosuth embarked upon a series of works entitled *Art as Idea as Idea*, involving texts, and began making word pieces in neon. *Words are deeds* is one of Kosuth's most concise text works—three words, a sentence. Deadpan, tautological, it questions assumptions about the nature of words. We tend to think of words as carriers of meaning or a message, conveying feelings, emotions, directions, observations, but Kosuth provokes the viewer/reader into considering that there is no distinction between words and deeds, between thought and acts or actions.



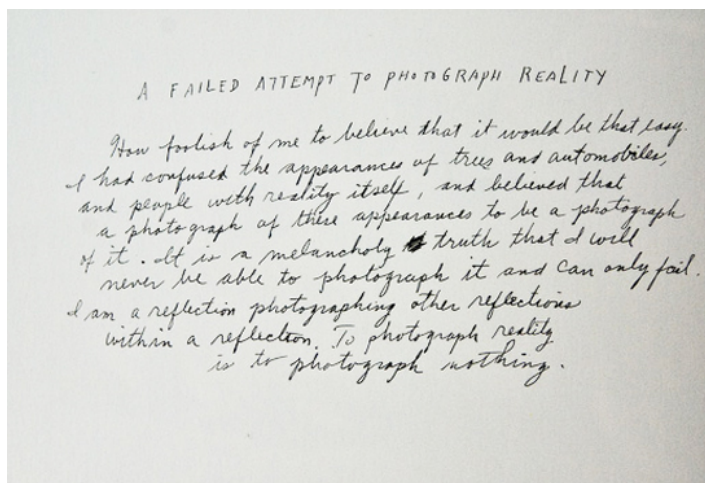


Duane Michals (American, born 1932)  
*A Failed Attempt to Photograph Reality*, 1987  
gelatin silver print, edition of 25  
11 x 14 inches  
Courtesy of the artist and Pace-MacGill Gallery, New York

Duane Michals was one of the first artists involved in photography to forgo making pictures of things in favor of making his ideas into pictures. He has said "When you look at my photographs you are looking into my mind." Staging events for the camera, working in picture sequences to tell a story, and painting and writing on his photographs are among the innovations for which he is given credit. Michals once said, "Photography deals exquisitely with appearances, but nothing is what it appears to be." Michals' mistrust of the visual has occasionally taken him to abandoning lens-based imagery in favor of text-only description, as in *A Failed Attempt to Photograph Reality*. It comprises five sentences succinctly summarizing Michals' understanding that any attempt to photograph "reality" can only end in failure, because it is based on confusion between perception and the look of things. His conclusion that "I am a reflection photographing other reflections within a reflection" expresses a frustration with trying to capture appearance, a process which leads to uncertainty about the very existence of things.

The hand-written text reads:

How foolish of me to believe that it would be that easy. I had confused the appearances of trees and people with reality itself, and I had believed that a photograph of these appearances to be a photograph of it. It is a melancholy truth that I will never be able to photograph it and can only fail. I am a reflection photographing other reflections within a reflection. To photograph reality is to photograph nothing.



Bruce Nauman (American, born 1941)

*Raw-War*, 1975

color lithograph

22 x 28 inches

Collection of the Honolulu Museum of Art, purchase, Charles Montague Cooke, Jr. Fund, 1995 (25724)

In the late 1960s conceptual artist Bruce Nauman began putting elements of text or words into his works, initially using neon as a means of writing with the vivid colors and glow of advertisements. Many of his works have centered on ironic plays on words, stressing the arbitrary relationship between the definition of a word and its meaning and its corresponding sound and graphic structure. The print *Raw/War* is based a neon installation from 1970 in which the letters light up in alternating progression, making it possible to read them both from left to right and right to left. This forms a perfect anagram (one in which the letters of the source word/text are rearranged to make the anagram and the letters are used the same number of times in the anagram as they appear in the source) or, more precisely, a *semordnilap* (a name coined for a word or phrase that spells a different word or phrase backward, "semordnilap" being "palindromes" spelled backwards). In *Raw/War* two meanings echo each other in a disquieting manner, each amplifying the other.



Kay Rosen (American, born 1949)

*BLURRED*, 2003-2005

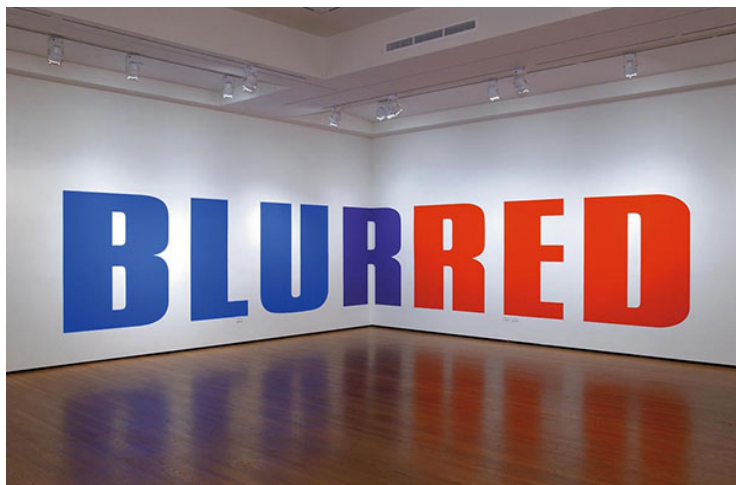
latex paint on wall

dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins Gallery & Co., New York

Kay Rosen loves type, the shapes. “They are the architecture of text,” she has said. Trained as a linguist, Rosen has become a kind of visual rhetorician, manipulating words—via juxtaposition, scale, and color—in order to highlight their inherent fluidity and complex implications, all leavened by the artist’s sense of humor. Rosen uses language to show rather than tell, and her typographic installations are playful and fun to figure out. In *Blurred*, Rosen examines how the way a word is depicted can evoke in visual terms its definition or meaning. The letters “Blu” are painted in blue, and “red” in red; in the middle, is a lone violet “r,” which represents the color achieved when blending (blurring) the colors together.

Rosen’s *Blurred* also evokes the journalistic practice of dividing states into Blue and Red categories according to the tendency of their residents to vote towards the extremes of political affinities. Rosen pokes fun at this kind of simplistic, reductive notion, and recently, University of Michigan professors created maps that prove most of the country is politically neither Red nor Blue but in fact Violet.



Ed Ruscha (American, born 1937)

*News*, 1970

gunpowder on paper

image: 9 3/4 x 27 inches, paper: 11 1/2 x 29 inches

Collection of Sharon and Thurston Twigg-Smith

Ed Ruscha has long been interested in the material form of language. He has stated that, "I like the idea of a word becoming a picture...then coming back and becoming a word again." In the 1960s, Ruscha's fascination with the look of language replaced objects as his subject matter, becoming the core of his artistic practice for the next two decades. He experimented with various powders and organic substances as artistic materials and discovered gunpowder as a graphic medium, similar to charcoal. In his first gunpowder drawings Ruscha used hard-edged letters, marking them out with masking tape and then rubbing layers of powder and fixative into the paper's surface. When the tape was removed, he continued to contour the letters using cotton swabs soaked with gunpowder. Eventually he became adept at working without taping and only from sketches, drawing freehand. This allowed him to draw letters and words that look like cut/folded pieces or curls of paper, exploring their architectonic, rhythmic forms. Set against the subtly modulated ground, the word "News," with its highlights and shadows, takes on a three-dimensional, seemingly physical presence. We think of words, of news, having the potential at times to ignite controversy and confrontation, even to incite anger and violence. In this drawing, the literally explosive capabilities and allusive potential of the gunpowder medium are thus apt for conveying a kind of hidden or ironic meaning.

[no image]

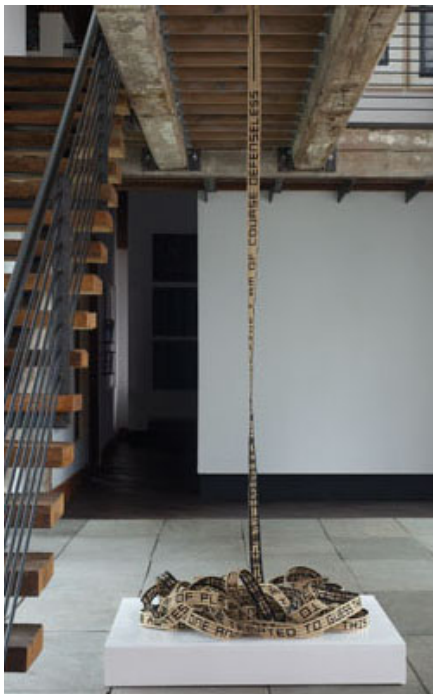
Deborah Valoma, (American, born 1955)

*Femininity*, 2008

waxed linen, computer-aided weave structure, hand-woven, stitched  
33 feet x 2 1/2 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Brown Grotta, Wilton, CT

Deborah Valoma works primarily with thread—a medium with a global history and practice crisscrossing political, social, cultural, and gendered meanings. Valoma uses thread in a sculptural manner, exploring, whether through traditional hand construction techniques or cutting-edge digital weaving technology or a hybrid of both, subtleties of the material, conceptual, and metaphorical possibilities of the medium. The artist has stated: “I first learned to knit in Jerusalem from a Polish refugee of the Holocaust. I learned to stitch lace from my grandmother, descendant of Armenian survivors of the Turkish massacres. I learned to twine basketry from one of the few living masters of Native American basket weaving in California. These dedicated women tenaciously pass the threads of survival forward. When their memory fails, my hands remember. My hands trace the breathless pause when I teeter on the sharp edge of sorrow and beauty.” Valoma is particularly interested that textile arts came to be uniquely associated with notions of femininity. In the work on view here, *Femininity*, Valoma wove a graphic statement about Sigmund Freud's underestimation of women's artistic abilities (Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, 1933).



Ben Venom (American, born 1978)

*"Turn Up The Night,"* 2012

hand-cut used jeans, batting, thread

107 x 85 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Guerrero Gallery, San Francisco, CA

In his art, Ben Venom (Venom has been his nickname since he was a teenager hanging around the Atlanta punk rock scene) fuses two seemingly opposing forces, the extremes of Heavy Metal music and the tradition of handmade craft. Venom has said about his work, "It's like two opposing forces colliding- Heavy Metal is tough, loud and fast, and quilting soft, kind of slow, and won't hurt anybody. I want to be right in that middle where something explodes and something new happens. I kind of like to break through those boundaries. I'm definitely not your typical quilter." Ben Venom usually makes quilts out of old Heavy Metal band T-shirts, although the work on view here is composed of blue jeans, mainly donated by Venom's friends and a few purchased from Goodwill. In Venom's words, his work "is serious, yet attempts to take on a B movie horror film style, where even the beasts of Metal need a warm blanket to sleep with." *Turn Up the Night* is the first song of English band Black Sabbath's album *Mob Rules*.



