

Launch of Issue 3 TEXT at Douglas Hyde Gallery Dublin, featuring artists ORLA BARRY, TONY COKES, ERIK VAN LIESHOUT, ADRIAN PIPER, PAUL ROY, CESAR VAN PINSETT.

“Talk is dirty, writing is clean.” Gilles Deleuze

We, the editors, have been working on this text-based art project for 18 months. During that time, a time of conversation, correspondence and production, we have performed an ambivalence as to what this project is, as if it was so present-tense or prescient we have yet to confront its essence formally or conceptually. We have embraced this ambivalence, even tried to hang on to it a little, in an effort to retain the spirit and energy of what first-issue contributor Mark Verabioff calls the “first wave”.

Our launch at the Douglas Hyde Gallery Dublin heralds a trilogy of publications, TONE, TOLD & TEXT. What has emerged during this time of production, discussion and sometimes debate, is the question of language-use in culture, culture being defined here in philosopher Gilles Deleuze’s terminology as “resistance”.

In our small art scene there have been text-as-art moments that have been ancillary and provisional. But this is what is important about text as art, it erupts and disappears like every speech act. Text as art works differently than the art object. There is something subversive about its literalism, brazenness and dumbness that seems antagonistic to what we call “visual art”, which works with meaning covertly through image or form.

Text as art is efficiently defined by text-based artist Larry Johnson in an interview with David Rimanelli,

“My job as an editor is to cram a big story into a small space: to forego the short story, to forego anything but the blurb. The idea is to maximise the attention span the reader/viewer has for the work of art, which I imagine to be equal, say, to that of a daily horoscope or beauty tip.”

Text is somehow read as empty in an art context, fugitive, always referring to something full, object or experience of objecthood, or what we might conjugate as *object-experience*. If we take this line, that text is empty and dependent on some object-experience, then what is an art object?

Today we could claim the art object is not resisting its online reification, but leaning into it. Bruce Hainley writes: “Whether abstract or seemingly not, today’s art is not produced to complicate, disrupt, intensify or question what anything (the world, existence, etc.), is taken to be; nor to move anyone (risking vulnerability, soul); nor even to float new trippy kinds of meaning or meaningfulness or meaningful meaninglessness: it is produced only to have been produced. Reification, I’m pretty sure Uncle Georg warned, isn’t critique, but, you know, whatevs.”

This view could be put down to a hardening of veins on Bruce’s part, through years of breaking down art experience with words, which is another form of reification, like these words written (or spoken) right here, right now. In a sense we reify with words to make sense of a

world and a fate that is outside of words. The stranglehold of identity politics and political correctness via the labelling of things and experience feels like it comes out of a desperation to name the unnamable.

In 1976, in his novel *Ratner's Star*, the American writer Don DeLillo writes how:

“To bear a name is both terrible and necessary. The child, emerging from the space-filling chaos of names, comes eventually to see that an escape from verbal designation is never complete, never more than a delay in meeting one's substitute, that alphabetic shadow abstracted from its physical source”

In 1989, Slavoj Žižek writes something similar in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* via Hegel, that “the word is a death, a murder of a thing”. If the word is the murder of a thing, in how a thing named no longer exists as a thing or experience in the world, but as a word, what are the 18 artists who have contributed to the three issues thus far, expressing or resisting by fetishising (in respect to the specificity and exclusivity that the fetish defines) in the name of the word?

The answer is something antagonistic. Text as art is antagonistic to what we call, inadequately, “visual art”. And yet text is visual, and there is a lot of visuality taking place in all three issues we have produced over the last year: typed, handwritten, colour, font, scale, format and so on. In a sense we experience the form and the content — what is being said — at the same time, which is always a kind of intentional dumb, or what co-editor Alan Phelan described as “silly”

in relation to his recent text and stripe-based paintings presented at Molesworth Gallery Dublin. We have come to learn that dumb or silly are the most important things for the artist who is considering text as part of their tool bag.

We are told in art school to not be literal. Artists who use text in their art are going against this dictate, to the point of cliché. They are embracing cliché, believing in cliché, or making cliché more real. These are sentiments or statements that speak the name of art with force and farce. They are essentially dumb, unlike the jargonistic catalogue essays that follow as afterthoughts. Text as art is about puncturing the present, while at the same time vanishing from view. Text as art is about time and timing.

Text as art is an attitude, an attitude tested by the current policing of language. Distilling art into text at this moment of verbal self-consciousness and correctness seems like the worst time (in respect to the mainstream), but best time (in respect to art as something distinct from the mainstream). Language is complicated. Artists are complicated. When art and language come together it is really complicated. But when artists become conflicted, not complicated, art is lost.

From the outset we have asked our contributors to try to avoid, at all costs, the use of images as a backdrop to text, to avoid memes in essence. This editorial directive has not always landed: images, or rather the residual effect of images, have survived the editorial process. This is a symptom of the hold images have on us as artists.

So why adopt pure text as art? Has the image failed us? Is text as art a recognition of the image's failure to speak for the artist. If so, text as art is a device that gives permission to the artist to express with words, words that are otherwise read or unread in the side-show of gallery literature. Whatever way we take on text as artists, viewers and readers, whether rhetorically, poetically, politically, formally or ironically, text as art poses a particular type of resistance in the visual field of art, especially at a moment when AI language models (GPT) are beginning to do the textual work for us, minus the awkward subjectivities and opinions of what it means to be human.

We invite you to come find out more on May 3rd, 6pm, at Douglas Hyde Gallery Dublin, where a launch will take place with the co-editors and some of the contributing artists.

The third issue TEXT (and a limited number of first and second issues) will be for sale at the launch night. It will NOT be available online as a pdf, or by post, but will be distributed only in-person. 50 copies will be available on the launch night at €20 each, strictly one copy per person. Cash only.

A limited number of copies of Issue 1 *TONE* & Issue 2 *TOLD* will be available for purchase at the launch.

TONE features artists: LAURA FITZGERALD, ALAN PHELAN, JACK PIERSON, LAURE PROUVOST, MARK VERABIOFF, ISOBEL WOHL.

TOLD features artists: FIONA BANNER, GARDAR EIDE EINARSSON,
CLAIRE FONTAINE, JAKI IRVINE, DARRAN MCGLYNN, WALKER &
WALKER.

Funded by The Arts Council of Ireland and Dublin City Council