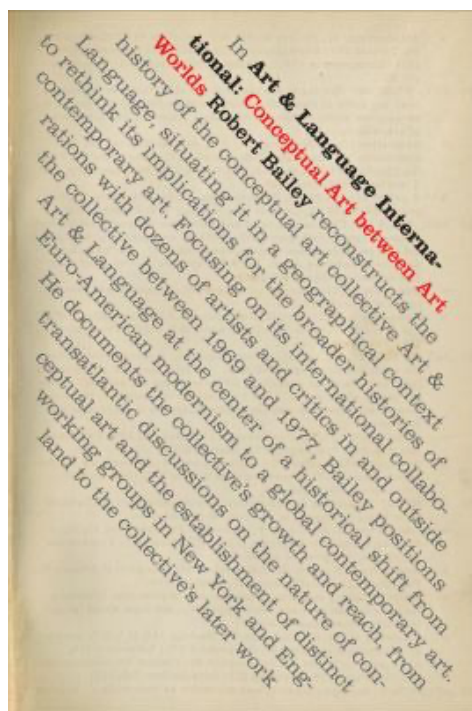


Art & Language International: Conceptual art between Art Worlds

by Robert Bailey. Duke University Press, June 2016. 240 p. ill. ISBN 9780822361688 (pbk.), \$23.95; ISBN 9780822361497 (cl.), \$84.95.

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“Not quite an art movement, not quite a research institute, not quite an activist group and not quite a rock and roll band“ (p. 1), Art & Language was founded in Coventry, England, by artists Michael Baldwin, David Bainbridge, Terry Atkinson, and Harold Hurrell in 1968. They published the journal Art-Language (May 1969, subtitled 'The Journal of Conceptual Art'), the first public vehicle devoted to theoretical discussions on conceptual art, and the main forum for a community of artists whose practices were primarily textual. Since the late 1960s until the late 1970s, more than fifty artists and critics were associated with the group and its activities, in the United Kingdom but also the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Yugoslavia, etc. After 1977, the group has comprised artists Michael Baldwin and Mel Ramsden, and the critic Charles Harrison (until his death in 2009).

Art & Language International focuses on the period 1969–1977, and the international collaborations that

took place during those years, with a particular emphasis on the New York collective (Joseph Kosuth, Ian Burn, etc.), linked to the publication of the journal The Fox (1974–1976). It also charts its evolution, from linguistic interrogations of the nature of visual art, through projects questioning knowledge and its acquisition, to political (Marxist) work.

This is a substantial contribution to the now ample literature on conceptual art, not just expanding our understanding of this seminal group (and complementing previous books by Charles Harrison), but of the wider history of art in the late 1960s and 70s. Peter Osborne defined contemporary art as post-conceptual art, and here we have a further attempt to

integrate a transnational view of conceptual art and the development of global contemporary art by incorporating conceptual practices outside Western Europe and North America into its historical narrative.

The book is well written, presenting complex theoretical arguments in a clear and accessible way, and grounded in fact with extensive references to archival material and primary source publications. The author is Assistant Professor of Art History at the University of Oklahoma, and has also edited a volume of writings by Australian artist and former A&L member Terry Smith.

The title is well illustrated with reproductions of historical documentation, and it has a useful index and a comprehensive fifteen-page bibliography. As a significant new monograph on its subject, it would be of interest to libraries with collections in the fields of contemporary art, British art, or American art.