

**TEXT**

**S T E**

**PIECES**

**F A**

**B**

**N**

**R Ü**

**1997**

**G G E**

**2014**

**M A N N**

**The Wall — South Kensington**

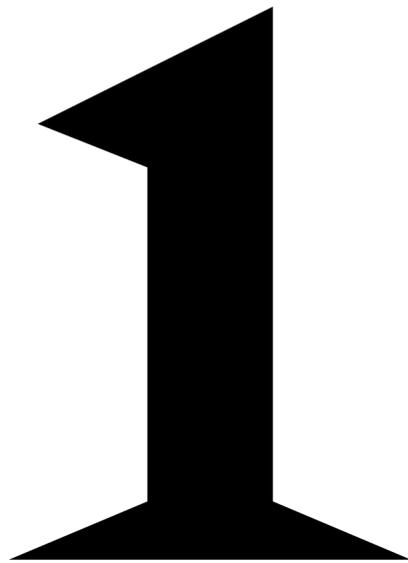
# 26 STATEMENTS IN 4 PARTS

by Nicolas de Oliveira  
and Nicola Oxley

The following is a co-authored text on *Text Pieces (1997 — 2014)* by Stefan Brüggemann.

Each work has been assigned a place by the writers in one of four separate areas of concern, entitled *parts*. These are temporary arrangements, in the same way that exhibitions of works are rarely permanent. After the text, the works will be dispersed once more by the artist and others.

- Part 1** — examines the institutional context addressed by the work
- Part 2** — in which artworks become products
- Part 3** — considers the contested ground of authorship
- Part 4** — where silence and emptiness are discussed



Framing the corner site of Harrington Road and Queens Gate Road, in South Kensington, London, is a pristine white wall measuring 101 metres by 2.5 metres. It appears to demarcate the boundary of the empty site behind it. The immediate area boasts one of the largest concentrations of museums and cultural institutions in the world and includes the Natural History Museum, the Victoria & Albert Museum, and the Science Museum.

However, the white enclosure is not the protective cordon for a putative institution being built within its perimeter — for there is no such construction work taking place — but the wall itself is the location for the ‘institutional’ presentation.

# (THIS MUST BE THE PLACE)

(This must be the place)

2003

Font arial black

Black vinyl lettering

Edition of 3

The 'retrospective' exhibition of the Mexican artist Stefan Brüggemann entitled *Text Pieces (1997 — 2014)*, consists of twenty-six works in total, drawn from the extensive corpus of the artist's works with language from his early career to the present.<sup>1</sup>

The vinyl texts, printed in Arial Black typeface, are temporary manifestations of ideas, fixed in regular intervals along the entire length of the wall in the manner of works hung in 'enfilade', a method used both in military formations and in museum architecture. In the case of the latter, the term signifies a suite of rooms aligned with one another, affording a single continuous axis or vista. Indeed, the Victoria and Albert Museum nearby is designed in just this manner. The exhibition takes place in the shadow of the institution, and references institutional codes and narratives, rather than attempting to replicate its physical appearance. Today, to understand the nature of an institution, it is insufficient to examine its core, and we must pay attention to all that surrounds it.

Institutions are not just physical structures, but also sites — or scenes — for instituting, meaning that they produce certain relations and posit certain ideas and ideologies. [...] Institutions are as much functional as

fictional.<sup>2</sup> Institutional narratives lead to myth-making; these are compelling stories told about such places by others — in the case of the museum, the audience — but equally include narratives promulgated by the institutions themselves.<sup>3</sup>

Unlike those artists who presented their own idiosyncratic versions of museums and collections such as Marcel Broodthaers, Hubert Distel, or Daniel Spoerri, Brüggemann invokes the presence of the *institutional*, rather than the museum itself. His exhibition establishes a classification model according to medium, material, and date — appropriating the conventions of art history that underpin collecting. But contrary to the position taken up by artists during the formative years of institutional critique of the 1960s and 1970s, the artist's work signals a departure from dematerialisation and proposes a *rematerialisation* of the institution. Here, the institution — and the exhibition — function in the manner of a script; this is constantly re-enacted by the cast of curators, artists (and spectators) with a minimum of divergence, yet it is the actual interpretation, the performance, which rematerialises them through interpretation.

Brüggemann's oblique restaging of a retrospective thus posits the institution in an ideal form: he borrows its authority and proposes a *détournement*, a re-reading of its function in order to accommodate and serve his own work. Presented in the open-air, on a busy thoroughfare, the exhibition echoes the philosopher Walter Benjamin's monumental *Passagen-Werk* or *Arcades Project*, an archive of collected and collaged texts on urban modernity, consumer — or spectacular culture, and bound posthumously within a vast volume.<sup>4</sup> Its location is a reminder of the city as a constantly evolving organism, and a backdrop to public interaction and discourse. It is this energy that the author chronicles. Here, Benjamin's work consists, not only of writing, but collecting, recombining and *writing down*, all of which would be considered as authentic activities for an author today. Considering his own motivations, the artist and poet Marcel Broodthaers writes:

*'In trying to recreate the world around us, provoking and introducing minor modifications, elements of reflection, keys to reading, without losing touch with what we have left behind, discovering history not only as memory but also and above all as*

*action, as continuous construction, as living matter and not as an immobile concept.'*<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The text pieces represent a specific aspect of Brüggemann's work, but, as a retrospective exhibition are necessarily partial, since there is no place for — or indeed mention of, his installations, films and paintings.*

<sup>2</sup> *Simon Sheikh, Instituting the Institution, in: Kunsthalle Lissabon: Performing the Institution(al), KH Lissabon and Atlas Projectos, Lisbon, 2012, p.90–3.*

<sup>3</sup> *According to Philosopher Roland Barthes, Myth presents itself as natural and transparent, but is a cultural signification driven by ideology. Similarly, the idea of the museum may project an aura of neutrality, but its taxonomies are opaque, cultural and ideological products.*

<sup>4</sup> *Walter Benjamin, Gesammelte Schriften, Vol.5: Das Passagen-Werk, Rolf Tiedemann (ed), Suhrkamp, 1982.*

<sup>5</sup> *Marcel Broodthaers quoted in: Birgit Pelzer, Marcel Broodthaers: Collected Writings, Ediciones Polígrafa, Barcelona, 2013, p.19.*

# THE EVENT OF WRITING MAY BE THE UNEVENT OF READING

**The event of writing may be the unevent of reading**

1997  
Font arial black  
Black vinyl lettering  
Edition of 3

Broodthaers' and Benjamin's approaches to *writing* undermine the stability of *reading*. They propose an interchangeability between the roles of reader and writer, a position supported by Brüggemann's mutable exhibition:

*'An exhibition is a construction that reveals itself continuously. A reality that happens in front of our eyes, a series of experiences oscillating between permanency and the traces of a present that becomes past, a future already present.'*<sup>6</sup>

In this instance, the exhibition may represent a continuous state of becoming, in which the institution, the work, the artist and the audience are entirely mobile arrangements and are able to develop new positions and functions. This

tendency of dissolving the material and conceptual boundaries of exhibition spaces can also be witnessed in writer André Malraux's proposition of a 'Museum without Walls', begun in 1947, in which he argues for a collection of world art that is not contained within any given architectural space, but is instead held between the covers of a book. By replacing the work of art with a photograph, its aura is shattered and it functions solely as a document — a placeholder for an original. Of course, latterly, the internet might be seen as the place in which Malraux's argument is taken to its logical conclusion: a house built, not of walls, but of words and pictures.

<sup>6</sup> Mathieu Copeland, *Choreographing Exhibitions*, JRP Ringier, p.23.

# WORDS THAT BECOME PICTURES PICTURES THAT BECOME WORDS

## Words that become pictures pictures that become words

2003

Font arial black  
Black vinyl lettering  
Edition of 3

The discussion of the relationship between pictures and words is central to the legacy of conceptual art; it suggests that there is a conflation between form and content, or more accurately, between the idea and the artwork. The artist Joseph Kosuth states:

*‘Indeed, it is nearly impossible to discuss art in general terms without talking in tautologies... the “art idea” (or “work”) and the art are the same... The “purest” definition of Conceptual Art would be that it is an inquiry into the foundations of the concept “art”.’<sup>7</sup>*

If we follow Kosuth’s proposition, *Text Pieces (1997 — 2014)* suggests a presentation of ideas, in the form of words which, in turn, might operate as pictures in an exhibition or, more precisely, as questions about the nature of depiction. ‘I use words’, states the artist Robert Barry.<sup>8</sup>

*‘The words are an attempt at defining something that cannot be defined, words circling around something that may be in your mind. Then I fell for the power of individual words and the space between them. The meaning between unrelated words and also the physical space in between. And their look, their placement, [...] but there is always a connection to something else.’<sup>9</sup>*

Accordingly, Brüggemann’s statements offer few visual clues. The letters are entirely uniform, 20 centimetres in height, with 7 centimetres between each character; they advance a mechanical system of writing and a formal, metronomic reading dictated by the rhythmic spacing of the words, redolent of the even  $\frac{4}{4}$  ‘motorik’ beat on tracks by ‘Krautrock’ groups such as Neu!, Can, or Kraftwerk. The very monotony and the repetition allow for an understanding of the *unsayable*, something beyond the realm of language.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Kosuth, *Art after Philosophy, I and II*, in: *Idea Art*, Gregory Battock (ed), EP Dutton, New York, 1973, p.70.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Offer & Exchange’ is an ongoing project by curators Lisa Rosendahl and

*Daniel McLean*, which explores the idea of the artist’s contract and presents an exchange of works between Brüggemann and Barry.

*The project makes reference to the seminal ‘Artist’s Reserved Rights, Transfer and Sale Agreement’ (‘The Artist’s Contract’) devised by the curator Seth Siegelaub and drafted by the lawyer Bob Projansky in 1971.*

<sup>9</sup> Robert Barry interview with Mathieu Copeland: *Ideas Come out of Objects*, in: *Voids A Retrospective*, Centre Pompidou, Kunsthalle Bern, and Centre Pompidou-Metz, JRP Ringier, 2009, p.00/01.

# FROM ANYTHING TO ANYTHING IN NO TIME

## From anything to anything in no time

2007

Font arial black  
Black vinyl lettering  
Edition of 3

It is usually the role of the exhibition catalogue to provide further discussion on the artist's work in an exhibition, and offer a broader context of interpretation. The catalogue forms one of the pillars of the *institutional*, as well as providing an exhibition with a certain degree of legitimacy. The curator Hans Ulrich Obrist stresses the need for exhibitions to be seen as important artistic manifestations in their own right by maintaining that 'an exhibition which does not produce a catalogue does not exist'. Consequently, the publication offers the exhibition, understood as an ephemeral configuration, a lasting form.

Brüggemann's catalogue, in the shape of a newspaper, appears to eschew the traditional format of the book; by seemingly ignoring its legitimizing power he reaffirms the exhibition's intangible qualities.

The newspaper is one of the quintessential emblems of mass consumer culture, progress and international modernity. As early as the 19th century were its possibilities for 'shaping new and unorthodox skills in reading — and looking' noted by the writer and poet Stéphane Mallarmé.<sup>10</sup> After all, a newspaper is written as a collective effort and assembled, in the manner of

a collage, before it is rapidly printed. Compared to the authority and permanence of a book, the newspaper — containing news, editorials, opinions, letters and advertisements — is an entirely temporary and disposable object. This is not to say that its contents are not reliable or respected, but its findings relate chiefly to a permanent present, updated daily. It is this very feature of *presentness* that has challenged and altered reading habits. For Brüggemann the publication invokes a dialectics of temporality: it is both crucial to the exhibition and wholly redundant. Perhaps the newspaper functions

in the same way as the vinyl texts themselves: as disposable forms of lasting ideas, whose physical presence is subject to rapid decay.

<sup>10</sup> Anna Sigridur Armar, in: *Un coup de dès: Writing turned image / An Alphabet of Pensive Language*, Generali Foundation Vienna, Walter König, 2008, p.192.

**THIS WORK IS  
REALIZED WHEN  
IT IS  
DESTROYED**

**2**

# THOUGHTS ARE PRODUCTS

## Thoughts are products

2001  
Font arial black  
Black vinyl lettering  
Edition of 3

The notion of the artist as a selector of 'products' can be traced to the early 20th century through the artist Marcel Duchamp, who argues that 'making is choosing' in establishing his idea of the *readymade*.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, Duchamp takes mass-produced products and turns them into artworks by the power of his selection, an assertion that was later reprised in the work of the Conceptual artists, who, according to Benjamin Buchloh, adopted an 'administrative aesthetic' in an attempt to address the commodification of art.<sup>12</sup> In 1970, the artist Daniel Buren states:

*'We might even say that the producer-“creator” is only himself, a man alone before his product; his self is no longer revealed through his product....His product, devoid of style, could by extrapolation have been put out, that is to say, made, by anyone...His relation to his product is similar in nature to the relation between a demonstrator and the product he is demonstrating.'*<sup>13</sup>

Buren asserts that the introduction of the product leads to a detachment between author and object. It suggests that products are able to develop a more autonomous position without relying on the author's presence or narrative;

thus, they are able to circulate with greater freedom in line with the tenets of free market capitalism. Indeed, today, artworks 'send a message that marks difference and generates confidence, the resulting sense of community and belonging is not unlike that evoked by branded goods.'<sup>14</sup>

Brüggemann's statements appear to chime with this position, since they are both unique *and* endlessly reproducible, as well as rapidly installed and easily removed, so as to be instantly responsive and flexible products. The works' elusiveness then links them to the dialectics of presence and absence so essential to the affect of the commodity.

<sup>11</sup> Marcel Duchamp Speaks, Interview, BBC, 1959, quoted in Thierry De Duve, *Kant after Duchamp*, MIT Press, Camb.Mass, 1996, p161.

<sup>12</sup> In the case of Marcel Duchamp's work *Tzanck Cheque* (1919), he pays his dentist for his services with a work of art in the form of a handwritten cheque, a transactional gesture performed subsequently by other artists such as Yves Klein, Robert Morris and others.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel Buren, *It rains, it snows, it paints*, in: Gregory Battcock (ed), *Idea Art*, EP Dutton, 1973, p.170-1

<sup>14</sup> Isabelle Graw, *High Price: Art between the Market and Celebrity Culture*, Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2009, p.130.

# TEXT INSTALLATION / EASILY REMOVABLE

## Text installation / easily removable

2001  
Font arial black  
Black vinyl lettering  
Edition of 3

But if the artwork becomes a product, it proposes a critical break with authorship and craft, and changes its position as a unique object in the art market. The artist's *Text Pieces* (1997 — 2014) adapt a conceptual *style*, which is carefully

aligned with contemporary market trends in the artworld, whilst simultaneously parodying its position as an arbiter of taste, placing them squarely between sincerity and cynicism.

**LOOKS  
CONCEPTUAL**

**Looks conceptual**  
1999  
Font arial black  
Black vinyl lettering  
Edition of 3

The art historian Pamela M. Lee argues that the 'artworld as we once knew it begins to lose its singularity, its focus... Contemporary art has been increasingly recruited in the service of politics, economics, and civil society'. She puts forward the view of 'culture as an expedient resource to the increasingly managerial ethos of the global age.'<sup>15</sup> And the jewel in the crown of this global age is the idea of the *contemporary*, celebrated in art's ability to plasticize contemporaneity itself as an image.

<sup>15</sup> Pamela M. Lee, *Forgetting the Art World*, MIT Press, Camb.Mass and London, 2012, p.2-3

**TO BE POLITICAL  
IT HAS TO LOOK  
NICE**

**To be political it has to look nice**  
2005  
Font arial black  
Black vinyl lettering  
Edition of 3

The philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky goes further in describing the gradual shift from Postmodernity to Hypermodernity, a period marked by what he calls the 'second individualistic revolution', in which shared ideology remains only in the form of nostalgia for its loss.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Gilles Lipovetsky, *Hypermodern Times*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2005, *op.cit.*

# IDEOLOGY IS OVER

**Ideology is over**  
2012  
Font arial black  
Black vinyl lettering  
Edition of 3

This revolution is driven by the divestment of the public sphere, the loss of major social and political institutions, the dissolution of collective memory, the passion for new technologies, moral relativism, and exacerbated narcissism. These developments have led to an 'Aesthetic Capitalism' in which the category of 'art', controlled by multinational companies, subjects every facet of life to aesthetic scrutiny. Today, mass consumption mingles art and aesthetics with sports, brands, fashion and entertainment.

# MONEY CREATES BAD TASTE BUT CREATES CULTURE

## Money creates bad taste but creates culture

2013

Font arial black

Black vinyl lettering

Edition of 5

Brüggemann's statement remains equivocal towards capital and its effects, recognising, on the one hand, its potential for abysmal and uneducated aesthetic decisions, whilst, on the other, praising its ability to foster and sustain a broad range of cultural formations. However, the very notion of 'bad taste' remains questionable, since we no longer live in an age of connoisseurship, when certain individuals who were in possession of sufficient 'cultural capital' acted as taste-makers.<sup>7</sup> The emergence of a 'knowledge market', driven by widening participation in higher education and enhanced access to information technology, would appear to broaden the agenda of taste.

But today, echoing Lipovetsky, fiercely individualised aesthetics are largely driven by global multinational companies; their strategic positions in the market allow them to forecast trends, which become self-fulfilling prophecies. Taste, therefore, has become a matter of monetary influence. Consequently, if we pay attention to the voice of capital, there ought not to be any bad taste. Perhaps the resulting 'culture' is due to the eradication of bad taste by the pressure of media technology. The language of taste is 'inscribed in the very DNA' of advertising.

<sup>7</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Harvard University Press, 1984, *op cit*.

# AN ADVERTISEMENT FOR COKE

# KEEP OUT OF THIS

## **An advertisement for coke**

2012  
Font arial black  
Black vinyl lettering  
Edition of 5

Advertisement is the first system to accomplish the breakdown between every register at once: between text and image, between object and experience, between performer and receiver. This revolutionary potential made advertisements' lexicons ripe for borrowing, as many artists, from Andy Warhol and Richard Hamilton, to Roy Lichtenstein and Dan Graham discovered.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, the homonym 'Coke' invokes the brand 'Coca-Cola' an emblem of hyperconsumerism, whilst also referring to the drug cocaine; in the case of the former, one of the world's leading brands, advertisements are not needed to bring its ubiquitous name to our attention; instead, the advertisement signals perpetuity and underscores the brand's historical and cultural value. The inference of cocaine, which, as an illegal substance, cannot be commercially advertised, points to its use as a desirable lifestyle statement, described by philosopher Jean Baudrillard as its 'sign value'. Brüggemann's

play on words connects both examples through the notion of contemporary desire where the sign value of an object (rather than its *functional- or use value*) creates demand. The market of luxury brands bestows a lingering *aura* of exclusivity on its objects in order to obscure their reproducibility. This trend is entirely contrary to a classical market based on supply and demand, where it is the very scarcity of a product that enhances its exchange value.

This conflict of value is further escalated when applied to the authentication and evaluation of artworks, and remains a central theme in Brüggemann's *Text Pieces (1997—2014)*; his position, like that of the market, retains a central ambiguity.

<sup>18</sup> Rachel Haidu, *The Absence of Work: Marcel Broodthaers, 1964–1976*, MIT Press, Camb.Mass and London, 2010, p.60, *op.cit.*

## **Keep out of this**

2014  
Font arial black  
Black vinyl lettering  
Edition of 5

# 3

The opening text from the philosopher Roland Barthes' autobiography problematises the relationship between the self, the writer, and the text.

**'Once I produce, once I write, it is the Text itself which (fortunately) dispossesses me of my narrative continuity. The Text can recount nothing: it takes my body elsewhere, far from my imaginary person, toward a kind of memoryless speech which is already the speech of the People, of the non-subjective mass (or of the generalised subject), even if I am still separated from it by my way of writing.'**<sup>19</sup>

Barthes asserts that the author is separated from the 'speech of the People' by his own writing: the author writes himself out of the picture. Moreover, the act of writing becomes a means of distancing the author from what he produces. If understood this way, authorship can be seen as a divestment or dispersal of the self, rather than an assertion.

Now consider Brüggemann's statement below in the light of Barthes' instruction to the reader in his autobiography: 'It must all be considered as if spoken by a character in a novel'.<sup>20</sup> Do not read it, but *hear* it.

<sup>19</sup> Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes, MacMillan, London, 1977, p.6.  
<sup>20</sup> Roland Barthes, *ibid.*, p.3

**I CAN'T EXPLAIN  
AND  
I WON'T EVEN TRY**

**I can't explain and I won't even try**

2003  
Font arial black  
Black vinyl lettering  
Edition of 3

The artist seems to refer to an unnamed event or circumstance that is beyond the power of words; it is indeed in moments of heightened emotion, or, contrariwise, when mired in boredom, that language fails us. Perhaps the reluctance to speak is due to the inadequacy of language in those moments: we cannot say the *unsayable*.

But this reticence could also be perceived as a display of petulance or hubris by the artist; as long as the respective territories of artists and audiences — or writers and readers — remain sharply delineated, artists will always appear to be withholding something essential from the audience, namely the explanation of the work. Therefore, no matter how small or insignificant

the withheld information (if any) may be, its level of importance is always out of proportion to the desire for revelation. Here, the statement points to an explanation of something personal (about the artist) and the impenetrability of contemporary art. The conflation of the autobiography with the work always reduces the latter to an episode in the artist's life, and renders it indecipherable without his narrative.

Brüggemann's double refusal to explain either his personal motivations or his artwork, would appear to place interpretation beyond reach; however, the deliberate play on his silence, his own inconsistency and fallibility, offer the audience a large measure of interpretive autonomy.

**SOMETIMES  
I THINK  
SOMETIMES  
I DON'T**

**Sometimes I think sometimes I don't**

2001  
Font arial black  
Black vinyl lettering  
Edition of 3

Questions of productivity and authorship are central to Brüggemann's work. In particular, the artist is interested in the oscillation between opposite states. This is not a vacillation, or lack of resolve, but instead it delineates a productive, fully constituted *in-between*.

The writer and artist Lilo Nein asserts that authorship 'could be considered a function of the interface between 'you' and 'I', rather than maintaining the absolute differentiation of being an author or a not-author of a work and by taking for granted that there are gradual differences of identification and responsibility, possible and necessary in contemporary working conditions'.<sup>21</sup>

This does not strictly mean the artist relinquishing authorship, but rather entering a negotiation with the audience; authorship is then a mutable, active space that is manipulated by both parties. As a result, the author 'is not only the condition, but at the same time the product of this relationship'.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Lilo Nein, *The Curator as Choreographer*, in: Mathieu Copeland (ed) *Choreographing Exhibitions*, JRP Ringier, Zurich, 2013, p.177.

<sup>22</sup> Lilo Nein, *ibid.*, p.174.

# (THIS MOMENT IS YOURS)

**(This moment is yours)**

2013

Font arial black

Black vinyl lettering

Edition of 3

Therefore, authorship is the result of a process of collective effort, an encounter between the artist and the spectator. The act of looking at the work then does not signal the end of the engagement, since the encounter continues to linger, rendering the act of authoring a protracted *becoming*.

*'In all these works of art, borrowed texts signify not merely writing, but the "present". Present in this sense means both contemporaneity [and] to participate in a cultural slice of time. As if the artist were a kidnapper authenticating a photograph of his hostage, text in art signifies both presence and the present.'*<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Rachel Haidu, *ibid*, p.4

# THIS WORK IS REALIZED WHEN YOU STOP LOOKING AT IT

## This work is realized when you stopped looking at it

2012

Font arial black

Black vinyl lettering

Edition of 3

The content of the work ought not to be seen as distinct from this relationship between object and viewer, but, in a sense, is the very site in which it takes place. If there is no separate content, then it follows that the work should not strive for novelty or originality. The artist Douglas Huebler wrote in 1969: ‘The world is full of objects, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add any more’,<sup>24</sup> a statement echoed later by artist Richard Prince who says that ‘I have never thought [of] making anything new. I make it again’<sup>25</sup>. But if these differently calibrated refusals to make new art objects — which resonate with Brüggemann’s works — do not preclude an artist from working, the implications are even more extreme when applied to text. The writer Kenneth Goldsmith has coined the term ‘uncreative writing’ in his search for more productive forms of text:

*Faced with an unprecedented amount of available texts, the problem is not needing to write more of it; instead, we must learn to negotiate the vast quantity that exists.’<sup>26</sup>*

This process of ‘unwriting’ is also described as the action of ‘moving information’ by writer Marjorie Perloff; it signifies pushing language around as well as the act of being emotionally moved by that process.<sup>27</sup> Terms such as appropriation, unoriginality and unwriting, have been explicitly adopted as strategies in the Contemporary. Each appears to invoke the principle of *negation*, but we should not assume an absence of human emotion or engagement on the side of the artist or writer.

‘It’s been awhile that I’ve been good for nothing’ writes Marcel Broodthaers, commenting on his fraught passage from writing poetry to art practice.<sup>28</sup> Emotion always solicits the spectator’s empathy, since it suggests a large degree of honesty — we are usually unable to cry unless we are upset or physically hurt. But the above statement, within the ambit of an exhibition, reveals a form of duplicity. The artist must present an insincere position, in the manner of an actor in a film — a simulation of reality — which art requires to succeed. This is not merely false modesty on the part of the artist — a means to receive praise — but a tactic of engagement, and indeed outlines a rhetorical position, in which both the statement *and* its implication, that is, its inversion, are held as true.

<sup>24</sup> Douglas Huebler, *Artist’s Statement for the Gallery publication to accompany January 5-31, Seth Siegelau Gallery, 1969.*

<sup>25</sup> Richard Prince quoted in: Richard Prince, *Writer, in: Canaries in the Coalmine, Exhibition Catalogue, Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo, 2006, p.128.*

<sup>26</sup> Kenneth Goldsmith, *Uncreative Writing, Columbia University Press, New York, 2011, p.1.*

<sup>27</sup> Kenneth Goldsmith, *ibid., p.1.*

<sup>28</sup> Marcel Broodthaers, quoted in: Rachel Haidu, *ibid., p.3.*

**ALL MY IDEAS ARE IMPORTED  
ALL MY PRODUCTS ARE EXPORTED  
(ALL MY EXPLANATIONS ARE RUBBISH)**

**All my ideas are imported, all my products are exported,  
(all my explanations are rubbish)**

2003

Font arial black  
Black vinyl lettering  
Edition of 3

We ought not assume that Brüggenmann is being *either* truthful or not, but that he is both, a paradoxical proposition shared by other conceptual artists from Joseph Kosuth and Robert Barry to Richard Prince. Barry's seminal statement from 1969 in which he states 'during the exhibition the gallery will be closed'<sup>29</sup> illustrates the point of these 'true contradictions' or 'dialetheia' theorised by philosophers Graham Priest and Richard Routley in 1981.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Robert Barry, in: *Art & Project Bulletin* 17, 1969.

<sup>30</sup> *Dialetheism* proposes that there are true contradictions and opposes Aristotle's first formal statement of the Law of Non-Contradiction, which states that 'the same thing cannot be and not be'.

# THIS WORK IS REALIZED WHEN THE VIEW IS UPSIDE DOWN INSIDE OUT

**This work is realized  
when the view is upside down inside out**  
2013  
Font arial black  
Black vinyl lettering  
Edition of 3

Contradictions are deemed to be linguistic games, precisely because the structure of language is able to accommodate them. Equally, we are able to conceive in language of spatial positions and geometries that would be entirely incompatible with the laws of nature and perception. Yet, in language, they may be entertained as propositions, delighting in their descriptions of *how* and *where* things are, allowing the audience to play out multiple subject positions.

**THIS WORK IS  
REALIZED  
WHEN  
I DIE**

**This work is realized when I die**

2013

Font arial black

Black vinyl lettering

Edition of 3

In drawing attention to the work's incomplete status, the artist explicitly invokes a moment after his own death. The legacy of a life's work is, of course, a concern to every artist, though to mention it can seem morbid and uncomfortably hubristic. But in building this legacy into the very structure of a current work Brüggemann combines his concern with contradiction and paradox with the role of the audience. Since he is unable to accomplish the work during his lifetime, the mantle of the author is passed on to the audience who must see to its completion. The impossible assertion of the work is a trap: a proposition we can neither fathom nor refuse.

**(NO MORE TEARS)**

**(No more tears)**

2004

Font arial black

Black vinyl lettering

Edition of 3

# LOVE NEVER FAILS

## Love never fails

2014

Font arial black

Black vinyl lettering

Edition of 3

Donna Summer and Barbara Streisand's duet of 1979 went on to become an iconic disco hit. The title *No More Tears* includes the coda (*Enough is Enough*) omitted by Brüggemann. *Love Never Fails* is the eponymous title of a song by Brandon Heath from 2009.<sup>31</sup> Of course it is not as if the song titles have any specific claims on originality, since they are drawn from commonplace statements denoting emotion and sentiment. Both conform to the hyperbolic use of language in pop music: one is placatory, the other promissory. The suggestion of the latter is that when all else fails, love delivers; in the lyrics of popular music the term 'love' is used more than any other, repetition rendering

it seemingly banal. Its hit is instantaneous and lasts for only the duration of the track. But playing a favourite song over and again allows the listener to restage its emotional charge, and gain a measure of authorship. The lyrics, when voiced with enough emotion, never describe general feelings, but only the individual recipient's. After all, as lovers often say: 'This is our song'.

<sup>31</sup> It also echoes the identical statement from 1 Corinthians 13:8.

However, here the term 'love' refers to charity and is not erotic, but selfless.



In her seminal essay *The Aesthetics of Silence* the critic and writer Susan Sontag describes the long goodbye between the artist and the audience:

**‘Contemporary art seems moved by the desire to eliminate the audience from art, an enterprise that often presents itself as an attempt to eliminate “art” altogether.’**<sup>32</sup>

Art has been presented as a form of withdrawal from the audience. As an artist one ought ‘to educate oneself to silence’ states the writer Michael Bracewell.<sup>33</sup> This withdrawal has taken different forms of negation, from obfuscation and the refusal to communicate, to destructive action. If the power of art is located in its ability to *negate*, ‘the ultimate weapon in the artist’s inconsistent war with his audience is to verge closer and closer to silence. The sensory and conceptual gap between the artist and his audience, the space of the missing or ruptured dialogue, can also constitute the ground for an ascetic affirmation.’<sup>34</sup>

Silence does not literally exist, something acknowledged by the artist and composer John Cage, whose work *4’33’*<sup>35</sup> addresses the absence of intentional sound. Even in an anechoic chamber that eliminates all external sounds, the individual hears his own heartbeat and breath, and, on the edge of audibility, the blood coursing through his veins. Instead, there is ‘a receding horizon of silence’, a process of gradual disappearance towards a *vanishing point*. For something to be perceived, there must be a viewer or listener, equipped with the means of sensing.

**‘The artist who creates silence or emptiness must produce something dialectical: a full void, an enriching emptiness, a resonating or eloquent silence.’**<sup>35</sup>

Negation always refers to fullness, albeit in an absent state. It is impossible to picture a void without describing what is adjacent to– or around it. To add the words ‘no’ or ‘not’ to something invokes its presence through opposition and absence.

<sup>32</sup> Susan Sontag, *The Aesthetics of Silence*, in: *Styles of Radical Will*, Secker & Warburg, 1969, p.8

<sup>33</sup> Michael Bracewell, in Stefan Brüggemann, Nicolas de Oliveira (ed), *JRP Ringier*, 2007, p.31.

<sup>34</sup> Susan Sontag, *ibid.*, p.8

<sup>35</sup> Susan Sontag, *Aspen*, no 5–6, Autumn Winter 1967.

# (NO CONTENT)

## (No content)

2004

Font arial black

Black vinyl lettering

Edition of 3

Brüggemann's *Text Pieces (1997—2014)* are laconic utterances, parsimoniously doling out words as if they were precious things. By actively negating the noun *content*, he appears to withdraw even what little he has written. Without the added brackets *No Content* would be just that: a void. The brackets function as a quasi-pictorial framing device, and as a signal that the contrary of what it contains is true. Here, the artist invokes the 'Law of Non-Contradiction', which maintains that 'the same thing cannot both be and not be'.

It follows that emptiness is not a property of the work itself, but exists as an effect of perception in the spectator's mind. We cannot see sight itself, we can only contemplate the idea of perception, according to the critic Brian O'Doherty, who writes that "'seeing sight" feeds on emptiness; eye and mind are reflected back to engage their own process'.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, the idea of the act of looking becomes an artefact that exists only in the mind of the spectator. According to the artist Steven Parrino 'good art is experiential'.<sup>37</sup>

The question of experience is addressed in Georges Perec's novel *A Void*, written entirely without the letter 'e', where the central protagonist Anton Vowl is found examining his carpet:

*'It's almost as though, intrinsic to his rug, to its vitals, in a way, is a solitary strand looping around a vanishing point — alpha,*

*you might call it — as though acting as a mirror to all unity and harmony. Such a point might grant him a synoptic vision of cosmic infinity, a protological point of origin gradually maturing into a global panorama, an abysmal chasm.'*<sup>38</sup>

In this passage, the world is represented, in its absence, by a single loop of wool. To make the transition from the banal to the sublime requires, not only an act of the imagination, but the ability to pay attention, to scrutinise, to undergo total immersion in the *act* of perception. Correspondingly, Brüggemann's texts cut the information down to almost nothing, whilst inviting the spectator to pay attention to what is left.

<sup>36</sup> Brian O'Doherty, *The Gallery as a Gesture in: Voids: A Retrospective, Exhibition Catalogue*, JRP Ringier, Zurich, 2009, p.211.

<sup>37</sup> Steven Parrino, *The No Texts: An Anthology of Writings*, Abaton Book Company, New Jersey, 2003, p.14.

<sup>38</sup> Georges Perec, *A Void*, Gilbert Adair (trans.), Vintage Classics, London, 2008 (1969), p.6.

# (NO END)

## (No end)

2004

Font arial black

Black vinyl lettering

Edition of 3

The aphoristic nature of his work presents a minimal transaction, momentarily isolated from the surrounding world. It presents a work of art as a hermetic space of speculative philosophy.

The minimal poet Aram Saroyan's works are known for their brevity, to be looked at as much as read. His eponymous book of 30 poems from 1968 could be read in a matter of minutes.<sup>39</sup> His most famous work *Light* from 1965 is of a single word, unconventionally spelled and printed in the centre of an otherwise blank page. It plays with the glimmering quality of light, doubling and expanding silently in space. A single word appears to require only an instant to absorb, and minimal effort, but its visual conciseness belies the potentially infinite extension of its reading.

Saroyan's minimalism also chimes with the writings of the poet Ezra Pound, who coined the term 'Imagism', defined by its textual use of

precise visual images. Pound also denies the use of any word that does not contribute to the presentation, a concern with laconism adopted by Brüggemann. But where these poems rely on style and verbal resonance, essentially transposing an *elsewhere* into the text, the artist's statements offer the viewer no other place to escape or daydream. Their tautological nature requires intense scrutiny, rather than imagination. Copying, repeating, negating, and contradicting are stratagems that always return the viewer to the point of departure. If arrival and departure are essentially no longer counterposed, they are nullified, a classic feature of the paradox.

<sup>39</sup> Aram Saroyan, *Complete Minimal Poems*, Ugly Duckling Press, 2007, New York.

# (THIS IS NOT SUPPOSED TO BE HERE)

**(This is not supposed to be here)**

2001

Font arial black

Black vinyl lettering

Edition of 3

The *Text Pieces* (1997—2014) appear to play with the idea of gallery-labels, used to title, date and describe the material nature of the artwork. A label is not a discrete object, since it always refers to an adjacent object; if the object is removed, or indeed, if there is no object, then the link is broken and it becomes 'not label' and 'not work'. This double negation results in a new image.

The aphoristic joke 'Knife without a blade without a handle' conceived by the 18th century German scientist Georg Christoph Lichtenberg uses the description of the knife in order to say 'nothing', through a double negation. The philosopher Jean Baudrillard employs Lichtenberg's dictum to examine the construction of images. 'Utopia through the abolition of the blade and the disappearance of the handle, gives the knife its power to strike' writes Baudrillard.<sup>40</sup> He argues that the image thus has no object, and that images are indifferent to the world:

*'Therein lies the secret of the image, of its superficial radicality and its material innocence, this capacity to refract every interpretation into the void.'*<sup>41</sup>

Perhaps Brüggemann's *Text Pieces* (1997 — 2014) are in fact such images without objects, subject only to the aesthetics of pure surface; without objects as masters or originals to hold them in check, sharp and cutting — they are knives without defence. To strike with nothing is always more powerful than to strike with something.

<sup>40</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Utopia Deferred: Writings for Utopia (1967–1978)*, trans.

Stuart Kendall, *Semiotext(e)*, New York, 2006, p.62.

<sup>41</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime*, Chris Turner (trans.), Verso, London, 1996, p.81.

# NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE NOTHING IS POSSIBLE (EVEN NOTHING CHANGES)

**Nothing is impossible, nothing is possible, (even nothing changes)**

2003

Font arial black

Black vinyl lettering

Edition of 3

Negations function by drawing our attention to the space between two disparate assertions, underlining the inherent instability of positions. Sight is momentarily cancelled by blinking, offering a momentary respite from permanent vision. If we did not blink we would not be able to see. 'Interruptions wake us up from the delusions of control', writes the philosopher Paul Virilio.<sup>42</sup> The white wall displaying *Text Pieces (1997–2014)*, and framing the corner site of Harrington Road and Queens Gate Road, interrupts, in the manner of a blink. It is an interval, a pause, a space of suspension. It is not a museum, but a crack in the institutional fabric: *a museum of the void*.

<sup>42</sup> Sylvère Lotringer and Paul Virilio, *The Accident of Art, Semiotext(e)*, New York, 2005, p.100.

# Interview

# HANS ULRICH OBRIST

# STEFAN BRÜGGEMANN

**HANS ULRICH OBRIST** *I think a good way into our conversation is to consider the idea of doing exhibitions in unexpected locations. I curated a show in 1993 in my hotel room, following my interest in how you can meet art where you expect it the least. Here, we have an exhibition on a wall on the street, which makes an obvious reference to Mexico and its long story of muralism. But before we enter into that, I wanted to ask about your beginnings. What was your first appearance as an artist?*

**STEFAN BRÜGGEMANN** My first exhibition took place in a law firm in Berlin in 1994. I showed some watercolours in a lawyer's office, but I couldn't see the show as I was living in Mexico. I made these watercolours in the eighties, maybe when I was 13 or 14 when I first decided to be an artist and started to sign my work. I still have those watercolours in my own collection.

**HUO** *What was on them?*

**SB** They were influenced by pop art and architecture; they show a series of building structures with very bright primary colours. I still have them because it's very different from what I do.

**HUO** *Are they figurative?*

**SB** In a way they are but they also become abstract representations of building models and structures. When I was young, I had a clear vision of what I wanted to do but I needed to choose between architecture and art. I was very influenced by space and its relation to society. At the end I decided to be an artist because you have more liberty in the sense that you don't need a client. You just do it and it happens but if it doesn't happen there's no problem.

**HUO** *Can you talk about this idea of the billboard and the wall?*

**SB** Obviously they are an important part of the cultural heritage of Mexico. They take you as a child to see the murals and they become part of your unconscious. The same way capitalism is also part of your unconscious; government elections and commercial campaigns are not regulated in Mexico, which results in having billboards everywhere, from the highways to the most unexpected urban spaces. It's a mix of both.

**HUO** *It's about the artist as a public figure.*

**SB** I believe that as an artist you are a public figure, and you can activate the public in different ways. For this project, having a wall in South Kensington close to Exhibition road with the Natural History Museum and the Victoria & Albert Museum, I wanted to do an exhibition rather than an intervention. I wanted to twist and invert the idea of the exhibition. This project is conceived as an institutional show outside the institution. By using the same techniques of an exhibition in a gallery or a museum, such as displaying the works in a chronological way, I wanted to make a critique of the institution.

**HUO** *The project is almost like a retrospective of your text pieces. I was wondering, when did you introduce for the first time words into your work? Obviously it's not related to the watercolours, the words came later. There is a long history of text and words into exhibition space.*

**SB** It was a slow transition, in the early watercolours there were city landscapes showing billboards with text. The trigger came when I was looking at a copy of *Artforum* and saw the advertisement of an exhibition of the date paintings by On Kawara. Curiously enough I don't remember the date of the magazine or the exhibition but I do remember the works dealing with the consciousness of time and space. I realised that I could use language in a different way. While Kawara painted those works, giving them a gesture, I was interested in including text into my paintings. That was my first revelation.

**HUO** *When was the first time you made a text piece?*

**SB** The first time I put vinyl text on the wall was in 1997.

**HUO** *What happened in 1997?*

**SB** The piece is called *The event of writing may be the unevent of reading*. At that time I was reading a lot of structuralism and post-structuralist philosophy. I wanted to question the process of reading by twisting the mechanism of looking and thinking about a text. I was interested in how writing only exists in the process of reading, but also in how the act of writing, beyond the visual and formalistic process, is about the concept embedded. Writing can be invisible too.

**HUO** *Will this text be part of the exhibition?*

**SB** Yes, it is the first one.

**HUO** *Is it your number one in your catalogue raisonné of the text pieces?*

**SB** It is. They are placed in a chronological way, following the academic and traditional forms of display. It echoes the museum techniques of organising their works chronologically and thematically and also the way retrospectives are still being curated.

**HUO** *Can you tell me more about the chronological order for the text pieces? How will the chronology unfold, is it a sequence, or is it a story?*

**SB** It is the first time that I put all my text pieces together in this order. They are placed in a row as paintings are in the academy, which opens for a constellation of random connections. Normally I show them individually, but by putting them all together they become thoughts and voices that raise multiple questions. I also want to show the invisibility of the concepts they contain. I see the text pieces as mirrors; I am very fascinated by the idea of a mirror and how the text becomes a mirror to the reader. The purpose is that the text pieces become the internal voices of the audience. For me, that is when the work is activated, it makes you think and it makes you question.

**HUO** *Duchamp said that the viewer does 50% of the work.*

**SB** The public does 50% or even more of the work. I like the idea of my work being activated by the public, which raises many doubts. I like to think of my work as an unstable source of thinking, which can be perceived and understood in multiple layers and through many interpretations.

**HUO** *Since it is the first time that the Text Pieces will be seen together, these sentences were not planned to be written one after the other, and you made them for a specific context and exhibitions: can you tell us how these are activated and maybe you can give us some examples to talk us through these different works?*

**SB** The piece *This work is realised when I die* is about the impossibility of seeing the work completed. It has to do with the agency of the author upon the work and in relationship to the audience, which may or may not be present in the future where the work may happen. It's an existential piece. *Looks conceptual* questions how conceptual art became a style, betraying the original notion of the dematerialisation of the artwork. As a kind of mannerism, Conceptual Art was objectified as it became impossible to make the object disappear. In addition, it wittily plays with the idea of looking at a "concept" which, in this instance, is a contradiction. As an artist, I am obsessed with the void, which I am always trying to represent. This failure is part of trying the same experiment over and over. The text *This is not supposed to be here* and its opposite *This must be the place* deals with the placing of the artwork and its contradiction. *Money creates bad taste but creates culture* deals with the capitalist view of society, of how money has become a producer of taste. It's a remark of how you cannot judge it on taste but you can judge it on culture.

**HUO** *How do you see the change over time in your pieces ? From the very beginning which is a sentence about the act of reading the text, to more recent self-referential and existential compares, about life and death. How do the works change ?*

**SB** I think I am becoming more existential, trying to be a mirror of society. The last text in the exhibition, for example, *Love never fails*, is more romantic and optimistic in a way . I don't know how I have come to this point, I think of it as rhizomatic. I don't work in stages, and my bodies of work often contradict themselves. They are direct observations of our time.

**HUO** *What is next, how do you continue, do you have some unrealised works?*

**SB** All my works are unrealised. The text pieces are unrealised because they are in the mind even though they are texts on the wall.

**HUO** *One could say that all these pieces on the wall are unrealised.*

**SB** Exactly, I will consider them all unrealised, so now that you were talking about this I would like to think how I could realise them.

**HUO** *I think that will be the next step. How to realise all these sentences materially?*

**SB** I have another piece that I offered to a botanical garden but they didn't accept it. It is a gravestone with my name on it and my date of birth and the gap for my death date. The piece would be activated when I die and my ashes will be buried by the gravestone in the botanical garden. I wanted to close and open a cycle by becoming fertiliser for the soil. This is also an unrealised work until my existence ceases. I like when my work raises a lot of questions: is this an artwork, is this a proposition, is this a conclusion, or is this a statement? Perhaps, it's all these things at the same time and they take different shapes and different ideas.

**HUO** *While we see in the streets of London, Kensington, your billboard murals, you also work with painting and installation. For the reader of our interview to know what else you are doing, because you are doing many other things, can you tell me what is going on with other media?*

**SB** The latest painting I have done is called *I*, which shows the letter 'I' in black vinyl on a white canvas. When you look at it you don't know if it's a rectangle or a letter. It confronts you like an invisible mirror, and it becomes an existential problem, a void. I normally work with vinyl text, which always goes on the wall, but in this case the vinyl goes on canvas. I made five of them putting the vinyl myself, which displaces the 'I' when they are together but if you place them apart they seem to be the same painting. They are a reflection about humankind and how we are all the same and different at the same time.

I did a project with a reference to Dan Flavin's *Monument for Tallin*, which I titled *Monuments for the ceiling*. They consist of 1:1 replicas that I placed on the ceiling, so they became the lights of the exhibition. I went to the same factory where Flavin produced them but instead of putting them vertically on the wall I return them to their status of fluorescent light on the ceiling, so they would illuminate the space. I like to play with that contradiction about the visible and the invisible. Every time you enter an exhibition

space you never take in consideration the lighting, which has such a big presence. It also conceives the idea of the monument being inverted, instead of being from the floor to the sky it's the other way around, I am twisting it.

I am also working on this project called *Shift*, where I participate with other artists. Influenced by On Kawara's date paintings, I question the notion of history as a horizontal line. I want to break that line through associations with artists in which each of us come with an artwork and a contract that changes the authorship of that artwork every five years. Therefore, the price, label and history of that work will change. I did the first one with Robert Barry, he made a work on paper with words and I did a photograph of a light bulb, so every five years we shift the authorship, and the history of the work becomes a zig-zag. It challenges the signature of an artist, which seems to be perpetual. In this case, the piece is a Barry for five years and a Brüggemann for the next years and so on.

**HUO** *So if you show it in 2011 it might be Barry's and in 2015 it might be yours.*

**SB** It is also about breaking the speculation on history and value. Some artists have rejected it, which is very interesting as some artists don't let their work go. Luis Camnitzer also agreed and I am talking to other artists at the moment.

**HUO** *So what did you do with Luis Camnitzer?*

**SB** He wrote a word in vinyl that is very similar to mine aesthetically; it's a word that you can read it but you don't understand what it says. I did a painting that says *This work is realised when it's destroyed* that is also a text piece at the retrospective.

**HUO** *Can you tell me more about the relationship to conceptualism and to the 60s? Because so many young artists revisit the past, how do you see the whole idea of repetition and difference?*

**SB** My work is not nostalgic; it reactivates certain strategies and tries to take them a step further. I am not intending to engage in a nostalgic or romantic practice. I want to use the experimental ideas from the 60s and take them to the next level, or rather, to the limit. I want to complicate things. Maybe at the end of my career I will go back to the watercolours.

**HUO** *You could go back to those early watercolours that you showed in that law office in Berlin.*

**SB** For instance, *Shift* is a breakthrough on authorship; it's a new way of looking at the art and about separating authorship and ownership. It breaks the system; it puts it in a different situation. That's why sometimes my work is not well received in institutions or biennials, because it is very problematic to put in a package. They find it difficult to deal with.

**HUO** *We talked about artists from previous generations that inspired you: On Kawara, Robert Barry. Who are the artists you feel close to in your own generation? Do you feel part of a group?*

**SB** It's very strange to say because I have two personalities: I have the Mexican and the English or the international one. In the more international I have connections to Jonathan Monk, Martin Creed or Ceryth Wyn Evans. In Mexico I am close to Mario Garcia Torres; he started as a curator inviting me to his exhibitions; also Gonzalo Lebrija or Carlos Amoraes. I think it's very difficult to be part of a group; I can be everywhere and nowhere. I am very curious to see how the exterior puts my work in a niche and for the time being it is very difficult. I find that fascinating.

**HUO** *But that's very twenty-first century, not to belong to a specific geography.*

**SB** I don't know which pavilion in the Venice Biennale I would show at, the German or the Mexican.

**HUO** *In 2014 what would be your advice to a young art student?*

**SB** I would say: *Don't go to school!*

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Published by:  
**The Wall**  
**Corner of Harrington Road and Queen's Gate**  
**London, UK**

**On the occasion of the exhibition**  
**'Stefan Brüggemann. Text Pieces (1997 — 2014)'**  
**May 2014 — October 2014**

Curator:  
**Marina Kurikhina**

Graphic Design & Art Direction:  
**Atelier Dyakova**

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