Contents

Page 2

A. This Is Text Based Art: A Possible Common Art Language for Global Thinkers and Critics

Worldwide Perspectives On What Is Possible With Text-Based Art

The following overviews are only short summaries of just a few of the writings, theories, and criticisms of these art critics, curators, art theorists, art scholars, and artist-critics, who in turn are just a few of the thinkers and writers in these areas and fields worldwide. That said, based on research of them so far, my tentative conclusions about global text-based art include that—despite often fundamental and even acute differences in philosophical systems, thinking systems, religious influences, and political, economic, and social structures and assumptions, text-based art is (a) evidenced as an art form almost everywhere on the planet for (b) many of the same philosophical, artistic, and concrete reasons.

Broadly speaking, those reasons appear to be that text-based art—loosely and broadly defined here as any visual art that uses words, language, characters, or language-symbols in some way—affords artists, no matter where they are globally, across continents, countries, and cultures, an artistic aesthetic and a means of artistic expression that can address, explore, and wonder with curiosity about:

- **Our most concrete and present issues and needs;**

- **Our most abstract and philosophical questions about both the intellectual head and the emotional heart;**

- **Our questions about our languages themselves; and**

- **Our questions about art itself, including, what is art?**

Asia

China

The Chinese art critic and curator **Li Xianting**, who has also made contributions to avant-garde art in China, might view text-based art primarily as associated with activist art, as a means of challenging established cultural and political norms, using language as a tool not just of critique but also of various degrees of subversion. He might be among those global art critics who take interest in text-based artists who use language in innovative and even imaginary ways, such as **Xu Bing**, the artist, professor, MacArthur Fellow, and former vice-president of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, who has used text and fictitious Chinese characters to question the reliability of communicating through any language, on the theory that the very nature of language allows not just for ambiguities and interpretation but also profound exploitation and manipulation.

Japan

The Japanese contemporary artist and critic **Yoshitomo Nara**, whose work is seen to be able to bridge both high art and low art, and both the East and the West, might see text-based art not just as an art form for expressing social and political commentary, but also as a way to express personal and human feelings in a complex way. Nara might also see text-based art useful both aesthetically and conceptually as a means of disrupting not only traditional forms and mediums of art, but also as a means of disrupting a viewer's assumptions and expectations, such as by text works that offer an initial illusion of one set of

emotions, feelings, or ideas, but in fact offer interpretations inviting contemplation of very different emotions or ideas. Nara might also see text-based art as being able to push boundaries of what is considered to be art, and as a way to disrupt traditional forms of visual art.

Vietnam

Vietnamese art critic **Phan Cam Thuong**, who has written on the intersection of art and politics, might see text-based art as a way to challenge the dominant narratives and ideologies, and further as a means of political dissent through the possible use of art and text to subvert traditional and entrenched power structures. Thuong might also see text-based art as a means by which artists can both document and amplify the voices and traditions of marginalized communities and cultural groups in Vietnam.

Africa

Ethiopia

The Ethiopian curator, anthropologist, and writer **Meskerem Assegued**, who was a member of the selection committee for the 2007 Venice Biennale African Pavilion, and who has written on contemporary art practices in Ethiopia and Africa, might see text-based art as an art form that allows artists to offer interpretations about the interaction between language, culture, and identity in Ethiopia. Her writings suggest that she might also see text-based art as a way to challenge traditional notions of Ethiopian art and culture and to create spaces for marginalized voices, and might see ways in which text-based art can be used to create new forms of expression to engage with complex political and social issues in Ethiopia, and perhaps also across the continent.

Nigeria

Chika Okeke-Agulu, the artist, art historian, Princeton University professor, and British Academy Fellow, is a Nigerian art critic and curator who has written about, and curated shows about, several aspects of contemporary art in Nigeria, as well as art during late twentieth-century dictatorships in Nigeria. Based on his publications, he might see art with words as an artistic expression through which artists can experiment with, and offer, new possible meanings, open to interpretations, about not just contemporary Nigeria but also the historical relationships between language, culture, and identity within Nigeria, specifically the intersection of globalization with Nigeria's cultures and identities, as well as issues in Nigeria during and after colonialism.

Tunisia

The Tunisian art critic and poet **Souad Guellouz**, and the Tunisian art critic **Sonia Hamza**, might each see text-based art as an artistic medium that could be used to express complexities of contemporary Tunisian society—such as Tunisia's intersections between Tunisia's art and politics, its traditions as juxtaposed against its modern norms, between past and present modes of thinking, and between the individual as distinct from the collective. They might also see text-based art as a way to create new modes of language expression that not only reflect realities and possibilities of Tunisia, but which also provide for greater world access to Tunisia's contemporary art and contemporary artists, a point especially made in art criticism writings by Hamza.

Uganda

The Ugandan art critic **Eria Solomon Nsubuga**, known as SANE, is a contemporary Ugandan painter and art lecturer. With a chosen designation as a social artist, and given that his practice explores the politics of climate, allocation of natural resources, morality, and spirituality, he might see text-based art as a form or medium of art that can provide not only for social and political critique—and more specifically as a way to challenge the status quo and to raise awareness about structural inequalities in Ugandan society—but also as a way to invite new perspectives on traditional notions of spiritual and religious iconography, beliefs about resource possession, and the contradiction of corruption within leaders claiming to be of religious faith. For Nsubuga, text-based art might be a way to give voice to both people and to issues that are marginalized and silenced, as well as to be an affirmative means for social and political change with respect to some of the concrete issues mentioned above.

Central America

Guatemala

The Guatemalan poet and art critic **Luis Cardoza y Aragón** might see the use of language as a medium itself in the context of art, and might see text-based art as a way to explore the relationship between image and word as a function of visual and linguistic aspects of communication. He might also see the use of text in art as a way to connect with cultural and historical literary traditions.

Eastern Europe

Poland

Karol Irzykowski, a Polish critic who wrote about both film and visual arts, might have seen text-based art as a form of visual poetry, where text stands not just for its linguistic meanings but also for its own aesthetic qualities, depending how presented.

Global Indigenous Peoples

Cree

The Cree scholar, writer, and artist **Karyn Recollet**, who has written about the intersection of art, activism, and decolonization, often in connection with modern urban spaces, might see text-based art as an aesthetic vehicle for engaging with these topics and issues, possibly using language in text art for both conversation and resistance. She might find of interest those text artists who incorporate text into their practices as a means of challenging dominant narratives, while at the same time promoting disenfranchised cultures, knowledge systems, and perspectives. For example, she might favorably view the work of Anishinaabe artist **Maria Hupfield**, whose works with text address some of these issues in the context of cultural identity and political power.

Māori

The Māori scholar, professor, and critic **Linda Tuhiwai Smith** has written on the relationship between Western and Indigenous knowledge systems, including critical analyses of how Western scholarly research paradigms impede social justice during the colonialization of indigenous cultures. Professor Smith might see text-based art as holding the possibility of critiquing the intersections of language, culture, identity, social justice, and colonialization of societies, with an emphasis of documenting not just indigenous languages and but also indigenous knowledge systems. As such, she might be interested in text artists who both preserve indigenous knowledge and culture and also affirmatively assert it, such as the Anishinaabe artist **Rebecca Belmore**, whose text-based visual works have addressed some of the types of colonialism and identity issues that Professor Smith has written about and critiqued.

Pueblo

The Pueblo poet and writer **Simon Ortiz**, known in part for his participation in the second wave of the Native American Renaissance, and who has written on issues of Indigenous identity and culture, including the preservation of literary and oral histories, might see text-based art as a form of art capable of not just preserving those histories but also engaging with them, to document perspectives and present new interpretations. He might see with interest the work of text artist **Marie Watt**, who is enrolled in the Seneca Nation of Indians, who sometimes uses text and symbols in exploring the full diversity of Northern Hemisphere Native American histories and mythologies in her practice.

India

The Indian curator and art critic **Geeta Kapur**, known for her writings on modern and contemporary art in India, might see text-based art as an aesthetic useful for exploring assumptions within language, identity, and power. She might find of interest artists who use language to reclaim lost or misappropriated cultural and historical narratives, such as the contemporary Indian artist **Nalini Malani**, whose practice sometimes uses words and phrases in her visual works on these subjects in India.

The Indian art critic **Ranjit Hoskote** might see text-based art as a tool for political and social critique, specifically as a way to both challenge the status quo and attempt to subvert dominant political power structures. Hoskote might also see text-based art as a way to explore the intersections between art, politics, and society, and to question cultural assumptions that underlie them.

Middle East

Egypt

The Egyptian art critic **Tarek El-Ariss**, who has written on the intersection of art, literature, and politics, might, like other critics discussed here, see text-based art as a medium of expression uniquely able to expressly discuss relationships between language, power, and identities in Egypt. He might also see text-based art as a means of challenging established narratives of Egyptian society by creating new artistic spaces for marginalized voices. He might also focus on the ways in which text-based art could be used to explore nuances of Egyptian culture to create a more inclusive and diverse art scene in both Egypt.

Iran

Shahram Karimi is an art critic in Iran who has written about the relationships and interplay of art and broader culture. Karimi might see art with words as allowing artists a means of exploring complexities in the relationships between language itself and broader cultural and historical identities. Like other art critics and scholars discussed here, he might see text-based art as a means of confronting established or entrenched cultural narratives in order to explore under-represented voices in Iranian society. Karimi might particularly appreciate the ways in which text-based art can be used by artists to express emotions and ideas in ambiguous layers that can be interpreted in different ways to engage viewers with elements of Iranian culture.

Iraq

The Iraqi art critic **Nada Shabout** might view text-based art as an artistic medium for investigating the cultural and historical facts of contemporary Iraq and the Arab world. She might see text-based art as a way to present new narratives that shape a viewer's understanding of Iraq, and more broadly the Middle East, and to create and express alternative viewpoints that reflect the broader diversity and fuller richness of Iraq's many cultures and voices. For Shabout, text-based art might be a way to reclaim the histories and cultural heritages within Iraq, and to both document as well as amplify its internal histories in the context of the larger world.

Ali Assaf, another Iraqi art critic, who has written on contemporary art practices in the Middle East, might see text-based art as useful for exploring the same intersections identified by other art critics, including the intersections of language, culture, and identity in Iraq. He might focus particularly on text-based art in the context of amplifying marginalized voices and in the context of creating new forms of contemporary expression altogether, to examine contemporary political and social issues in Iraq.

Tamara Chalabi is a third Iraqi art critic who is also known for her engagement with contemporary art practices in Iraq. Like other critics discussed in this paper, Chalabi might likely see text-based art as important not just as a form or genre of art, but for serving as a form of expression that can engage with relationships between language, culture, voices, and identities in Iraq. She might see text art specifically as an aesthetic form that can also question traditional notions of Iraqi art, as well as the notion of art itself.

Israel

The Israeli art critic **Gideon Ofrat**, who has written about the relationships between art and politics, might see text-based art as a way to explore the complex political and cultural relationships between Israeli and Palestinian identities. He might particularly see text-based art as a means of documenting and juxtaposing the contemporary and historical perspectives of both Israeli and Palestinian voices. Ofrat might also consider text art as possibly facilitating new perspectives for dialogue and understanding.

Palestine

The Palestinian art critic **Kamal Boullata** might have seen art with words as an artistic medium able to both express and document experiences of displacement. He particularly might have seen text-based art as a way to articulate emotions and feelings about contemporary political experiences in relation to identity and place. He might also have seen text art as a form of aesthetic expression that can explore relationships between cultural histories, political histories, and cultural memories, including across borders. He might have seen text-based art as uniquely available to create layered and ambiguous meanings allowing for new interpretations of complex political dynamics across borders, and, more broadly, throughout that region of the world.

Turkey

Levent Çalıkoğlu is an art critic in Turkey who engages with contemporary art practices. Çalıkoğlu might view text art, like other critics in this paper, as a way to explore the relationships between language, culture, and identity. He might also see text-based art as a means of affirmatively challenging the power dynamics of languages themselves, and as a way to create new visual-symbolic modes of communication. Like others, Çalıkoğlu might also appreciate the ways in which text-based art can be used to create ambiguous and layered meanings, to afford new interpretations of complex political and cultural issues in Turkey.

Saudi Arabia

Ahmed Mater, the Saudi artist, writer, and art critic, who is known for his engagement with contemporary art practices on each of these levels, might see art with words and language as a way not just to explore the intersections of religion, culture, and identities in Saudi Arabia, but also of demonstrating and challenging the entrenched power dynamics of languages themselves.

Abdulaziz Al-Sudairy, an art critic in Saudi Arabia also known for engagement with contemporary art practices, might consider text-based art as allowing for a fuller artistic discussion of interactions and assumptions as between languages, religions, and identities in Saudi Arabia, through the expression of ambiguities and layers of meaning that could allow for new interpretations.

Syria

Murtaza Vali is a Syrian art critic who writes on contemporary art practices in the Middle East. Like many others discussed in this paper, Vali might see text-based art as a means of considering how language, culture, and identity interact. He might particularly see text-based art as offering a medium to investigate traditional notions of Syrian art and culture relative to more contemporary views and voices. And like many other critics discussed here, Vali might appreciate that text-based art can be used by artists to create new forms of aesthetic expression that engage complex political and social issues within a country.

North America

Canada

Sarah Milroy is a Canadian art critic who writes about contemporary Canadian art. Like many discussed here, she might see text-based art as an aesthetic for exploring human intersections in her country, including how Canada's multiple histories, languages, and identities interact. She might particularly view art with words and language as engaging with Canada's histories with respect to cultures, including with respect to Indigenous peoples, that exist across Canada's vast geographical space.

Cuba

Tamara Diaz Bringas, as both a Cuban art curator and as an art critic, might see text-based art as a way to engage with the political and social realities of contemporary Cuba. She might also see the potential for text-based art to address issues such as censorship, surveillance, and political repression, as well as to celebrate resilience and creativity in Cuban culture. She might also see the use of text in art as a way to connect with the history of literary expression, and all artistic expression, in Cuba.

Mexico

The art historian and art critic **Raquel Tibol**, who was born in Argentina and who died in Mexico City, and who wrote on Mexican and Latin American art, with a focus on social and political issues, might have seen text-based art as affording artists the possibility of engaging in new ways with issues of cultural identity and issues of national politics, using language to expressly critique dominant ideologies in order to encourage actions towards social change. Tibol might have been most interested in text artists who use language as a means of expressly engaging with specific cultural and historical contexts, such as some of the **muralists of the 1920s and 1930s** who employed text and language, including at times **Diego Rivera**, as well as artists who used language to challenge false narratives and assumptions supporting dominant norms of colonialism and imperialism.

The Mexican writer, poet, diplomat, and cultural critic **Octavio Paz**, whose writings included analyses on the intersections of Mexican art, literature, and politics, might have seen text-based art as allowing a wide range of artists to explore nuances of the most complex aspects of language, identity, and power. He might have been interested in artists who use text and language to not just document and but also call attention to marginalization and exploitation, as well as artists who employ language as a means of reclaiming cultural heritages, such as **muralists of the 1960s and 1970s**.

The Mexican muralist and painter **Jose Clemente Orozco**, known for politically charged artworks addressing social and political issues in Mexico and beyond, might see text-based art as a direct vehicle allowing artists and viewers alike to engage these issues, with word art enabling new uses and interpretations of language for the purpose of critique and subversion. He might be interested in artists who use text in a bold and provocative manner in the context of political, social, and cultural issues and assumptions, such the American text-based artist **Barbara Kruger**, whose large-scale installations and text-imagery works question power dynamics and artificial constructions in contemporary society relating to identity, sexuality, and consumerism.

The Mexican art critic and curator **Marta Elena Bravo**, who has written on contemporary art in Mexico and Latin America, might see text-based art as directly engaging with concepts of cultural identities and political power, using language both to critique dominant narratives and to offer new interpretations for social change. She might find of interest artists who use text as a means of exploring the full complexities of Mexican and Latin American cultures, such as the Mexican artist **Gabriel Orozco**, whose works sometimes employ text with cultural artifacts to address not just identity, migration, and globalization, but also to blur ideas of the boundaries of art itself.

United States

Rosalind Krauss, the American art critic, art theorist, and professor at Columbia University in New York, and a leading figure in the field of modern and contemporary art theory, had an analytic approach that emphasized both the ideas of French post-structuralist thinkers, like **Jacques Derrida**, discussed below, as well as the importance of the role of the viewer in the interpretation and meaning-making of art. In her theory of analysis, a work of art is not fixed or determined exclusively by the intentions of the artist alone, but rather is also constructed through and by the viewer's interaction with the work.

In terms of aesthetics, Krauss might be interested in the ways that text-based art expressly challenges traditional notions of visual art (in all forms, including both figurative and abstract) and expands the theoretical and concrete possibilities of what art itself can be. She would likely emphasize the importance of considering the formal qualities of text-based art, such as work's use of typography, materials, and composition, in addition to its substantive content.

In terms of a theoretical perspective, Krauss might be most interested in the ways that text-based art intersects with language and literature, and how it engages with issues of meaning itself, and also the nature of communication itself. She might draw on these to explore the ways that—and reasons why—language is inherently unstable and subject to multiple interpretations.

In terms of possibilities, Krauss might be interested in the ways that text-based art can be used to explore an unusually wide range of subjects and themes, from political and social commentary to personal expression, human feelings, and human emotions and intuitions. She might likely see text-based art as both a theoretically and practically valuable form of artistic expression that challenges traditional boundaries between art forms—and also successfully invites viewers to actively engage both with and in the meaning-making of text-based work.

Separately, the American art critic **Jerry Saltz** has written that he sees text-based art has having a robust history that stretches back to the earliest known examples of human expression. He might note that from ancient cuneiform tablets to modern-day graffiti, text has always played a vital role visual arts across mediums. He might say that, while there is a risk that text-based art can be didactic, or prone to teach, declare, or explain, rather than allowing for interpretation, what sets text-based art apart from other aesthetics is its ability to convey complex ideas and emotions through language and hybrids of language and image, as well as its potential to engage the viewer on both a visual and intellectual level through ambiguity and interpretation. Saltz might also write that text-based art offers a unique opportunity for artists and viewers to explore the intersections between language and image, and to push the boundaries of what a given society or culture considers to be art.

Given some of his writings, Saltz might argue that with the rise of both digital media and the beginning of the democratization of the art world, text-based art has become an increasingly important form of diverse visual expression, and one that has the potential to challenge our assumptions about who makes art, what art is, and what it can do both as an art form and as an element giving voice in unique ways in broader society.

Separately, the American art critic **Peter Schjeldahl** might focus the risks of text-based art limitations while also seeing its possibilities. Specifically, he at times wrote that some text-based artists might lapse into the limitations inherent in all language forms, in that, depending on how approached, language-based art can be difficult for a viewer to engage with if it becomes didactic, or narrowly focused on teaching, telling, explaining, or otherwise becoming declarative. He has also written that text-based art can lapse into being overly intellectual, at least to his critical tastes, by prioritizing a substantive message over the viewer's aesthetic experience with a work. He has also noted in his writings that text-based art for some viewers can be difficult to read or interpret, particularly where there are barriers across languages or references.

With the above risks and potential limitations in mind, Schjeldahl has also written that the promise and possibilities of text-based art exist at their fullest where an artist uses a given language and the forms of letters, characters, symbols, and words not just for expression of concrete subjects and themes, like social justice or specific political commentary, but also for reflexive questions looking inwards and introspectively on issues relevant to art itself, and language itself, including questions such as (1) what are the boundaries of visual art and language in relation to meaning; (2) where are the lines between didactic declarations and ambiguities that invite viewer interpretation; and (3) whether there are overlapping spaces in text-based art that are not just intellectually engaging but also emotionally and even spiritually engaging, even across borders and language differences.

Russia

The Russian art critic **Boris Groy**, who has written on the relationship between art and politics, might note some of the same theoretical points raised by Krauss, Saltz, and Schjeldahl, particularly as to the risk of text-based art resulting in works that are didactic, but given some of his writings he might still see text-based art as a powerful concrete artistic tool for political commentary and activism. His writings suggest a focus on art with words as having a unique ability to convey messages and ideas in a direct and impactful way as to both a particular viewer and as to a culture or society as a whole. Groy would likely observe text-based art as having potential because of its history, in that text, or text concepts, have played a lasting role in the development of art from the earliest symbolic cave paintings and rock etchings to the present day. He might also see the use of text in visual art as allowing for a range of artistic and aesthetic approaches, from straightforward communication without deeper meanings to more abstract and ambiguous messaging not just as to facts or views but also emotions and feelings.

Groy's writings suggest that he would see text-based art as being able to incorporate other forms of media, such as video or sound, to create an immersive experience for the viewer using multiple senses and multiple parts of the brain, including the intuitive and the logical, particularly as new technologies emerge allowing artists using text to continue to push and blur the boundaries between art mediums, causing text-based art to remain a profound component of broader collective notions of art.

Aleksandr Benois was a Russian art critic who might have viewed text-based art as a unique way to express not just the concrete and the material but also, particularly, the spiritual and emotional dimensions of humanity and of art itself. He might see text-based art as a means to most clearly convey to the viewer the inner world of the artist, and the way to most clearly capture and share the essence of human experiences and ideas. Based on his writings, it appears that, for Benois, text-based art would be a way to bridge the assumed divide in some thought systems between the external world of objects, things, and reason, on the one hand, and the internal world of emotions, feelings, and intuition, on the other hand.

Continued next page.

South America

Argentina

The Argentine art critic **Marta Bravo** might see the possibilities of text-based art in relation to the medium's ability to explore and communicate ideas relating to political and cultural implications of dominant societal norms. She might view artists using text as being able to find a way to communicate social and political commentary through hybrid language-visual means, allowing an artist who uses text and image to more fully and more directly challenge oppressive political and social structures, both through the mind as well as through the heart, and additionally to serve as catalysts for potential social and political changes in the context of cultures and their histories.

Peru

Juan Acha, the Peruvian art critic, might see text-based art as a means of more robustly engaging with issues of identity and cultural heritage. He might view text-based art as a way of successfully exploring the intersections between language, culture, and history, and he might be interested in the questions of how and why text-based art can reflect upon, mirror, and critique specific cultural contexts, while also pushing boundaries and subverting expectations, in a way that engages the viewer by exploring ambiguities and encouraging interpretations.

South Asia

Pakistan

Quddus Mirza is a Pakistani art critic who has written on contemporary art practices in Pakistan as well as South Asia. Mirza might view text-based art as an art form and as a medium that provides a means of exploring the relationships between languages, cultures, and identities in Pakistan and its society. As with critics discussed above, he might see text-based art as a way for artists to challenge not just contemporary societal norms in Pakistan but also traditional notions of Pakistani art and culture, as well as to create spaces for marginalized voices in Pakistan in relation to Pakistan itself as well as to both elsewhere in South Asia and the broader world.

South Eastern Europe

Greece

Maria Marangou is a Greek art critic who has written on contemporary art practices in Greece as well as Western Europe, and might see text-based art in many of the same ways as other critics discussed above, including as a means of exploring the intersections of language, culture, and identity in Greece both now and historically. And like other critics discussed above, her writings suggest that she might see text-based art as a way to examine and evaluate traditional notions of Greek art and culture relative to contemporary, modern, and possibly also post-modern views.

Continued next page.

Western Europe

France

Jacques Derrida, referenced above in the discussion of the American art critic, theorist, and academic **Rosalind Krauss**, is the prominent French philosopher and literary critic across multiple disciplines who made watershed contributions to Western philosophy as the conceptual founder of deconstructionism. Very broadly, for purposes of this short monograph / artist's studio paper, deconstruction is an analytic useful for criticizing not only literary texts and philosophical texts, but also societal and political constructs, in an attempt to find or create concepts of justice in those texts and constructs.

Applied here, through the analytic of deconstruction, Derrida might see text-based art as a profound vehicle by which to questions the very idea of meaning itself, a question transcending any one language or any one aesthetic, and approaching questions of the universal. More specifically, he might especially see text-based art as being able to highlight and explore all of the multiple and often contradictory interpretations that can be read from, and applied to, almost any given textual or language-based statement, be it as short as a single phrase or as long and complex as an entire novel—and by extension, almost any given idea or view that may be expressed in those texts.

As the founder of deconstructionism in all its applications, Derrida would likely be most interested in text artists who are most adept at avoiding the didactic and declarative, and rather are able to experiment with ambiguity, multiple interpretations, and viewer interaction for meaning-making to its fullest, and thereby challenging traditional modes of artistic expression that focus only on the intent of the artist, and not the participation of the viewer in the act of interpretation. As such, Derrida might see the influential American text-based artist **Jenny Holzer** as at the vanguard of the possibilities of text-based art, given that Holzer's public space installations worldwide, both large and small, offer viewers intentionally ambiguous phrases and sentences that are not just open to multiple readings, but which also invite those multiple readings in some of the most profound areas of human thinking, interactions, and questions of morality and ethics.

The French literary critic and philosopher **Roland Barthes**, who has written on semiotics, the study of anything that can make meaning through any of the human senses, has, relevant here, written on the relationship between semiotics, language, and culture. He might see text-based art as a means of exploring the cultural and political significance of language in making meanings, and also exploring how and why those meanings might be interpreted by different recipients the same way or different ways. Also relevant here, many of his writings appear to emphasize the possibility of, and the intellectual utility of, the ability for text-based art to create multiple meanings, ambiguities, and interpretations, even the simplest of texts, including even short phrases, one word, or even a character-symbol—or even a sound of a word or a letter. Loosely from his writings, Barthes would arguably see the most meaningful of text-based artworks as those being made by artists who experiment with language in a self-reflexive manner, inwardly and introspectively, using language to question the very nature and qualities and possibilities of language itself, such as the influential American text-based artist **Lawrence Weiner**, particularly as to his text works that provide written instructions to viewers on how to create a specific piece of art as an theoretical exercise and experiment in the exploration of language itself and, the ability of language structures to make, record, and transmit meanings to recipients.

Italy

Achille Bonito Oliva is an Italian art critic known for his engagement with contemporary art practices in both Italy and Western Europe. Like many of the critics discussed above, Oliva might view text-based art as a means of exploring the relationships and interactions between human languages, cultures, and identities of peoples in Italy and in surrounding countries in Europe and the Mediterranean region. He might also see text-based art as a way to challenge deeply-rooted traditional notions of Italian art and culture, and to juxtapose them against contemporary Italian norms, and Western norms, in cultures and societies.

Conclusions of Part 1

To be clear, these overviews are only short summaries of just a few of the writings, theories, and criticisms of these art critics, curators, art theorists, art scholars, and artist-critics, who in turn are just a few of the experts and thinkers in these areas and fields worldwide. That said, based on research of them so far, my tentative conclusions about global text-based art include that—despite often fundamental and even acute differences in philosophical systems, thinking systems, religious influences, and political, economic, and social structures and assumptions, text-based art is (a) evidenced as an art form almost everywhere on the planet for (b) many of the same philosophical, artistic, and concrete reasons.

Broadly speaking, those reasons appear to be that text-based art—loosely and broadly defined here as any visual art that uses words, language, characters, or language-symbols in some way—affords artists, no matter where they are globally, across continents, countries, and cultures, an artistic aesthetic and a means of artistic expression that can address, explore, and wonder about:

- **Our most concrete and present issues and needs;**

- **Our most abstract and philosophical questions about the intellectual head and the emotional heart;**

- **Our questions about our languages themselves; and**

- **Our questions about art itself, including, what is art?**

I think text-based art can be beyond cool—and way beyond deep. It's because I think a piece of text-based art, and a long-term body of text-based work, can be all of these things, cumulatively, cohesively, even sometimes all at once.

This is what I think, and what I feel, when I say, this is text-based art.

Continued next page.

Page 12

B. This Is Text Based Art: Across Many Art Histories, A Global Artistic DNA

An Initial Survey of the Art Histories, plural, of Global Text-Based Art

As to the available books, papers, and websites that leave a reader with the impression that text-based art is unique to certain artists in New York City in the United States in past 60 years, or unique to certain Western European artists in the past 100 years, or similar, such views are not consistent with globally available evidence. Art with words, or text-based art, or art with language, is shown to be a composite of many art histories across continents and cultures dating back to at least 40,000 BC.
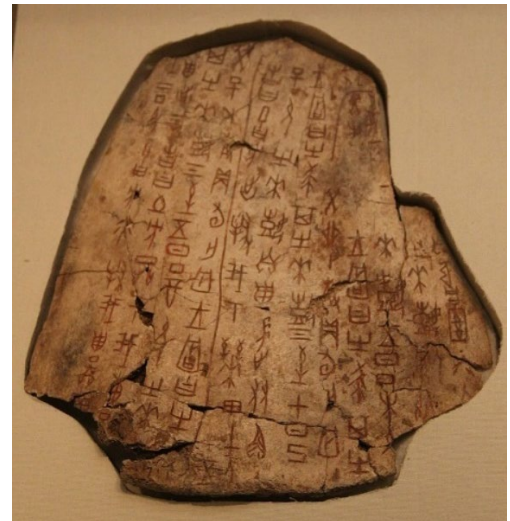
Above left -- *Depiction of an unknown bovine animal discovered in the Lubang Jeriji Saléh cave, dated to be 40,000 to 52,000 years old. Linguists and anthropologists are currently debating whether such images were not only figurative but also attempts at an early visual-sound-language communication system—perhaps an early form of text-based art.* *Above right* – *Oracle Bone Script (Chinese: 甲骨文; pinyin: jiǎgǔwén) which is an ancient form of Chinese characters engraved on oracle bones—animal bones that were used in particular ceremonial acts. Oracle bone script was used in the late 2nd millennium BC, and is the earliest known form of Chinese writing.*

1. As Art Histories

In **China**, text-based art has an aesthetic tradition and intellectual tradition that is amongst the oldest in the recorded world. Chinese calligraphy, with both beautiful intricate brushstrokes and profound intellectual and philosophical meanings, has been revered globally as an art form and as a manifestation of China's art histories for over two millennia. Chinese calligraphers also often placed within their works not just philosophical but also poetic expressions, conveying both profound human emotions and human cognitive ideas at the same time through the written character-word as represented in artistic form. Today, many modern Chinese artists have also pushed the boundaries of text-based art, while at the same time making reference to Chinese art history, by incorporating calligraphy and language characters into contemporary art contexts, as discussed in Part 1. These explore the relationships between the traditional and the modern, as well as the interplay of language and image. Chinese text-

based art often reflects the country's complex history, politics, and social issues, offering critical commentary on contemporary Chinese society—using express or tacit references to an aesthetic that has existed in China for thousands of years.

In **the Middle East**, contemporary and modern text-based art has a direct lineage from, and conceptual and aesthetic connection to, another form of calligraphy, Islamic calligraphy, which is considered a divine art form unto itself. Islamic calligraphy often features verses from sacred texts and has been widely used both in antiquity and in modernity in religious, decorative, and architectural contexts. Contemporary Middle Eastern artists continue to draw on the profound heritage of Islamic calligraphy while at the same time experimenting with new forms, new variations, new content, and new techniques. Many contemporary Middle Eastern text-based artists now explore and investigate themes and issues relating to concepts of identity, gender, and politics, using text in different media as a means to express thoughts and reflections on the region's diverse cultural landscape in relation both to itself and as to the broader world.

In **Africa**, text-based art may be said to have art histories grounded in spoken languages, oral traditions, and storytelling to communicate and impart and receive knowledge. Very broadly speaking, and as will be discussed below, a significant number of African cultures in North Africa, East Africa, West Africa, and Southern Africa have histories of thousands of years of using verbal narratives, language heuristics, and symbols as a way to convey accrued wisdoms, historical information, and cultural, ethical, and spiritual values and beliefs. Referencing this and incorporating this, both overtly and tacitly, in dozens of contemporary African art forms, mediums, and artistic expressions, artists may be seen using text with visual image to address issues such as colonialism, post-colonialism, identity, and social justice, as well as cultural, religious, military, and power structures and power dynamics. Perhaps because of the strength of the language component in many African text-based art histories, many contemporary African text-based artists are creating language-focused works that are particularly powerful and thought-provoking, including conceptual works that challenge conventional notions not just of art itself, but of particular languages—including languages not only African but also of the countries that engaged in colonization of African countries and regions. As such, and again very broadly speaking, text-based art histories across Africa reflect perhaps not a tradition of calligraphy, as seen in China and the Middle East, but rather the spectacular development across Africa of hundreds of linguistic art histories in mediums of sound and speech.

In the broader region of the **Mediterranean, North Africa, and the Middle East**, with its astonishingly rich cross-border histories of dozens of ancient civilizations, the histories of text-based art—from the hieroglyphs and proto-symbolic-languages of ancient Egypt, to the inscriptions on architecture and pottery in ancient Greece and the Roman empire, among other empires, establish that text has played a significant role in the aesthetic and artistic expressions of the region across thousands of years, as it has in China and across all of Africa, as discussed above. In the contemporary aggregate Mediterranean-North African-Middle East region, text may be said to be most often used to explore themes such as migration, identity, and cultural heritage—referencing and incorporating what text-based artists derive from the region's past, including its mythologies, while also engaging with contemporary issues facing several Mediterranean, North African, and Middle Eastern countries and societies, such as political instability, war, social inequality, gender inequality, economic issues, and environmental. Yet, broadly speaking, text-based art in this region is also known for its poetic, lyrical, and thought-provoking nature, both as to intellectual systems and as to belief systems, and it invites viewers to reflect and interpret at multiple levels on the complexities and nuances that exist throughout the region's past and present in the context of being one of several foundational locations around the planet of initial human development.

In **South America**, text-based art may be seen to have art histories with somewhat different aesthetic and intellectual foundations than other regions discussed above, in that, broadly speaking, text-based art appears to be deeply influenced by the continent's unique literary, artistic, and philosophical traditions. Specifically, yet again speaking broadly as a composite, Latin American literature, with its distinct history with respect to concepts of magical realism, and similar spiritual and intangible beliefs, has inspired some contemporary text-based artists to incorporate text into their works not just in literal ways, such as to engage in social or political or economic issues, but also, and sometimes more fundamentally, in unique and innovative ways embracing feelings and beliefs that far transcend the literal, the material, and the concrete. Broadly speaking, due to these art histories on the continent, South American text-based art, while often addressing social and political issues such as inequality, colonization, and cultural identity, is also a means of using references to different cultural histories of magic realism to more subtly yet powerfully challenge dominant narratives, express dissent, and offer alternative perspectives on South American societies and political powers. Because text-based art in South America has art histories of particularly blurring the boundaries between art and literature, and between the actual and the magical, in the broadest meaning of the concept, it has particular qualities that invite viewers to engage with the power of words, literal, metaphorical, and allegorical, in developing the viewer's understanding of our world—both that which can be seen and which cannot be seen.

For **Native, Aboriginal, and Indigenous Peoples**, in all regions of the world, hundreds of text-based art histories manifest elements of each of the global and regional art histories broadly summarized above. Again, necessarily for this paper as a very broad composite, these art histories are also, like those in several regions, grounded in the primacy of language—including oral traditions and storytelling—as an aesthetic, a means of communication of values and beliefs, and as a means of imparting, sharing, and retaining collected wisdoms and experiences. Across the globe, dozens of Indigenous peoples and cultures have long-standing and complex art histories, language histories, and cultural histories that are not only in oral artistic mediums, but also in recorded artistic mediums, including proto-languages, or early languages, using symbols, glyphs, and other forms of

written or visual communication, marks, signs, and figures as a means of communicating and passing down through time knowledge, history, spiritual beliefs, and both practical and spiritual understandings of, and relations to, other species and the natural world of the planet itself. From these art histories, in contemporary Indigenous art a significant number of text-based artists incorporate text references and symbol references to highlight, assert, and advocate for cultural identity, as well as to challenge false colonial narratives and draw attention to post-colonialization social, cultural, natural, and environmental issues facing Indigenous communities due to the profound misconduct identified with colonializations. As both a matter of content and aesthetic, many examples of text-based art by Indigenous artists may be seen to reference and draw upon these thousands of years of different, yet in some ways conceptually similar, traditional Indigenous languages and histories. Broadly, in doing so, these text art histories of Indigenous peoples around the world afford present day artists an artistic means by which they are revitalizing and reclaiming the Indigenous cultures and knowledge systems that colonialists marginalized or erased by genocides and other means. Such text artists thereby may be seen to be continuing the same conveyance of knowledge, history, wisdom, and beliefs as seen through thousands of years of oral traditions in thousands of cultures worldwide.

On the landmass that is **Russia**, the art history of text-based art was documented by the Russian artist Kazimir Malevich, who in approximately 1915 created a series of artworks that consisted solely of geometric shapes and words—not that conceptually different from works in the 1920s and 1930s in parts of Europe during the Dada movement and also during the Surrealism movement, both of which also incorporated text into their works in conceptually similar and aesthetically similar ways, often as a means of subverting conventional meanings and creating new associations.

In **Central America**, the histories of text-based art are also historically a function of, and are still influenced by, not only the diversity of languages and cultures in the region, but also the region's need throughout its histories, as with so many other regions discussed above, to respond to the profound physical, cultural, spiritual, and philosophical abuses and consequences of colonialism. Reflecting those art histories, contemporary text-based artists may be seen as often using text in art as a form of protest and resistance, addressing social, political, and economic issues facing Central American societies. In doing this, as seen with the contemporary use of other art histories in other regions of the world, a significant amount of text-based art engages through reference to and amplification of cultural folk art from the past and the present, sometimes fused into street art, creating historically referential yet modern and dynamic works that engage with local contexts and communities at multiple levels. Broadly, Central American artists who use and incorporate text do so as a vehicle to raise awareness, promote social change, and advocate for human rights, but through lenses that reflect historical political legacies and cultural traditions.

In **North America**, Western-centric text-based art histories exist but are profoundly younger than those discussed above in all of the other regions and cultures of the world, each of which long pre-date the Western view now present on the North American continent. In this context, North America's Western text-based art histories arguably began within only the past 400 years, in the aftermath of two colonialization-genocides, resulting in aesthetic and language elements of art histories and traditions from the landmass of Europe as well as the landmass of Africa. While arguably the marriage of Western conceptualism to text and visual art is a North American and particularly an American art history, evidence from around the world establishes that this art history did not arise sua sponte on its own on American soil or in American minds, but rather draws from, if not expressly or impliedly appropriates, both culturally and visually, text art histories from all over the world, centuries older, each summarized and discussed above. Corroborating these broad observations are the significant number of published sources that treat North American text-based art history as not existing until the practices of current and/or recently living artists such as Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Ed Ruscha, Christopher Wool, Lawrence Weiner, John Baldessari, Glenn Ligon, Joseph Kosuth, Mel Bochner, Kay Rosen, and others from the 1950s to the present, including but not limited to Holzer's ambiguous yet provocative worldwide text installations, and her Truisms series, and Kruger's works that combine text with images to challenge notions of power, gender, consumerism, and advertising. At the same time in America—and again in profoundly recent art history time relative that in China, Africa, the Middle East, the Mediterranean, South America, Central America, and among Indigenous peoples worldwide—the mid-twentieth century also saw in the United States the rise of the Pop Art movement, which often used text in art as a way of commenting on mass media and consumer culture. Artists such as Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein incorporated corporate slogans, corporate brand names, and other language from popular culture and advertising into their works, consistent, in many respects, with exploring many of the same questions about the nature of art and the nature of language that other cultures and text art histories had already been exploring for thousands of years, as discussed above.

In **Europe**, text-based art histories are also comparatively far shorter compared to the art histories of text-based art in the Middle East, Africa, China, the Mediterranean, South America, Central America, and among Indigenous peoples worldwide. Europe's text-based art histories that are from that continent's cultures themselves arguably begin with medieval illuminated manuscripts, primarily in religious contexts. Text-based art can be traced back to the Book of Kells and the Lindisfarne Gospels, and to 16th century in Europe, where artists such as Albrecht Dürer and Hans Holbe Younger incorporated text, often with morals in Latin, into their artworks. Dürer's Melencolia I (1514), for instance, is an engraving that combines a depiction, various symbols, and an ambiguous Latin language phrase that has been interpreted in various ways. Holbein's The Ambassadors (1533) depicts objects, symbols, and a Latin inscription that is moralistic. It is interesting to juxtapose such a moralistic message in European text-based art in the medieval centuries with European text-based art five hundred years later, such as some text pieces of the British artist Tracey Emin of the Young British Artists period.

2. As Language Histories

The hundreds if not thousands of distinct text-based art histories around the world for over two millennia appear to demonstrate that, in many manifestations of text-based art among the world's artists, for dozens of centuries, language is not merely referenced or incorporated secondarily to complement a visual image or depiction, and is not merely a vehicle or tool for communication, but rather, in these art histories around the world, language itself in the art—meaning that on its own, the language element also holds profound cultural, historical, and emotional significance and meanings. Many text-based art histories arguably support the view that, historically, across time and across geographical areas and cultures, text-based art not only communicates about a subject matter, idea, or emotion—but also communicates something about our languages themselves, and the common elements of our human language histories. Broadly, the histories of text-based art across cultures and time seem to support the observation that many text-based artists have realized, not just in this century but in many centuries past, that language itself is a power dynamic, and that language, though intangible, can create hegemonies of existence, belief, thinking, and values just as powerful and as long-lasting through history as the locations of bodies of water and as the strength or size of militaries. Similarly, in these diverse text-based art histories worldwide, it seems to be that text-based artists worldwide had realized, long before the contemporary-modern period of the last century, that, just as language can be used to bridge, bond, and understand, it can also be used to inflame, isolate, and divide—and also to confuse, mislead, and lie.

3. As Human Developmental Histories

Why do linguists and anthropologists think that humans in so many different places all independently began making text-based art, blending visual communication with symbol, language, and sound communication? The basic answers appear relatively straightforward as to causes but truly remarkable for their essential elements of commonality across thousands of years and across thousands of places worldwide:

Communication and Storytelling: Language is a fundamental element of human communication and thereby the human condition, and text-based art may have emerged as one of several ways to visually communicate ideas, stories, and narratives where for some reason either the visual alone was not enough, or language alone was not enough—either for practical or aesthetic reasons. Just as spoken or written language conveys meaning, text-based art can additionally visually represent language concepts, emotions, and experiences, enhancing and adding to both the efficiency and reliability as well as the enjoyment of the communication of ideas, stories, beliefs, experiences, and accrued wisdoms. Given that in many regions oral storytelling and oral traditions were foundational to the backbones of cultures, text-based art may have served as a visual form of storytelling, allowing early humans to convey information and express themselves through a combination of images and language that perhaps was both more easily understood, such as by younger members of the culture, or by outsiders in neighboring regions having language barriers—but not visual-figurative barriers.

In other words, someone from another group might not know your **word** for "animal," but they were likely to know, or be able to guess, your **symbol** for "animal."

Ritual and Ceremonial Practices: Many Indigenous cultures around the world have, as discussed, profound histories of using text-based art in their ritual, ceremonial, and information-sharing practices. Text-based art may have been used for being particularly well-suited to convey sacred or symbolic messages, communicate with deities or ancestors, or mark important events or occasions. In these contexts, text-based art serves as a hybrid-visual representation of spiritual or ceremonial practices, combining the power of language with visual aesthetics to convey deeper meanings and significance, including intangible elements not well-captured by either images or words alone. Again, the idea that the marriage of language and visual is additive—that each enhances the other, and thereby a new and more complete whole is made, is arguably an artistic dialectic created by Indigenous peoples around the world thousands of years before Hegel, in Germany, added the concept to the Western philosophical tradition.

Record Keeping and Documentation: Text-based art may have emerged as a way for groups, religions, cultures, and others to record and document important information, accrued wisdom, details of past events, and anticipations of future events, including pending celestial occurrences based on prior recorded observations. Early humans may have used text-based art to create visual records of their daily lives, or their group's activities, successes, and failures, such as relating to a hunt, or a type of animal or plant, or to communal activities. Text-based art may have also been created and used as proto-maps or other forms of

visual documentation to represent and communicate not just intellectual knowledge, and not just beliefs, but empirical and objective facts about the environment, such as locations of animals for food, dangers, and water sources.

Symbolism and Representation: Given that modern languages are used worldwide to represent and symbolize ideas, concepts, and emotions, text-based art may have emerged through experimentation in regions across dozens of centuries as a way to visually represent abstract, intangible, and inchoate concepts that were perhaps too speculative, too theoretical, or otherwise too difficult to convey solely through figurative images. Not everything can be well-captured or well-shared in two dimensions by the physical acts of creating lines and curves. By combining visual elements with language elements, early humans could create a more nuanced and layered representation of their evolving thoughts and beliefs, and their observations of their evolving emotions and their possible meanings. Text-based art may have been used as a form of visual symbolism that was advanced beyond proto-symbols, allowing humans to record, convey, contemplate, and evolve increasingly complex meanings and messages through a combination of images and language that more fully captured and reflected what evolving human brains were starting to produce all around the world in our earliest recorded and pre-recorded times.

Finally, **Aesthetic Expression and Creativity**: Many linguists and anthropologists hypothesize that, if humans universally have a natural or innate inclination towards artistic expression and creativity, it follows that, universally, text-based art may have emerged as one of many forms of emerging aesthetic expressions in each region and land mass of the planet, purely as a function of human creativity—perhaps an early precursor to the notion of art for art's sake—allowing early humans to explore and experiment with the visual possibilities of language, and, conversely, the language possibilities of aesthetics. Both conceptually and as applied, text-based art can be seen from this perspective as an early form of visual poetry, or perhaps even a visual form of lyrics without music, where the arrangement, style, and aesthetics of text and character-symbols become an artistic expression in and of itself, apart from any utilitarian purpose for the individual or the group.

In other words, just like I think that text-based art is super cool, maybe early humans did too.

Caveat

To be clear, to my understanding, no one in any scientific field or area of academic study knows as fact the exact causal reasons or chronologies for the emergence of text-based art in human histories around the world. Experts from art historians to linguists to anthropologists to archeologists will likely debate this and similar topics forever, for sound reasons. Further, generally speaking, it's a mistake by reductionism to look for just a small handful of causal reasons for something in human history—the mathematical probabilities are that dozens if not hundreds of identifiable factors contributed to the developments of text-based art in each group, culture, region, and landmass. Also, at some point, you just have to go with the joy of it—incredibly, humans all over the world with no connection to each other all came up with spectacular variations of this beautiful form of art that blends in infinite ways some of the most beautiful things humankind has ever created—visual art and language. This reminds me of one of the first text-based pieces I made, about something I had suddenly remembered from Whitman—after I heard all the learned astronomers, he wrote, with all their facts and charts, I went outside, and just looked up at perfect silence at the stars.

Above left – Whitman's When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer. *Above center* – the artist's second-ever attempt at text-based art, 8.5 in x 11 in (21.59 cm x 279 in), ink on paper, 2014. *Above right* – a subsequent early personal writing system work of the same text, 8.5 in x 11 in (21.59 cm x 279 in), graphite pencil on paper, 2016. In this last work, the artist's loose handwriting became unreadable as a result of overlapping layers of the repeated substantive text.

Conclusions of Part 2

One, when condensed to the shortest of factual sentences, the quantity, quality, and diversity of worldwide text-based art over the course of recorded history, and before, is staggering and fantastic: In **ancient China**, though **calligraphers** such as **Wang Xizhi** and **Su Shi**, as well as in ancient **Japan**, through the **calligraphy art shodo** as practiced by artists such as **Kukai** and **Miyamoto Musashi**, as well as in **Korea** and **Vietnam**, calligraphy and its derivations were considered a high art form and was often used to convey poetry, philosophy, and religious texts. In the **Middle East and ancient Islamic cultures**, art calligraphy decorated buildings and art objects, and conveyed religious texts and poetry. Ancient **Islamic calligraphy** is known for its elaborate scripts and intricate designs, with its most famous calligraphers perhaps being **Ibn Muqla** and **Ibn al-Bawwab**. In **ancient Hinduism**, ancient Indian texts, such as the **Vedas** and the **Upanishads**, were similarly illustrated with intricate and decorative text-calligraphy-images. Similarly, in **Buddhism**, ancient **Buddhist sutras** have been found illustrated with calligraphy and artwork throughout Asia, with notable examples from **Japan**, **China**, and **Korea**. In ancient **Africa**, as referenced, many ancient and traditional African cultures used text and calligraphy their art, such as **the Nsibidi script** used by the **Igbo people of Nigeria**. And in North America, long before 1960s New York City and conceptualism, **Native American cultures** on the continent were using **conceptual symbols and pictographs** to conceptually convey stories, ideas, and knowledge and belief systems, including the **Navajo sand paintings**. In **South America**, ancient civilizations such as the **Incas** and they **Mayans** used **hieroglyphics and pictographs**, not that conceptually different from those across the world in **Egypt**, to convey written language as part of their visual art forms. In ancient **Egypt**, **hieroglyphics** were used to convey written language and were often incorporated into works of art, such as sculptures and murals. Hieroglyphics were also used to convey religious texts and stories, and were a cornerstone of Egyptian culture and identity. And in **South Asia**, traditional art forms such as **Madhubani painting** and **Thangka painting** often incorporated text, text-symbols, and script into their designs. These art forms often conveyed religious and cultural stories and symbols, and are still practiced in some areas of South Asia today.

Two, one can see the continuation of these art histories worldwide. Just as a few examples, **Frida Kahlo** in **Mexico** often incorporated text and verses of poetry into her visual works to express her emotions and experiences. **Guillaume Apollinaire** was a **French** poet of Polish descent who pioneered the use of visual **calligrammes** in his poetry, in which words are arranged in a visual pattern to create a specific shape or image. The **Iranian** artist **Shirin Neshat** references the **calligraphy tradition** by using not just text but also calligraphy in her photographs and videos to explore issues of gender, identity, and cultural displacement. In **India**, the artist **Ganesh Pyne** was a painter within the last century who often incorporated text and script into his works to convey a sense of narrative and storytelling. The artist **Lee Ufan**, associated with both **Korea and Japan**, is a contemporary artist who often incorporates text and **calligraphy** into his minimalist paintings and sculptures to explore ideas of language and communication. These are just a few of the aesthetic connections between text-based art histories and text-based art now worldwide.

All of these global text-based art histories: This is text-based art.

Continued next page.

C. This Is Text Based Art: How Will We Evaluate It As Words and Images Change?

Potential global standards and criteria, both now and post-AI.

1. Who, and now what, gets to make text-based art?

There is now a fundamental question of access and authorship in the context of human art and human language arguably surpassing the revolution started during the Holy Roman Empire around 1440 with the printing press.

For the entire history of our species until now, human beings were the sole source of text, symbol, and language combinations with semiotic meaning. With not just the development of but now worldwide access to AI language models, machines can now be prompted to generate coherent and convincing text and language combinations on their own—and soon human prompts will be unnecessary. This shift in authorship raises deep philosophical questions, and, in most nations, foundational property and related legal questions about the authenticity and originality of text-based art. If an AI language model generates a work of text-based art, is it truly an original creation in the human sense of the word, or simply a derivative product of pre-existing code and data sets? And does that even matter if, in the art market, like any economic market, there is a willing buyer? The question of authorship quickly raises difficult questions related to conceptions of value, worth, and meaning itself.

It seems to get very deep awfully fast. Arguably, compounding this, some human philosophical constructs aren't even equipped to handle the questions. For example, many philosophical systems of thinking currently prevalent around the world never posited the existence of anyone else besides humankind.

2. In the context of artistic appropriation and mimicry.

An easier entry point may be through the analysis of appropriation, plagiarism, and mimicry. Here, one challenge that AI poses to traditional standards and criteria for evaluating text-based art, and any type art, is the diversity of approaches and techniques that AI can offer. AI can be used to generate text that merely copies or mimics traditional styles, or a particular artist's style—or, on the other end of the spectrum, AI can be prompted to create entirely new forms of language and language-visual communication. These too raise questions of value and worth, as well as questions going to notions of quality and questions of what is, and will be, "good" art or "high" art in a normative or objective sense as opposed to just a market sense. From the related legal perspective, aside from long-existing property and more recent copyright concepts, it is possible that trade secret concepts in the modern intellectual property context might still be useful—but has an artist who has publicly shown their work of text-based art already in that act disclosed their trade secret, such that current law, absent change, cannot and will not protect that piece of text-based art—or the artist's unique "look and feel"—the artist's intellectual or emotional art practice process—from machine use? Particularly where a machine lacks the ability to form the requisite legal intent to steal or misappropriate? Again, it appears to get very deep awfully fast.

3. In the context of aesthetic and linguistic possibilities.

On the other hand, the text-based art possibilities with AI are breathtaking. AI can be used to analyze almost infinite amounts of text-based art, visual, and language data, incorporating everything from over 40,000 years of human activity—and generate new language patterns, new language structures, and new language meanings. The only handbrake on this might be the ability of the viewer to comprehend and interpret these new languages and meanings. Yet AI might then provide an immediate solution: Instant translations of the real-time new languages and text-based artworks, through separate interactive art and language "chatbots" that could field a viewer's questions—and possibly manipulate the set of possible interpretations in response.

4. What is Meaning? What is Language?

This comes in some ways full circle to the fundamental intellectual and philosophical questions that text-based art is particularly well-suited for exploring: What is meaning? What is language? Can either one be truly shared with accuracy? Or be truly

trusted? Likely, while trying to come to terms with these questions, humans will at some point—and it will vary by jurisdiction and nation—develop both (a) market-based economic ways for valuing text-based art in the context of AI, and humans will also develop (b) government-based legal standards the various conflicting property interests involved. On the economic side, the market will do what it will, while on the government-legal side, the eventually-settled-upon legislative standards and criteria will likely balance (i) the unique property challenges of AI-generated language and text-based art, (ii) the unique fair use and commercial opportunities presented by AI-generated language, and (iii) in that process, concepts such as artists' rights, copyright, trademark, trade secrets, misappropriation of trade secrets, authenticity, ownership, and sanctioned monopolies for set durations might be modified—or might not. The blending of art, language, aesthetic, ownership, and related property questions will be fascinating for many art lawyers, intellectual property lawyers, collectors, galleries, and institutions such as museums. An additional reason for this is that legislation and judge-made common law always lags behind what humans are actually doing at the time. Query how far the law will lag behind now that it is not humans but machines that are setting the pace.

5. Universal Languages

Even more difficult, query philosophically and in terms of our collective humanity what happens when AI, in making a body of work of text-based art, or when otherwise prompted, creates a new language that either by intention or by acceptance replaces the prevailing languages that are the common denominator political and economic languages of the globalized planet. Which raises the question of whether AI will finally be the thing that brings to humans a universal language.

Above – Between 2019 and 2022 the artist created a short series of text oil paintings exploring universal words and universal sounds in relation to text-based art as possibly supporting elements of a universal language. Research indicated that the word-sound "huh" is thought by linguistics and anthropologists to be both (a) a universally uttered and (b) a universally understood sound—but one that is ultimately (c) lacking the ability to convey complex information and ultimately (d) open to ambiguity. As a conceptual foil, the artist later painted "use" to document his research that, while all humans universally use tools and other things, the word would not be considered universal as to sound or as to meaning, as it has over twenty ambiguous usages. Above left – "Is It Social Interaction Or Inborn Structure And What Does It Mean To Us All," 2021, oil on canvas, 86 in x 60 in (218.4 x 154.3 cm). Above right – "To Use, Of Use, Been Used, Plus Twenty Or So More," 2022, oil on canvas, 86 in x 60 in (218.4 x 154.3 cm).

Esperanto, a constructed language created in 1887, aimed at becoming a universal language. It was designed to be simple, easy to learn, and politically neutral. The grammar of Esperanto is regular and phonetic, and its vocabulary is based on Latin and Romance languages. Esperanto gained popularity in the early 20th century, and Esperanto-speaking clubs and societies were formed around the world. But it never became a universal language. Today there are roughly only two million Esperanto speakers worldwide, out of almost nine billion humans. **Volapük** was a constructed language created in 1879. It was designed to be a simple and logical language, using a regular system of prefixes and suffixes to create words. Volapük gained popularity in the late 19th century, with clubs and societies formed around the world. It was passed over by humans in favor Esperanto and today is considered a dead language. **Interlingua** is a constructed language developed in the 1950s not by an individual person but by the International Auxiliary Language Association. It was designed to be a simplified version of Latin, with a regular grammar and a vocabulary based on common words from Romance languages. Interlingua never gained popularity, but is still used by some international organizations and academic institutions. **Solresol**, meanwhile, is a **musical language** created in the nineteenth century. It is based on the seven notes of the musical scale and was designed to be a universal language that could be understood by people of all cultures. Each note represented a different syllable, and words were created by combining different notes. Solresol never gained widespread popularity and today is considered a dead language. Finally, **Blissymbols** is

a graphical language created in the 1940s. It was designed to be a universal language that could be understood by people of all cultures, regardless of their spoken language. It consists of a set of symbols that represent words and ideas, and it is still used today as a communication aid for people with certain disabilities. However, it too never gained acceptance as a universal language.

Can a language be universal? Can an art language be universal? It seems to me that there can be a universal language, one that conveys and shares both our thoughts and our feelings, our highest aspirations, our practical experiences, our agonies and our ecstasies, our love, loss, pain, and joy—and it seems to me that a universal art language would be not just of language, and not just of the musical, or the visual, but maybe all three—I wonder if there will be a human universal language, undiminished by AI, that is a blend of language, sound, music, and image, in various balances, depending on which particular balance or combination of the four best would best communicate a the desired aspects of a particular feeling, thought, belief, value, or idea. It's only a theory, but this seems to be the essence of semiotics, in that almost all of the human senses might be part of the human experience of communicating through such a language.

6. Text-Based Aesthetics As Fire Walls And Archives For Humanity

What if there were to exist some forms of text-based art that can't be copied or mimicked by AI? Imagine a hypothetical piece of text-based art, executed by hand, setting forth a complete cohesive narrative—a story, an argument, a manifesto—or a documentation of human ideas and human emotions and feelings. Picture that piece of text-based art being executed in a legible but handwritten scrawl, in layers over and over, such that the semiotic content is always there—but now masked, or layer-erased, by the additional overwriting layers. What if experts at MIT and Cal Tech and elsewhere thought that—while AI could emulate the patterns of the lines and the curves, and emulate the material appearance of all the layers of paint—AI could not figure out the substantive content, due to the overwritten layers? What if only humans had that content, that meaning, passed physically and directly from the artist to viewers, such as at an exhibition, on old-fashioned apart from the digital world?
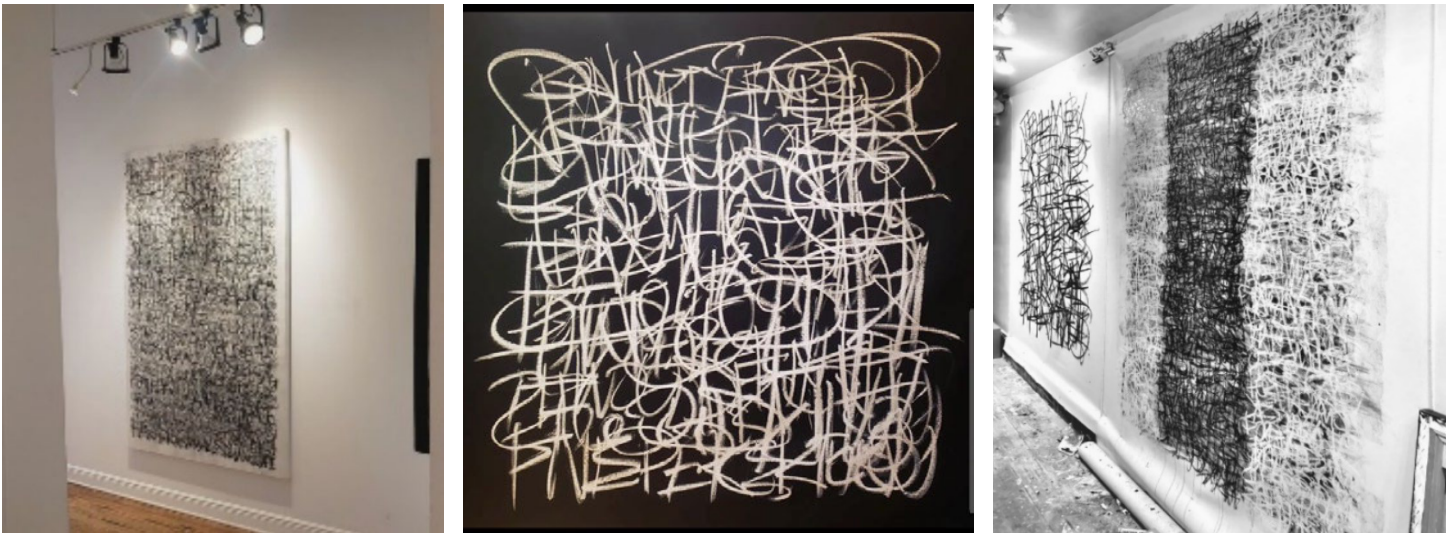
Above – consultations with human experts, including M.I.T. computer scientists working in law, robotics, and artificial intelligence, and also consultations with AI itself, through AI models introduced through OpenAI, Google, and Microsoft, suggest that while AI integrated with machinery and laser optics could emulate the materiality of the artist's personal writing system, AI would not be able to determine the semiotic content of the work. Apparently, AI might not be able to determine meaning from characters, words, and phrases that such artworks had effectively erased or rendered illegible by their subsequent overwritten layers of handwritten text. As such, even if AI could produce the same "look and feel" aesthetically, and as to art materials, AI could not reach or mimic the content or meaning. This is also because of an element of the artist's art practice. The artist's evolving practice, in creating a personal writing system work such as those shown here, includes the performative act of sharing the substantive language content only through human conversations with viewers, or during human gatherings, such as an exhibition or show. If the art theory remains valid that text-based artworks such as those above are one potential theoretical means by which humans can continue to convey truly human-to-human emotions, feelings, thoughts, and accrued experiences and wisdoms to each other, without degradation by or interference from AI, it seems that this type of text-based art, in conjunction with the performative act by the artist of ensuring only humans have access to the hidden language in the works for meaning-making, and for interpretation opportunities, all in some ways reference humanity's most ancient text-based art-acts, such as the oral traditions and storytelling documented across many global art histories, as discussed in Section 2—and are also a way to preserve purely human thoughts, feelings, emotions, beliefs, and values without diminishment or altering by AI.

Continued next page.

Conclusions of Part 3

It seems possible that there can be types of art, including text-based art, which may offer means of resistance and protection against anticipated meaning-making, or perhaps more accurately meaning-deterioration, that will be caused by the full onset AI.

In particular, it may be that some types of human art forms, including possibly text-based art, in possible combination with performative acts by both artist and viewers, and in that sense perhaps a kind of happening, might afford humans not only a humanist visual aesthetic in the period of AI, but also a way for humans, and only humans, to document, for ourselves, for someone, what our languages were, and what we did with them, how we as humans truly thought and felt, how we laughed and cried.

This to me is text-based art.

Continued next page.

Page 22

D.   Is This Text Based Art? A Critique of Works In This Show from a Global Art Critic Perspective.

A Potential Analysis Through Criteria of the Global Histories Voices.

This final section of the paper proposes some possible objective criteria for evaluating contemporary text-based art. It attempts this using two basic foundations. First, it attempts this using the observations of the global critics, theorists, and scholars discussed in Part 1. Next, it also attempts this using observations from the global art histories of text-based art discussed in Part 2. This final section then tries to test the proposed objective criteria against works in this show and related works by the artist.

As a starting point, for further art history foundation and context, this section begins by briefly listing the art movements that may be said to apply to works in this show.

a. Post-conceptualism

The movement that developed in several countries, primarily but not exclusively in the West, including the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, and which, as a generalized matter, building on **conceptual art**, emphasizes the idea behind the artwork, or an idea or theory unto itself, over the artwork's execution, materials, and aesthetic qualities. To oversimplify, with artworks and bodies of work associated with these terms, it is the idea, theory, or concept that takes priority to at least some degree over the materials, techniques, and other physical manifestations used to create it.

b. Post-minimalism

The parallel yet distinct movement that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in several countries, including in the West, and perhaps particularly the United States and some countries in Europe, which is very generally characterized by a focus on simplicity, abstraction, and sometimes the use of manufactured instead of natural materials, with artists often employing themes of repetition, symmetry, and other elements of formality in order to create a sense of order and structure.

c. Conceptual painting

Another related movement that also emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, in largely the same countries, as a type of painting by intention emphasizes not only (a) the idea behind the painting over its visual and execution qualities, but also (b) began to allow artists to experiment with the incorporation of non-painting elements, such as text, language fragments, semiotic content, and other non-traditional visual elements not previously associated with the act of formal painting.

d. Appropriation

Distinct from cultural appropriation, this was the emerging incorporation by some artists in the late twentieth century of other artists' prior existing images, objects, ideas, or language forms into self-declared new works of art across the spectrum of the conceptual to the visual. With appropriation came experimentation with the lines between reproduction, reference, deconstruction, and the recontextualizing of paintings, photographs, sounds, and the words and writings of authors, governments, and corporations to create new meanings, explore contemporary and pop culture mythologies—and even to test the legal boundaries between plagiarism, fair use, and new creation, arguably itself a type of hybrid appropriation-performance art work.

e. Art as Activism

In some ways considered a more recent development in art history—but actually not, as the above global surveys demonstrate—artwork created by artists associated with this category or genre of art most often have a purposeful cause and effect goal, in that they are creating art with the express intention, and sometimes the only intention, of a specific perspective, reframing, or social or political change that might result from viewer engagement with the artwork. The medium and execution is often secondary, as with conceptual art, and the artwork can take many forms, from video, to street art and graffiti, to performance art, to multimedia installations to even, arguably, the act and execution of a gathering or protest. Finally, and again arguably, art in this category may be most susceptible to being didactic as some artworks elect to declare what a viewer must do, as opposed to other artworks that present the question of action by raising ambiguous ideas and images that leave the viewer to explore and contemplate various interpretations before deciding, if at all, to complete the cause and effect.

Some proposed criteria for text-based art.

With the above in mind as some initial foundations and context, it seems that (a) the worldwide voices discussed in Part 1, and (b) the worldwide histories discussed in part 2, together suggest (c) the following may be among the initial criteria and standards that may be useful for objectively evaluating text-based art. There is no doubt others will exist, but this is an attempted start.

1. References to Histories of Text-Based Art

Perhaps, objectively, contemporary text-based can be measured, in part, by whether it references the histories of text-based art arising from the origins of humanity, including but not limited to China, Africa, the Middle East, the Mediterranean, South America, Central America, Indigenous Peoples worldwide, prehistoric cave paintings worldwide. This might be done through a measuring of some of the five elements (a)-(e) below.

Above – juxtapositions of (a) Oracle Bone Script, 2nd millennium BC; (b) a large-scale text-symbol work by the artist in 2020 *; (c) a discovered painting in the Lubang Jeriji Saléh cave, dated to 52,000 years ago; and (d) one of the artist's experimental 'new cave paintings' comprised completely of handwritten text and setting forth a cohesive substantive narrative. ** Both overt and tacit references to these global art histories appear to be both present and also transcended.

a. Contextualization—how effectively the text artist contextualizes and synthesizes their work within, and among, the thousands of global histories of text-based art. The artist might ideally demonstrate aesthetic and conceptual understandings of the historical context, and might incorporate elements and references relevant to a given work;

* Appeared in the artist's first solo show, 2021, listed 'Must See' by Artforum.
** Appears in the artist's second solo show, 2023, listed 'Must See' by Artforum.

b.   Innovation—the degree to which a contemporary text-based artwork incorporates a "newness" or innovation within the global traditions of text-based art, meaning that the artist might not simply replicate the works of past artists, but should rather offer an additive component, a "plus factor," as to perspectives or understandings aesthetically, substantively, or both, to have the potential for making a contribution to the ongoing worldwide development of the genre;

c.   Conceptual framework—whether the work has discernable emotional foundations, or intellectual concepts, or both, such that the intent of the artist may be relayed to the viewer through the use of the blends of text-language and art-image, meaning that the work might ideally have a coherent structure at its emotional and intellection core, with an intentional emotional or cognitive message or theme, thereby allowing viewers to receive from the artist through the work, and begin the viewer's act of interpretation at emotional and cognitive levels to complete the work.

d.   Aesthetics—meaning an examination into whether any imagery or symbolism in conjunction with the text or language-symbols might ideally be not just substantive or utilitarian, but also visually engaging on some objective level, resulting not just in the imparting of an idea or message, or a belief or feeling, but also resulting in an aesthetic and perhaps even emotional experience for the viewer, unto itself, possibly through a poetical or lyrical physical sense of the typography, layout, design, and cadence of the language; and

e.   Materiality—meaning as to the physical properties of the art, including decisions as to type or color of paint or other mark-making substance, and including decisions as to the scale of both the text, and its placement, and whether it is formal and structured, perhaps to demonstrate clear intent, or rather haphazard, to perhaps demonstrate the intuitive.

2. Relevance to Issues In Contemporary Societies, Cultures, and Art

Next, perhaps a measure of contemporary text-based art is whether it makes references to, or has the possibility of inquiry into, issues including but not limited to (a) issues **within a particular culture or society**; (b) issues **transcending any one culture or society** common to all humans, **at the level of our shared humanity** and as a species; and (c) issues as to **meaning itself**, be it of language, art, or even our shared human existence.
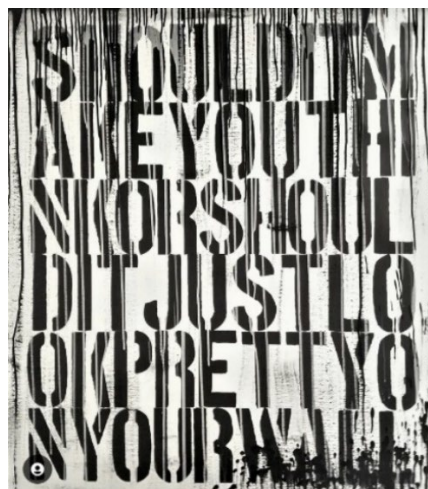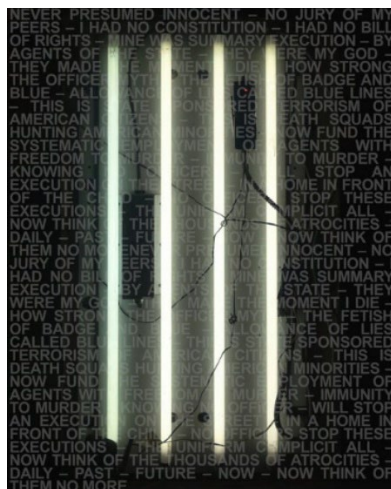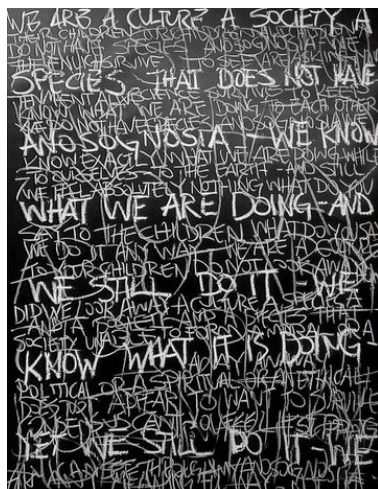

*Above – works by the artist in 2017, 2018, and 2021 exploring issues **(a)** specific to a particular country, culture, and society (**center** -- challenging divides between language in the United States Constitution and Bill of Rights and the public street executions of lawful citizens by state actors); **(b)** transcending any one nation or society (**left** -- positing that psychiatric diagnoses, such as anosognosia, can be applied to our collective species as a whole, because collectively we act in ways that are clinically deemed to be mentally ill); * and **(c)** issues in art and language itself (**right** – asking if one reason or purpose for art and language should have priority over others, and inviting the viewer to enter into a direct dialogue with the artwork, and thereby a direct dialogue with art and language itself, in the context of both universal as well as cultural-specific values, beliefs, and identities.*

* Honorable mention in 2021 show by jurist Dr. Harry Cooper PhD, Senior Curator, Head of Modern Art, National Gallery of Art.
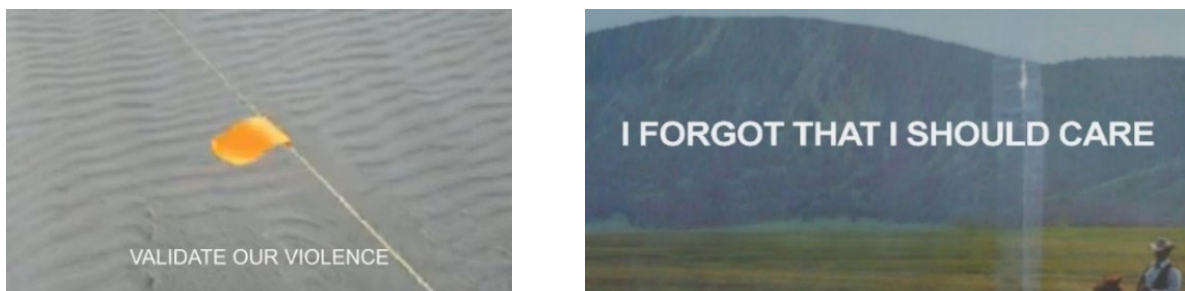
3. Methods, Executions, and Materials

Another set of objective criteria for contemporary text-based art might include how an artwork uses one or more methods of physical execution and one or more types of mediums and materials. As part of this, and for context, related criteria might be whether and how both (a) traditional and (b) non-traditional practices are utilized, and whether or not there is both a range and a dialogue between the various method of executions themselves. These in turn might include related criteria such as having an understanding of the physical properties, both possibilities and limitations, of each medium used and each implement used.

3a. Text Oil Paintings – Brush and Oil Stick
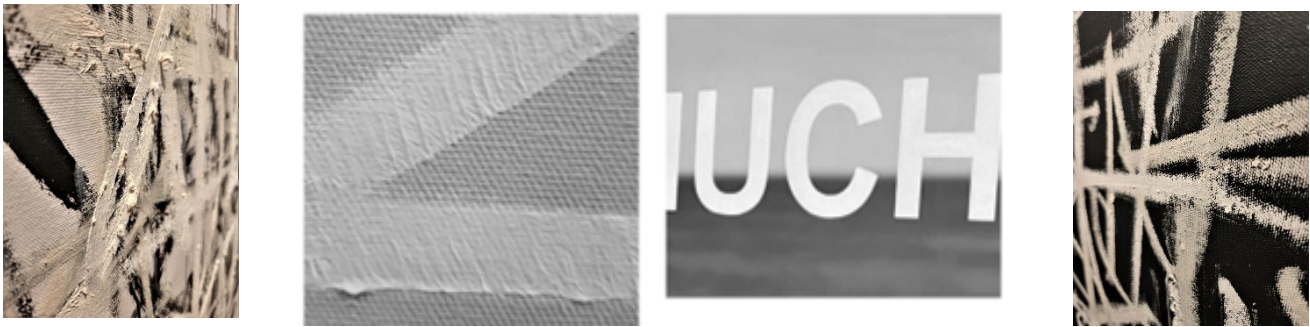
Above left – oil sticks used to execute the artist's personal writing system works, or "scrawls," interact with canvases differently depending on the speed and pressure applied by his hand, resulting in physical textures rising up to 0.33 inches (0.84 cm) off the canvas, thus also causing physical shadows on the lines and curves of the text handwriting, as shown. ***Center left*** *– the artist's "lithium signature" visible in his formal oil paintings on canvas and new media. His brush strokes show involuntary telltale markings due to irreversible tremors in his painting hand from 20+ years of taking prescribed lithium to treat his bipolar 1 mental illness. To execute precise lettering, as seen **Center right***, the artist re-hangs the entire canvas at various angles while working; uses his right hand to steady his painting hand; and alters commercial brushes by cutting away the edges in multiple ways. As such, the diagnosis of bipolar is not only a meaning-making element of the artist's practice—it is higher electrical impulses in brain neurons during mild manias (clinically, hypomanias), that result in the ability to make unusual connections between ideas and things—but also physical component of the artist's executions and practice, both as to his brushstroke in formal works, and also as to the speed and pressure of his oil stick use in his personal writing system scrawls.*

3b. Video and Text Oil Painting on New Media

As to methods, executions, and materials, the artist has learned in the past five years that some of the ideas, connections, ambiguities, questions, and interpretations that he suddenly may perceive during his hypomanias have the best chance to be in dialogue with the viewer, for purposes of the viewer's own meaning-making and interpretations, if video, sound, or new media images accompany the text. **Above left** -- "Validate My Violence," a 3:30 minute repeating video offering the viewer almost 20 lines of narrative juxtaposed against video and sound taken by the artist of an encroachment by mankind on an area of nature. **Above right** -- "I Forgot That I Should Care," a 2019 oil painting of text on a new media image created by the artist, specifically (a) the artist's second rephotographing and manipulation of (b) Richard Prince's first rephotographing of (c) Norm Clasen's 1980s cigarette marketing photograph.

4. Relevance Beyond The Contemporary

Another possible objective criteria for contemporary text-based art is whether, in addressing issues or ideas in the particular now, or as to a particular people, does it do so narrowly with respect to concepts of idea and place and identity, or does it engage with or reference themes and relations to issues that have historically, in different places and art histories, transcended specific historical periods or cultural contexts. For example, does the artwork offer views into the human condition that might

remain relevant across time, not just across languages and cultures now? Does it engage or make reference to universal and timeless human aspirations and concerns such as love, loss, suffering, and joy, or beliefs, values, mortality, or meaning? These questions may be good entry points to assess whether a work with text might transcend temporal time by speaking with a broader relevance to aspects of the universal.
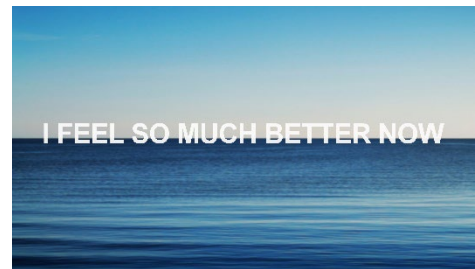

*The artist has explored human relevance from other temporal perspectives, including the life cycle of the planet and its other living things, such as in the work **above left** ("You Could Not Be A Less Relational Self," 2020 *); from the perspective of human attempts from the ancient to the contemporary to adopt temporally fleeting self-made laws that are often in direct tension with the timeless laws of physics and the natural world (**center**, "We Could Have Been Lovers But Then You Were Gone," 2021 **); and from the perspective of feelings and emotions that might never fade across time, as to the **left**. ****

5. Didacticism and Humility

Art critics worldwide have observed that the use of language in art may come across as **didactic**, leaving insufficient room for ambiguities or viewer interpretations. In terms of objective criteria and standards, the question of whether a piece of text-based art is didactic, or too didactic, defined loosely here as pedantic or declaratory, or diminishing the opportunity for viewer questions, interpretations, and conversations, it seems sliding scales, rather than bright line rules, are most helpful. So to with the notion of **"humility"** in text-based art. Given the sheer number of cultures, histories, and identities in the world, now and through history, as well as future, presumably a piece of text-based artwork should show, in some discernable manner, humility as to context, place, and time. This might include indicia recognizing that a given language and a given culture are not universal, and that an underlying thought or belief system is not representative of all cultures, identities, and viewer experiences.

One evaluative standard for this notion of **"humility"** in text-based art might be whether a work expressly or impliedly recognizes these factors and attempts to anticipate or even mitigate cross-cultural and cross-language misunderstandings or misinterpretations. The artist might also approach the use of language with a sense of awareness and respect for the diverse potential experiences of their viewers. Another possible evaluative process would be for the artist to attempt dialogue through the work not with a preferred model viewer, but with many different hypothetical viewers, from different cultures, societies, countries, languages, and identities, in order to create both a more meaningful and a more inclusive dialogue. Such evaluations could perhaps also be achieved by assessing the degree to which a piece of text-based art (a) invites ambiguities and questions, as opposed to asserting certainties, and (b) challenges a viewer's own preconceived notions and assumptions. In other words, a text-based artwork that facilitates artist-viewer dialogue by inviting all three—the artist, the artwork, and the viewer, to each step back from the pre-conceived and the assumed, and thereby come to the offered conversation more openly.
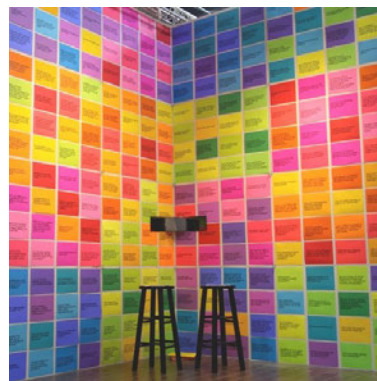
Above left -- *the artist created this 2018 work intending seven ambiguous meanings as to what was created, who created it; and whether it could be assigned a value, such as good or bad. Since then, viewers from six countries have said they see over twenty-two interpretations, some uniquely [continued]*

*   Appeared in the artist's first solo show, 2021, listed 'Must See' by Artforum.
**   Same.
***   Honorable mention in 2021 show by jurist Dr. Harry Cooper PhD, Senior Curator, Head of Modern Art, National Gallery of Art.

personal, some universal—fifteen more than the artist saw himself during the act of creation. **Above right** --- the artist created this 2017 installation in New York City with 256 distinct text phrases on regular-size color paper—a mix of questions, challenges, assertions, and declarations relating to contemporary society. At the end of the installation, viewers could take any of the text phrases they wanted. It's unclear what it fully means, but viewers took with them a roughly equal number of each type of phrase, possibly indicating that, at least in some text art contexts, even didactic phrases invite some level of dialogue with viewers.

6. Experimentations of Idea, Reference, Nexus, and Synthesis

Next, to evaluate whether a work or a body of text-based art has the potential to contribute in some way to post-minimalism, appropriation art, post-conceptualism, or conceptual painting, or another movement in visual art, it seems that several possible objective several criteria and standards may be helpful. First, the artist's or the artwork's ability to experiment with ideas and references—does the artist or artwork take theoretical or conceptual risks in challenging, critiquing, or offering other paths from conventional art ideas or issues? In theory, experimentation would be observable if an artwork has a unique or innovative approach that synthesizes, relates, or connects existing expressions in text-based art in new ways. Second, there might be additional syntheses—does the artist or artwork harmonize or associate different ideas, concepts, and mediums by metaphor, allegory, or other juxtaposition? Third, reference—does the artist or artwork demonstrate the ability to reference and incorporate indicia of inspiration from other art movements, cultural phenomena in one or more cultures, and the perspectives of one or more voices or identities—or fields of academic or theoretical study? Finally, query whether an objective standard in relation to post-minimalism and post-conceptualism is whether the artist and the body of work attempts to create nexuses as to different art and literature theories, and foundations of art, literature, and philosophical movements, to offer for the viewer interpretation and dialogue opportunities to consider both similarities and as well as distinctions in aesthetics and theories associated within these.
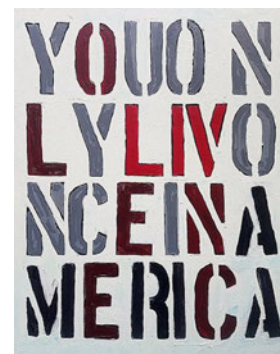

Above left, in New York City in 2018, the artist experimented with **an attempted three-way dialogue**, or "trialogue" between (a) the viewer, (b) an abstract symbol work, and (c) a text work that was intentionally missing letters. *Above center*, in 2015 the artist experimented with illegibility through layering for the first time, but here by using additive layers of abstract paint, as distinct from the additive layers of semiotic text as seen in his later personal writing system pieces. *Above right*, the artist experimented with the color-coding and the double- and triple-use of letters in a text work to have the piece simultaneously (a) set forth the title of the work in the painting itself and (c) use color to identify the two most important words in a 2017 painting ("You Only Liv Once In American Violence").

7. Intellectual and Emotional Rigor

This potential measure may need the proxy of a "you-know-it-when-you-see-it" quasi-objective standard, as it seems that emotional and intellectual aspects of a text-based work may turn on particular assumptions embedded within both the artist's and the viewer's given experiences, cultures, identities, and inherited belief systems, thought systems, and philosophical heritages. That said, it also seems plausible that if an artwork can share to the viewer both emotional weight **and** intellectual weight **at the same time**, then perhaps a rudimentary objective measure for evaluation rigor starts to form.

Continued next page.
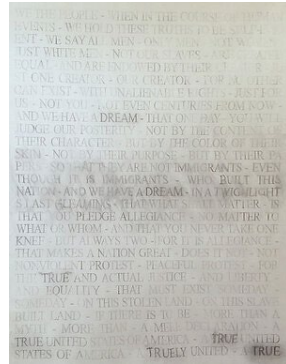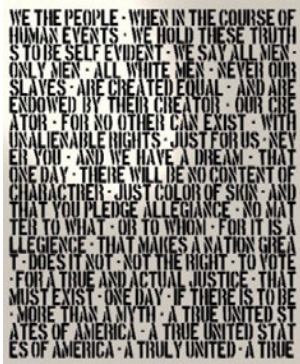
*Starting in 2016 the artist began experimenting with blends and variations of aesthetics and language that might be able to contain, and convey to the viewer, not just intellectual thoughts but also emotional feelings—**fused to be simultaneous**—in ways that allow viewers to experience the artist's intentions and emotions, on the one hand, while still inviting those viewers to have not only their own thoughts, but also their own feelings and emotions, ideally at the same time, thus exploring whether cognitive thought and emotional feeling can truly be separated in all contexts, thereby exploring and questioning a foundational assumption of Western thought and philosophy. Left to right: "We The People" (2016, 2017), "Incarcerated America" (2016), and "Some Feelings And Thoughts I Have Every Second" (2023).*

8. Interdisciplinary Experimentation

It appears that indicia of an interdisciplinary practice is, on balance, potential evidence of an artist's willingness and ability to push boundaries as to materials, methods of execution, and alternative and additional ways to enter into dialogues with viewers, in order that the viewer may better receive a work to begin their own interpretations and constructions.

In 2020 the artist began experimenting with collages of (a) language, (b) appropriated art images (here, Aarons, Koons, O'Neill), and (c) appropriated historical images, including from the National Archives, when notions came to him in hypomanias that did not fit within the conceptual and aesthetic frameworks of his painting practice his emerging personal writing system. Each of the dozens of layered images are altered to achieve a kind of visual elasticity, surrealism, and lyricism parallel to that which is sometimes evident in the cadence and rhythms of his text phrases and titles.

Continued next page.

Postscript
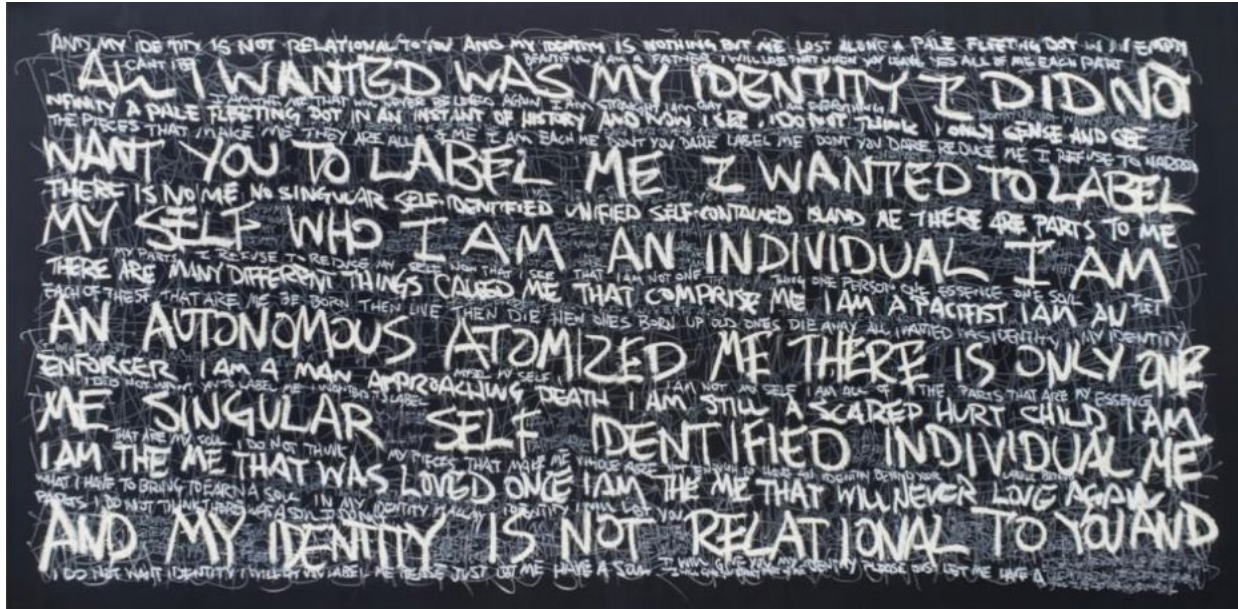
Adam Daley Wilson, "I Am Each Of The Pieces That Make Me And You Will Not Reduce Me," 2021, oil stick and charcoal on canvas, 58 x 122 in (approximately 5 feet x 12 feet), 147.3 x 309.9 cm. As with almost all of his personal writing system pieces, the artist spent months with feelings and thoughts that kept coming after an initial hypomanic notion, then executed this work in less than twenty minutes upon having a second epiphany as to what the piece would look like and say.

Annotated Bibliography

The following bibliography, in loose alphabetical order, is an ongoing research project that is not yet complete.

1. **African Textiles Today**, Chris Spring, Thames & Hudson, 2012, Africa. Discussing the use of text and other symbols in African textile art.

2. **Arabic Script in Motion: A Typographic Exploration of the Arabic Language**, Ali Almasri, Saqi Books, 2021, Lebanon. Discussing the use of Arabic script in contemporary art and design with work by artists and designers from the Middle East. It includes essays on the history and cultural significance of Arabic script.

3. **Art et Langage: Les Annees 1970**, Philippe Sers, Les Presses du Reel, 2006, France. (Translation: Art and Language: The 1970s) Discussing the emergence of text-based art and the relationship between language and art during the 1970s in France.

4. **Art and Text**, Gottfried Boehm, 2012, United Kingdom. Discussing the relationship between art and language and exploring the ways in which artists use text to convey meaning in their work.

5. **Art and Text: Contemporary Art and Literature**, Catherine M. Soussloff, The MIT Press, 1991, United States. Discussing the relationship between contemporary art and literature, particularly text-based art. It examines how artists have incorporated language into their visual work and the various ways in which text and image can interact.

6. **Art and Text**, Black Dog Publishing, 2011, United Kingdom. This book explores text-based art with a focus on work by contemporary artists from around the world and essays by art critics and academics exploring the significance of language and text in contemporary art.

7. **The Art of Writing: Chinese Characters**, Jean Francois Billeter, Sunflower University Press, 2010. Discussing the history and cultural significance of Chinese calligraphy, examining the use of text as an art form in China. It includes essays on the development of Chinese script.

8. **Art Textiles of the World: Japan**, Matthew Koumis, Telos Art Publishing, 2018, Japan. Discussing the use of text in Japanese textile art, with work by contemporary artists as well as historical examples. It includes essays on the cultural significance of text in Japanese art.

9. **Art, Word, and Image: 2,000 Years of Visual/Textual Interaction**, edited by Carol F. Soltis, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1984, United States. An in-depth analysis of the relationship between art, words, and images throughout history. It features works from multiple cultures and periods.

10. **Art, Word and Image: 2,000 Years of Visual/Textual Interaction**, John Dixon Hunt, David Lomas, and Michael Corris, Reaktion Books, 2010, United Kingdom. *Cf.* below the same title, publisher, and year in this bibliography. This book is distinct from the above work of the same title, but whether it is related to the following work by the same publisher remains unclear.

11. **Art, Word, and Image: Two Thousand Years of Visual/Textual Interaction**, Sylvia Moore, Reaktion Books, 2010, United Kingdom. Examining the history of the relationship between words and images in art, from ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs to contemporary art. *Cf.* the above book with the same title from the same publisher in the same year. Whether this is a different edition remains unclear.

12. **Art, Word, and Image**, Marsha Meskimmon, Richard Wollheim, and John Roberts, Blackwell Publishers, 1993. United Kingdom. Discussing the relationship between art and language including ways in which artists have used words and text in their work, as well as the ways in which language itself can be seen as a visual art form. It also offers a theoretical perspective on the development of text-based art late 20th century.

13. **Art, Word and Image: Interactions since 1960**, edited by Michael Corris, with essays on text-based art by John Dixon Hunt, David Lomas, and Michael Corris, University of Chicago Press, 2010, United States.

14. **Art, Word, and Image**, John Hunt, Thames & Hudson, 2012, United Kingdom. Discussing language and text in contemporary art with works by international artists who incorporate words and text into their visual art in the mediums of painting, sculpture, photography, and installation.

Continued next page.

15. **Art, Word and Image: A Collection of Essays on the Interactions between Literature and the Visual Arts** edited by Paul Gifford, Edwin Mellen Press, 2005, United States. Essays on the intersections between literature and visual arts.

16. **Between Word and Image: The Artistic Text Digital Age**, Jörgen Schäfer and Peter Gendolla, Routledge, 2013, United States. Discussing the relationship between text and image in digital art and emerging digital art mediums.

17. **Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents**, edited by Wu Hung, The Museum of Modern Art, 2010. This book includes a section on text-based art in China, with works by artists such as Xu Bing, Qiu Zhijie, and Gu Wenda. It also includes critical essays on the role of text in contemporary Chinese art.

18. **Contemporary Chinese Textiles**, Victoria and Albert Museum, V&A Publishing, 2012. Discussing in one section the use of text and other forms of visual communication in contemporary Chinese textile art.

19. **Korean Calligraphy and Painting: Text and Image as One**, Song-mi Yi, Korean Spirit and Culture Promotion Project, 2017, Korea. Discussing the intersection of text and image in traditional Korean calligraphy and painting, highlighting the ways in which they are integrated into a single art form. It includes reproductions of historical artworks as well as contemporary examples of calligraphy and painting.

20. **Text and Image: A Critical Introduction to the Visual/Verbal Divide**, Cornelia Parker, Reaktion Books, 2016, United Kingdom. Discussing the relationships between text and image in contemporary art with critical perspectives on text-based art's role in visual culture. The book also explores the historical, theoretical, and cultural aspects of text-based art in analyzing the interplay between language and visual elements.

21. **Text and Image: Art and the Performance of Memory**, edited by Rachel Garfield and Paul Coldwell, Intellect Books, 2016, UK. Discussing text and image in contemporary art, particularly in the context of individual memory. Essays and artworks by international artists.

22. **Text as Art: A Semiotic Analysis of Text-Based Art Practices**, Peter S. Kaminski, Lit Verlag, Germany, 2017. Analyzing the semiotics of text-based art practices, exploring the ways in which artists use language as visual elements, and in examining the relationship between text and image offers an analysis of the communicative potential of text-based art.

23. **Text as Resistance: Acts of Rebellion in Text-Based 21st Century Art**, by Claudia Siefen, Hirmer Publishers, Germany, 2019. Discussing the ways in which contemporary artists use text as a form of resistance, to challenge dominant cultural narratives, and to challenge power structures. It features works by international artists from diverse backgrounds in mediums including political posters, graffiti, and installations.

24. **Text and Image: Art and the Written Word**, Cornelia Butler and Wystan Curnow, The Museum of Contemporary Art, United States, 1989. This published exhibition catalog explores the use of text in contemporary art with works by Jenny Holzer, Lawrence Weiner, and Barbara Kruger. It includes essays by art historians and art critics examining the relationship between language, image, and meaning.

25. **Text Into Image: Image Into Text**, edited by Elza Adamowicz and Terry Wyke, Rodopi, (1994, Netherlands, 1994. Discussing the interplay between text and image in various artistic practices, including literature, painting, film, and multimedia art. The book is a multidisciplinary approach to the study of text-based art, examining how language and image intersect and interact in different contexts and mediums.

26. **Texte in der Kunst: Schriftbilder – Bilderschriften**, Klaus Peter Dencker, DuMont Buchverlag, Germany, 1974. (Translation: Texts in Art: Word Images - Image Writing). Discussing the use of text in art, the relationship between word and image, and analyses of the ways in which text-based art practices have evolved over time.

27. **Textual Spaces: Aboriginality and Cultural Studies**, Ross Gibson, University of New South Wales Press, Australia, 1999. Discussing the intersections between language, culture, and identity in Indigenous Australian art and literature. It examines the ways in which Indigenous artists and writers have used text as a means of expressing their experiences and cultural heritages, exploring relationships between language and art.

28. **Texto y Arte: Exploraciones en la Intermedialidad**, Rafael Marfil-Carmona, Editorial Comares, Spain, 2014. Discussing the relationship between text and art in different mediums including literature, film, and visual arts, and analyzing the ways in which text and visuals inform and influence each other.

29. **Texts: Contemporary Cultural Practice in South Africa**, edited by Federico Freschi, David Andrew and Ross Truscott, Jacana Media, South Africa, 2010. Discussing the use of text in contemporary South African art, literature, and performance. It includes essays on the political and social context of text-based work in South Africa.

Continued next page.

30. **Texts on Type: Critical Writings on Typography**, edited by Steven Heller, Allworth Press, United States, 2001. Collecting critical essays and articles on typography in graphic design, advertising, and fine art. It has writings from prominent designers exploring the role of typography in visual communication.

31. **Verbalismo Visual: El Texto en el Arte Contemporáneo**, by Oscar Masotta, Caja Negra Editora, Argentina, 2008. Discussing the use of text in contemporary art.

32. **Visual Words**, Paul Crowther, United Kingdom, 2010. Discussing the role of language in visual art as a component of the creative process.

33. **The Word as Image**, John Baldessari, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Spain, 1991. The conceptual artist's book showcases some of his iconic works that combine images and text in thought-provoking ways. It offers an artist's perspective on the potential of text-based art as a form of communication.

34. **Word as Image: American Art, 1960-1990**, by Richard Marshall and Lisa Phillips, Walker Art Center, United States, 1990. This published exhibition catalog explores the use of text as a visual element in American art from 1960 to 1990. It features text works by Jasper Johns, Barbara Kruger, and Bruce Nauman, and includes essays by art historians and art critics discussing the significance of text-based art.

35. **Word and Image: French Painting of the Ancien Régime**, Richard Wrigley, United Kingdom, 1996. Discussing the use of words and images in French painting during the Ancien Régime and examining the ways in which artists used language to convey meaning in their work.

36. **Words Matter: Writings by Contemporary Chinese Women Artists**, edited by Rong Rong and Xiaoyan Tang, China Arts and Entertainment Group, 2018. This book collects essays and artwork by contemporary Chinese artists who use text as a central element their work. It includes art historian and art critic essays on the role of text in contemporary Chinese art as well as reproductions of text-based artworks.

37. **Wörter/Bilder: Text-Bild-Verhältnisse in der Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts**, Andreas Hüneke, Fink Wilhelm GmbH + Co. KG, Germany, 2008. (Translation: Words/Images: Text-Image Relations in 20th Century Art). The book addresses various relationships in 20th century text art.

38. **Words and Images: Australian Prints and Art from the 1960s to the Present**, Elena Taylor, National Gallery of Australia, Australia, 2008. This published exhibition catalog explores the use of text and image in Australian art from the 1960s to the present day.

39. **The Word as Witness: Prints and Multiples from the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art**, Wendy Weitman, Museum of Modern Art, United States, 2004. This published catalog features works from the Museum of Modern Art's collection of text-based by artists such as Barbara Kruger, Bruce Nauman, and Ed Ruscha, as well as critical essays on the role of language in contemporary art.

40. **Writing on the Wall: Word and Image in Modern Art**, Simon Morley, Thames & Hudson, United Kingdom, 2003. This book traces the history of text-based art from the early 20th century to approximately 2020. It explores how artists have used language as a visual element in their work as well as the ways in which text has been used in artistic mediums to convey political and social messages.

About

As an artist

Please see my artist's statement on the next page.

Previously

Adam Daley Wilson (B.A., University of Pennsylvania, 1994, J.D., Stanford Law School, 1999) has an academic background focusing on international diplomatic history, international economics, the political histories of the United States and China, and a legal background focusing on international civil and criminal antitrust law, white collar crime, complex civil litigation, and federal and state appellate litigation.

He practiced law for about a decade at two of the world's leading international law firms in Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles / San Francisco after serving as a judicial law clerk to a United States Court of Appeals Judge. Additional government and non-profit professional experience includes the U.S. Department of Justice, serving as a court-appointed mediator in the Maine state courts, and representing adults with intellectual disabilities to protect their civil rights, human rights, and to protect them from disability discrimination. He has also been asked to serve on several non-profit boards, including in academia and mental illness stigma advocacy for teenagers and college students.

To ensure the art remains beholden to no one, he continues to maintain an appellate brief-writing practice for law firms nationwide. At the time of this writing he is assisting an intellectual property and media law firm brief questions of federal copyright law before the United States Supreme Court.

Above all, he is a Dad. He left the practice of law in the mid-2000s for over five years to be the full-time stay-at-home parent his two children, now 19 and 15.

Studio

Adam Daley Wilson lives and works in his studio in the arts district of downtown Portland Maine, a few blocks from the Atlantic Ocean. He paints his large canvases in the 27-foot by 3-foot narrow hallway of his tiny flat, so that he can work any time day or night when it suddenly starts tumbling out.

Continued next page.

Adam Daley Wilson

Artist's Statement

Spring 2023

Pictures of words started tumbling out of my head at age 42 after a medicine change for my bipolar 1 mental illness. I wrote some down but did not think much of it. As they kept coming, I liked how some sounded when I said them out loud. I started studying art history in books, learned there was text art, and a few years later applied to my first juried fair. A lot of my work is large, conceptual, and text-based. Oils or oil sticks. My hand shakes from twenty years of lithium, making a brush stroke my friends call my "lithium signature." This is my process: It just falls out, then I research art history and more, as much as I can, then I work. I paint in my narrow hallway where I live, two blocks from our art museum. I need my studio close because the painting comes fast. The art is the process is me.

Once I was told, "your mind's like a honeybee, you go from flower to flower, and then you make honey, like no one else, things no one else can see."

I like having a different mind, even as it needs twelve psychiatric pills a day to treat. But the art is not about any of that. It's about what I see. I bet you and I see the same things. For a random neurological reason, I just see them differently. Substantive areas and references seem to keep expanding, connecting. It's not intentional, I don't direct it. It just tumbles out. I don't try to capture it; I try to release it honestly. I've learned to know when I do it right. Starting about a year after the words, images of complex text paintings started coming too. These are cohesive narratives that look abstract.

Some start and evolve in my mind, and in my heart and my gut, for months, even a year, then suddenly I see what they look like and I work. Months of thoughts and emotions, all together, then executed in minutes, broken oil sticks, blisters, sweat. That work feels very good and after it is done it feels exhausting. The simple ones have almost a dozen layers of meanings. The complex ones have fifty layers of meanings, or more, and layers of materials too. They connect things I'm told aren't connected so far. As I learn, I see that may be right.

It's not for everyone. But if this is your fix, you may not quite find it anywhere else.

It's fine to use art words to discuss all this; they have their time and place. I'm learning them. But since I'm self-taught I think simple words are best. Not just for concepts, for feelings too. I made a piece a few years ago, and some people said it made them feel so much they wept. It had very simple words. It connected with emotions some of the deepest ideals that we articulate. It tumbles out of my head, when my head is running high, and without my psychiatrist and a few others, it would only be on some loose papers in some notebook where I live. I didn't know that it could be considered art.

This statement is my process too. It shows how I see, and why I make it when it comes.

— Adam