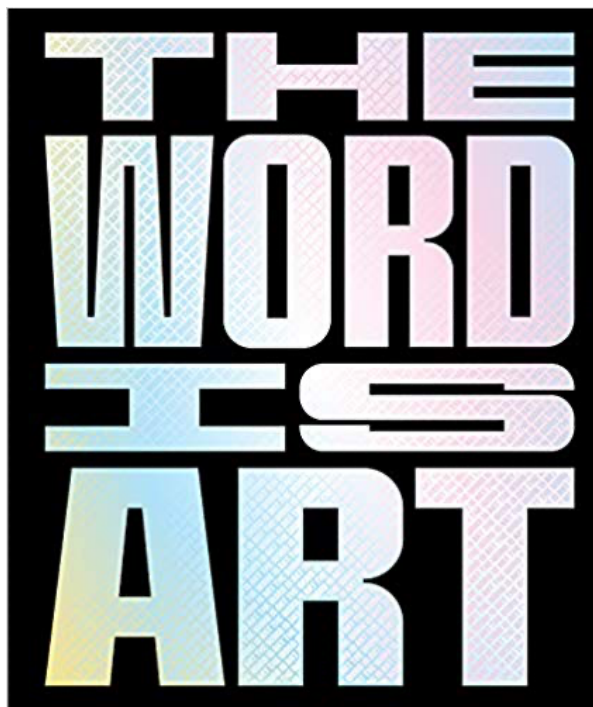


The Word is Art

by Michael Petry. Thames & Hudson, November 2018. 288 p. ill. ISBN 9780500239667 (h/c), \$60.00.

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The word in art is not a new concept. Yet publications that interrogate the value of text in the context of contemporary visual art are rare. *The Word is Art* provides a unique, in-depth, and well-rounded study on this very subject. Michael Petry (artist and director, Museum of Contemporary Art London) outlines a brief history of the use of text in art from antiquity through the digital age. The author delves into ways artists integrate text in their work as the primary or central visual aspect in the twenty-first century. This can be in the form of installations, sculptures, new media, paintings, and performances or experiments that use physical books. Petry takes the readers on an armchair tour of diverse art forms around the world with these guiding questions: How does the use of text contribute to contemporary art practice? How does art making with words shape and

inform our understanding of ourselves and the world around us?

A richly illustrated and thoroughly researched survey of word- and book-based art, the book is best suited for those who already possess some knowledge of art history, including advanced undergraduate, graduate students, and interested scholars. Because key modern art movements and associated early twentieth-century iconic pieces such as Marcel Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.* and René Magritte's *The Tyranny of Reason* are referenced throughout the book, a fundamental understanding of art and the vocabulary would be beneficial to comprehend Petry's proposition of the notion of word as art. The author also explores the intersection between art and other complex issues like translation, literature, cultural identity, and politics

as delineated in each chapter.

As an artist and a museum director, Petry has written extensively on topics through an international art historical lens. *The Word is Art* is no exception. The author attentively selects works that reflect cross-cultural influence in art practices, namely an adaptation of a combination of Hebrew and Arabic text in an assemblage sculpture by New York-based artist Ghiora Aharoni and the socially engaged performance works using Chinese imprinted brick production by Argentinian artist Rirkrit Tiravanija. The works represented are predominantly created by single artists, with a few by artist collectives. While some pieces call for social activism, endeavors by grassroots or community groups are barely addressed in the book.

The Word is Art is a sturdy hardback with a hologram cover design, glossy heavyweight paper featuring high-resolution photographs, and a binding that allows readers to lay the book conveniently flat. The application of various font sizes to the text for different sections and the well thought-out choice and placement of visually arresting images make for an engaging and captivating read. It is sure to be a treasured reference on the subject of the word as art, and readers may consult the bibliographies for further reading.