Tilt West Journal
Vol. 1 — March 2020

Nora Burnett Abrams, Noel Black, Angie Eng, Rick Griffith, Paul Miller, Juan Morales, Kelly Sears, Suzi Q. Smith, and Joel Swanson

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Tilt West, Denver

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Editors' Note

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the *Tilt West Journal*.

Tilt West is a Denver-based nonprofit dedicated to stimulating inclusive community exchange about art, ideas, and culture.

We believe that discourse is essential to supporting the growing cultural sector in Colorado. Since our founding in 2016, we have organized more than 20 roundtable conversations covering a range of topics situated at the intersection of artistic practice and contemporary issues. We have convened participants from across the cultural community to discuss such subjects as *Truth & Fiction*, *The Art & Politics of Afrofuturism*, and *Technology & the Body*. We share these conversations on our SoundCloud stream and regularly commission related articles for our Medium channel. With the launch of the *Tilt West Journal,* we expand our programming in this same spirit.

Art & Language, the topic for our inaugural issue, seemed a fitting choice for an organization that seeks to gather diverse voices, harness the power of language in fostering discourse about art and ideas, and break down barriers among cultural practices. A primal mode of describing and explaining the world, language is often the conductor through which art and culture are understood.

Art & Language has significant origins in conceptual practices; an artist collaboration founded in England in the late 1960s took *Art & Language* as its name. These artists married intellectual ideas and

theory to their visual creative practice and ultimately became influential in the conceptual art movement in the United States. Not insignificantly, they launched a journal in May of 1969 which served to introduce and cement a textual context for conceptual art. This journal, later called *Art-Language: The Journal of Conceptual Art,* was published from 1969 to 1985 and is often cited as one of the most extensive works of conceptual art.

Since that time, cultural practices have evolved in ways that continue to erode the barriers between disciplines and mediums, arriving at less rigid distinctions between art and criticism. With this inspiration in mind, the contributions in this issue approach the topic of *Art & Language* through essays and poems, as well as visual and time-based artwork. All of our contributors live, work, or have a significant presence in Colorado, and each examines *Art & Language* from a distinct point of view.

Designer Rick Griffith uses language as the building blocks for his visual works in a trio of brightly-hued pieces appropriately titled *A.*, *B.*, and *C.* In *A.*, tiny phrases scatter across the page, punctuated by circles and squares; in *B.,* magnified but barely legible red and orange letters nest together mid-composition; and in *C.,* lines of typewritten text sprout into geometric shapes. We are honored to feature *A.* as the cover art for this issue.

Artist and writer Joel Swanson, who prompted our October 2018 roundtable on *Art & Language,* offers a visual work from his scratchboard series, titled *BLINK/BLANK*, and the related essay, "Language Blinks." In both, he reflects on the ubiquity of blinking in a world where various forms of digital expression continually vie for our attention. Language blinks as it vacillates between presence and absence, speech and silence, the blink and the blank.

MCA Denver Director Nora Burnett Abrams takes Swanson's artwork as the subject of her essay, "The Dys/functionality of Language: The Art of Joel Swanson." Abrams discusses Swanson's large-scale sculpture of the < or > sign, titled *Logic Only Works in 2-Dimensions*, to illustrate Swanson's use and subversion of language in the creation of his art. In this work, Swanson exposes how a symbol or word can have one meaning or its opposite, depending on one's perspective.

In her imagery-rich work about the ravages and betrayals of gentrification, "We Pay Cash for Houses," **poet and performer Suzi Q. Smith** also explores how perspective creates meaning, but with a focus

on whose perspective is considered and given value. Smith's poem is intended to be read in multiple directions; its import and emphasis shift depending upon whether one reads the poem across the page, top to bottom, bottom to top, or stanza by stanza.

Writer Noel Black's essay, "A Conceptualist Walks into a Bar: Thoughts on Art, Language, and Absence," entertains the notion that language is always about what is missing, before addressing who was missing from the twentieth century art cannon: namely, women, queers, and people of color. Black argues that there is something inherent to conceptual mediums that has enabled members of these groups to forge entry.

Experimental animator Kelly Sears offers a contemporary incarnation of the idea of harnessing conceptual art to subvert dominant power structures in her time-based work, *After Fall*. The piece focuses on the 2018 nomination hearings for Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh. Sears reconstructs the power narrative to showcase women in protest and imagines an alternative ending. In appropriating still imagery from news coverage, Sears's work reflects the way in which visual images have become a dominant language in our digital world.

In *Endings*, **new media artist Angie Eng**, who also creates using appropriation and remix, constructs a continuous loop of old black-and-white film credits, all reading: "The End." Eng's piece offers a critique of consumerism. She telegraphs the intended but stereotypically portrayed target of much advertising—women—by employing the recurring moving image of an army of women pushing shopping carts and marching ominously toward the viewer.

Finally, because language, by its very nature, includes some while excluding others, the issue of translation emerges as a theme in some of the works.

Composer, writer, and artist Paul Miller (*a.k.a.* DJ Spooky) provides two graphic conceptual works in which the Japanese characters for "peace" appear untranslated. Miller made these works in conjunction with a concert he composed and performed at the preserved ruins of Nagasaki in anticipation of the 75th anniversary of the U.S. atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This multimedia concert, which is excerpted in the *Journal*, reveals how the layering of different mediums from music to projected images can provide points of entry where language falls short.

Poet and editor Juan Morales addresses a different aspect of translation in his touching personal essay, “Let’s Call It Home: Learning Language, Translation, & Literary Citizenship.” Morales explores the complexity and struggle of being a Latinx writer who was not raised to be bilingual. He describes his experience of learning Spanish—a language that is for him both formative and foreign—as an adult.

We hope we’ve piqued your curiosity and whet your appetite to enjoy the provocations and cross-pollinations inspired by the work in this inaugural issue of the *Tilt West Journal*. As always, we thank you for engaging in this ongoing cultural conversation.

—Kate Nicholson and Whitney Carter

Special thanks to Sarah Wambold, who conceived and developed our digital platform with help from Marty Spellerberg. We are also grateful to Maria Buszek for her editorial assistance and to all of our board members for everything they do!

Language Blinks

Joel Swanson

For summer vacation my family would go on cross-country camping trips. Our travels took us on highways that wound through small towns peppered with those mid-century motels that have become icons of the American roadtrip. We typically never stayed in these places since we were camping, but one time we did—I can't remember why. Excited by the rare opportunity to stay in a motel, my sister and I stayed up late drinking Diet Rite, watching cable TV, and wondering at the utility and function of a coin operated vibrating bed.

Most of these motels had a neon sign out front with the words "NO VACANCY" below the name of the motel, the illumination of the "NO" indicating a lack of available rooms. As a kid, it made me sad whenever we would pass a motel with the "NO" illuminated, because it eliminated any potential of spending the night in a bed instead of a sleeping bag, but even then, the cleverness and economy of this blinking sign fascinated me.

Blinking is ubiquitous; digital technologies are constantly vying for our attention. Mobile phones, crosswalk signs, turn signals; there is even a light on my electric toothbrush that blinks when it needs to be recharged. As I write this, the cursor on my computer screen is blinking at me, compelling me to write, a visual metronome for the written word. Things blink sonically and haptically; ringtones and silent vibrations

form recognizable patterns of sound and motion. “Phantom vibrations” of the phones in our pockets speak to how ingrained these Pavlovian patterns have become in our contemporary psyche. The blink is a signifier for the digital age, but what does it mean? How do we theorize something so pervasive?

Letters blink. Words blink. Language blinks. Blinking is intrinsic to the core functionality of sequential language. The *persistence of vision* is the phenomenon that occurs within film and animation whereby the illusion of motion is created by a quick succession of still images, like in one of those flip books made on the corner of a stack of Post-It notes. Perhaps there is an analogue within language and reading? Words are typically static, fixed forms on the page. But reading requires motion; as we read, our eyes scan the page, left to right, top to bottom (in western languages), producing not the *illusion of motion*, but perhaps an analogous *illusion of meaning.* Similar to the flickering images of film, while reading we focus on one word, then the next, and the next, forming a time-dependent chain of signification. Letters and words are simply shapes to which we ascribe meaning, and grammar is the set of rules that governs the sequence of language. But as Ferdinand de Saussure theorized, the connection between the form and the meaning is arbitrary.[1] There is no inherent or natural connection between a letter and the sound it represents. There is no causal relationship between the word and the thing it signifies. Meaning is constructed, an arbitrary illusion of signification. This meaning is more than the sum of its parts; sequence is significant.

Language also blinks within conversation. As Maurice Blanchot explores in his essay “Interruption: As on a Reimann Surface,” conversation is based on a series of interruptions. A Reimann surface is a mathematical concept that defines a one-dimensional complex manifold, or put more simply, a plane with peaks and valleys, like corduroy fabric. For Blanchot, this form of highs and lows is a metaphor for the interruptive nature of conversation:

> *The definition of conversation (that is, the most simple description of the most simple conversation) might be the following: when two people speak together, they speak not together, but each in turn: one says something, then stops, the other something else (or the thing), then stops. The coherent discourse they carry on is composed of sequences that are interrupted when the conversation moves from partner to partner, even if adjustments are made so that they correspond to one another. The fact that speech needs to pass from one interlocutor to*

> *another in order to be confirmed, contradicted, or developed shows the necessity of the interval.*[2]

Blanchot's Reimann surface is an analogue of the blink, a material encoding of speech and silence. At almost every level of language, from its fundamental structure to its performance in reading, speech, and conversation, the blink can be seen as a primary feature of language.

For a blink to have meaning, the sequence must be given a context. We need the corresponding language of Morse code for the sequences of dots and dashes to carry meaning. I need to be instructed that the blinking light on my electric toothbrush means that it needs to be recharged. An LED light that is programmed to blink randomly carries the "meaning" of randomness (which is no small field of research within computer science). Even distant pulsars blink at a rate corresponding to the rotation of their electromagnetic fields. Whether natural, cultural, or technological, the meaning of the blink is always inscribed and contextual.

The interval, the sequence of the blink, carries meaning at various levels. When Morse code was a popular form of communication, operators could distinguish other operators by the cadence of their tapping. Morse code carried its inscribed or literal meaning but, like the cadence and intonation in speech or the subtle variations of letterforms in handwriting, there is a surplus of meaning that conveys identity and personality. Patterns have affect, denotative and connotative layers of meaning that interpenetrate one another.

But what is the substance or materiality of the blink? A blink is a pattern, a sequence that holds meaning. Just as presence requires absence, the *blink* requires the *blank*. Absence is required as the antithesis of presence; it gives presence its form. Similarly the blink requires the pause, gap, or lacuna. Like binary data, blinking requires two states, O and 1, on and off, there and not. This is the structural requirement of the blink: there is no such thing as a solitary blink, just *blinking*.

This binary of presence and absence has subtly but powerfully influenced the way we think about the world. In her essay, "Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers," N. Katherine Hayles traces the dialectic of presence and absence into its contemporary, posthuman equivalent: pattern and randomness:

> *The contemporary pressure towards dematerialization, understood as an epistemic shift toward pattern/randomness and away from presence/absence, affects human and textual bodies on two levels at once, as a change in the body (the material substrate) and as a change in the message (the codes of representation).*[3]

The dialectic of pattern and randomness recuperates, or is built upon, the dialectic of presence and absence. These dialectics theoretically, historically, and materially influence the forms and communicative potential of language.

Even at the most simplistic forms of meaning—binary code—the blink reigns supreme. As voltage differences are read by a transistor, 0's or 1's, these *blinks* become patterns of meaning. It is astounding to think of the vast amount of information that is stored as binary data. From binary to machine code to the text we see rendered on a screen—and all the interconnected layers between— digital text is predicated on the blink.

As an artist, I am drawn to works that formally and conceptually blink. Vito Acconci's work *READ THIS WORD THEN READ THIS WORD* from 1968 directly builds upon this idea that language blinks formally and conceptually. The work consists of a simple sheet of paper with the following text:

> *READ THIS WORD THEN READ THIS WORD READ THIS WORD NEXT READ THIS WORD NOW SEE ONE WORD SEE ONE WORD NEXT SEE ONE WORD NOW AND THEN SEE ONE WORD AGAIN LOOK AT THREE WORDS HERE LOOK AT THREE WORDS NOW LOOK AT THREE WORDS NOW TOO TAKE IN FIVE WORDS AGAIN TAKE IN FIVE WORDS SO TAKE IN FIVE WORDS DO IT NOW SEE THESE WORDS AT A GLANCE SEE THESE WORDS AT THIS GLANCE AT THIS GLANCE HOLD THIS LINE IN VIEW HOLD THIS LINE IN ANOTHER VIEW AND IN A THIRD VIEW SPOT SEVEN LINES AT ONCE THEN TWICE THEN THRICE THEN A FOURTH TIME A FIFTH A SIXTH A SEVENTH AN EIGHTH*[4]

The work, deceptive in its simplicity, draws us into the liminal space between the mechanics of reading (motion) and the meaning generated through those mechanics (literal meaning of the words themselves). The text is imperative, didactic in its content. For me, the power of this work is in its ability to make the reader keenly aware of the motion of language and its contingency on the way words blink optically and conceptually.

Acconci's work also plays with reference in a disorienting way. When Acconci writes, "READ THIS WORD," does THIS refer to the word THIS? Or does THIS refer to WORD? Acconci makes the referential nature of words blink; my eyes jump back and forth as my mind processes which word is referring to which. His work reveals certain rules and aspects of language that are always present, but rarely noticed. The motion and cadence of reading is contrasted with the content of reading, creating a space of playful discomfort.

I also think about Jenny Holzer's quintessential LED works. These horizontal dot-matrix screens are typically used for news feeds, stock tickers, and other types of "important" informational display. Holzer repurposes these signs, displaying her own words—and the words of others—that relate to identity, politics, and the body. At times enigmatic and at others literal, the words create the "content" of these textual sculptures that synthesize the blinking of technology with the blinking of language. Holzer's installations require the attention of the reader in both time and space, reminding us that reading requires both mind and body. As the individual LED lights blink on and off, they create the *illusion of motion*: the words aren't moving, but the choreographed patterns of blinking lights create the appearance of movement. Holzer's works also invoke the *illusion of meaning*: materially, these are just solitary blinking lights, but the shapes they form are inscribed or coded with the meaning(s) that we interpret as language. Marshall McLuhan said, "It is the framework which changes with each new technology and not just the picture within the frame."[5] Holzer's work reminds us that both the picture and the frame of language are technological constructions. More than any other artist, the blinking of language is manifest in Holzer's work.

In 2018, Mark Bradford installed a new work as part of the University of California, San Diego's outdoor Stuart Collection. The work, entitled *What Hath God Wrought,* is a 199-foot flagpole with a flashing white light attached to the top. This beacon blinks out the titular phrase, "What Hath God Wrought" in Morse code, which was the first message that Samuel Morse sent from Baltimore to Washington in 1844.

There is an irony within this work, as Morse code isn't a commonly understood format of language. The typical viewer would see the blinking light but not be able to interpret the message. What does it mean to put a message—even a famous quote—into a coded format that few can read? What does it mean to put this enigmatic message on

top of a flag pole, a position typically reserved for symbols that claim identity, territory, or nationality?

Morse code played an extremely significant role as a popular encoding of language alongside its contemporary ancillaries like ASCII and UNICODE. These encodings, formats, and protocols of language define the very potential of communication within networked media. After all, we can't use an Emoji unless it is approved by the UNICODE Consortium, which controls the allowable characters of digital text. But what does it mean to *encode* language at all? Encoding can both obscure a language intentionally (e.g., a "secret code") or unintentionally. Is obscurity the unavoidable byproduct of encodings and formats that attempt to simplify language in the attempt to make language more universal? Morse code is often touted as a global format due to its simplicity, but this supposed simplicity assumes the universality of English, or at least some shared meta-language. Technology certainly has a penchant for blindly recuperating the colonial tendencies of language.

Bradford's piece also highlights the durationality and physicality of reading; it is typically thought of as a still and sedentary act. But reading is an active and durational practice that requires a physical presence in time and space. As we gaze up at Bradford's flag pole we are also reminded that our notions of time, space, and reading itself are historical and social constructions.

Bradford is known for his large-scale collage works that materially speak to identity, race, and marginalization. This minimal, austere flag pole is divergent from his typical work. His Wikipedia page states that this work is about "the powerful influence of technology on communication," but I am inclined to believe that there is something deeper.[6] There is an inherent tension in this work between the Samuel Morse quote, the distance from the light source to its viewer, and the inability of the general population to read the coded message. Most of us are just left looking up at a blinking light wondering what it all means. This is the powerful message behind this work; it is about agency, literacy, and the way that language itself functions as a technology that disempowers as much as it empowers, marginalizes as much as it privileges.

We are driven by a desire or compulsion to make meaning, to make sense of things. The history of technology parallels the history of the systems and structures of meaning we have developed to record and

communicate our experience. Although novel at first, these systems and structures penetrate our daily existence and become second nature; they are so familiar we no longer *see* them. The modest pencil was once a cutting-edge technology, but with its ubiquity the pencil has become invisible as a technology. The same is true with language; we need artwork that makes language strange again.

Our bodies carry a trace of the blink: our eyes blink, our hearts beat, our neurons flicker as they send signals between brain and body. These innate biological patterns are reflected in language; we are connected conceptually, historically, and materially to the words we use. By paying attention to these material aspects of language, we can use language more responsibly, critically, and creatively. “NO VACANCY” signs no longer make me sad, but instead remind me of our potential and responsibility to shape language as it shapes us.

Appendix

A non-exhaustive list of things that blink, in no particular order: crosswalk signals, red stoplights at four way stops (or when a stoplight malfunctions), eyelids, lights on routers and modems, microwaves and ovens when the timer is done, fire alarms, neon “OPEN” signs, almost every sign in Las Vegas, Morse code, beacons, runway lights, railroad crossing lights, traffic signs, twinkling stars, pulsars, turn signals, strobe lights, almost everything at an EDM show, lights on airplanes, the light on my dishwasher, the cursor on my computer, directional traffic signs, smoothie machines, “recording” lights on video cameras, the “fasten seat belt” signs on airplanes, fireflies, Christmas lights, the reflection of sunlight on water, lighthouse lights, fake LED candles, heartbeats, fireworks (sort of), streetlights when you are driving by them, fish scales catching the light, leaves in the wind, answering machine lights (back in the day), twinkly lights.

— — —

1. Ferdinand De Saussure, Charles Bally, and Wade Baskin, *Course in General Linguistics*, edited by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye in collaboration with Albert Reidlinger, translated from the French by Wade Baskin (London: P. Owen, 1961), 73.

2. Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 79.

3. N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 29.

4. Liz Kotz, *Words to Be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 166.

5. Marshall McLuhan and Eric McLuhan, *Essential McLuhan* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), 273.

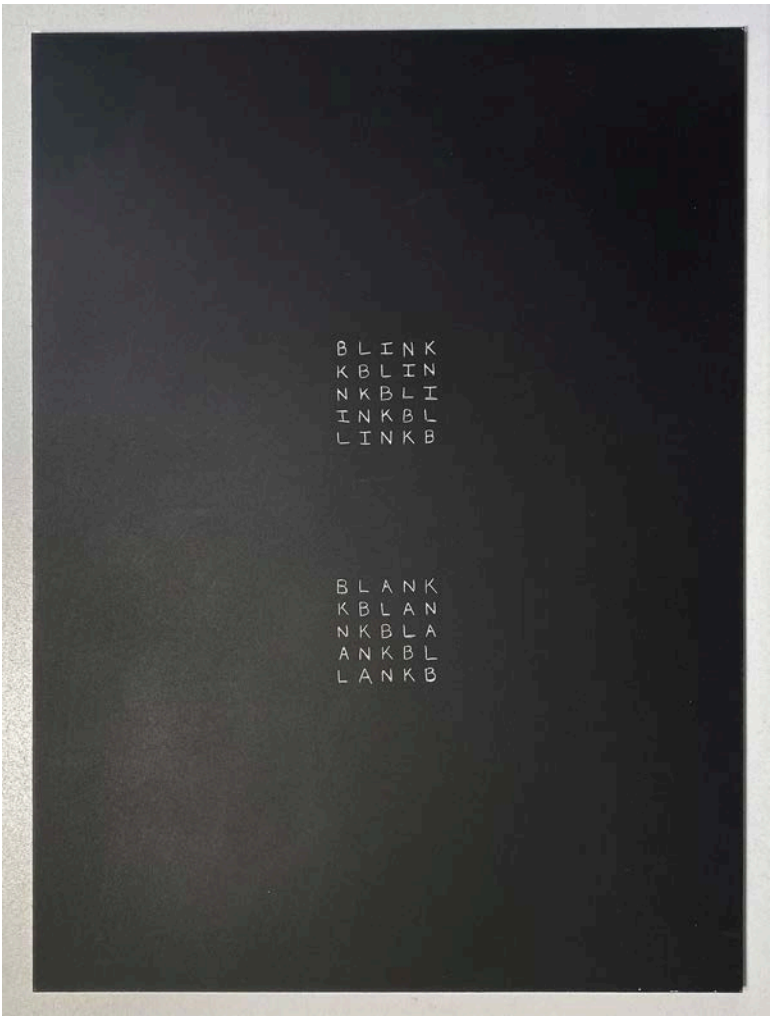
6. "Mark Bradford," *Wikipedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_Bradford]{.underline} (accessed April 17, 2019).

BLINK/BLANK

Joel Swanson

Artist	Joel Swanson
Year	2019
Dimensions	12 × 9 inches (30.5 cm × 22.9 cm)
Medium	Scratchboard
Credit	Courtesy of the artist.

A blink is a pattern, a sequence that holds meaning. Just as presence requires absence, the *blink* requires the *blank*. Absence is required as the antithesis of presence; it gives presence its form. Similarly, the blink requires the pause, gap, or lacuna.


BLINK
KBLIN
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INKBL
LINKB
BLANK
KBLAN
NKBLA
ANKBL
LANKB

The Dys/functionality of Language: The Art of Joel Swanson

Nora Burnett Abrams

Joel Swanson (American, b. 1978) explores language and its literal, at times even physical or material, forms. He stretches language to become an image or multiple images. Swanson continually makes clear how language is a constantly shifting, dynamic system to be pushed, pulled, and kneaded into meaning. His is a highly disciplined approach to art making, at times drawing upon the rigor of 1960s conceptual art as a foundation, finding ways of making it relevant to us today. He uses the structures of grammar and composition as sources for creative production. Importantly, such constraints become enormously productive and open up a range of possibilities for what he might do with them.

Swanson's work often renders the predictability of language unstable. In *Logic Only Works in 2-Dimensions*, 2014, a large-scale symbol is shown to be relative rather than definitive. The sideways ">" is the greater-than symbol, which when reversed, is also the less-than symbol. The freestanding, kinetic sculpture registers how this symbol can function as both, simultaneously. With this work and in other examples, such as

his ongoing series of lenticular drawings, Swanson plays with a duality within our linguistic system such that one thing can refer to or even be perceived as its very opposite. With *Logic Only Works in 2-Dimensions*, this type of dual reading is also entirely dependent upon the placement of the viewer. Pointing out the relative meaning of such a symbol is at the core of Swanson's practice, and in this effort he enables a fresh scrutiny of those subjects or ideas fundamental to and embedded in how we communicate and connect with others.

Swanson's continued exploration of the ambiguities or tricks inherent to the English language plays with the multiplicity of meaning. Studies of homonyms—words that sound alike but are spelled differently and carry different meanings—form the basis of his lenticular image *TRULY/RURAL*, 2019. Here, he encourages the viewer to move around the work to discover the different words embedded within the holographic surface. The work's title hints at the fact that this work requires the viewer's movement and investigates language and place. It is a work as much about reading as about looking and, more generally, the multivalent experience of viewing a work of art today.

Swanson is also unafraid to invite humor into his practice. In *Lady Gaga's Twitter Feed Translated into Morse Code,* 2011, a small bulb flashes incessantly as it channels the language of the pop singer into the language of Morse code. While the premise might seem irreverent or flippant, it is in fact demonstrative of another key aspect of Swanson's effort: to find ways of enabling the abstract logic of linguistic systems to be relevant to contemporary life. This quiet work speaks capaciously to the ubiquity of codes that underpin contemporary communications from emails to blogs, posts, chats, tweets, and numerous other methods for instant information-sharing. Transforming the ones and zeroes of contemporary technology into the dots and dashes of Morse brings the two languages together and indicates how similar the two are when broken down into their building blocks and component parts.

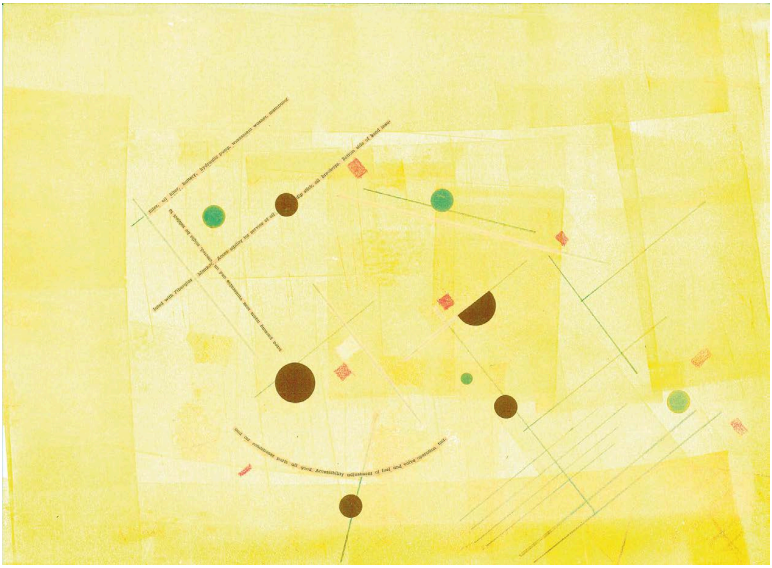
Swanson's works often act as prompts for viewer interaction, as they continually shift and move with our movements. Rather than passively observing his sculptures, photographs, and installations, viewers participate actively and, in doing so, discover new meanings in these all-too-familiar phrases, signs, and symbols. He finds dimensionality in language, bringing it out from the flatness of a screen or paper. His work helps us see, read, and experience this foundational system as the very opposite of its presumed rigor. When we see language as malleable, fluid, and active, we engage with it as relative rather than

fixed. Swanson opens up the rigidity of our invented linguistic systems to reveal their porosity and, ultimately, their duplicity. The simplicity of Swanson's enterprise belies a sophisticated reassessment of language as a profoundly creative and flexible device that can be tweaked and played with, without end.

A.

Rick Griffith

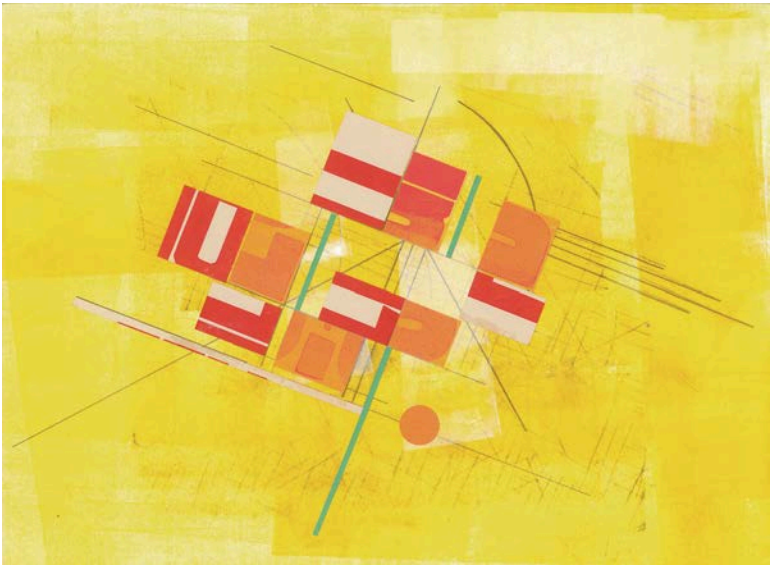
Artist	Rick Griffith
Year	2019
Dimensions	11 × 14 inches (30.5 cm × 22.9 cm)
Medium	Collaged text, graphite, ink
Credit	Courtesy of the artist.



B.

Rick Griffith

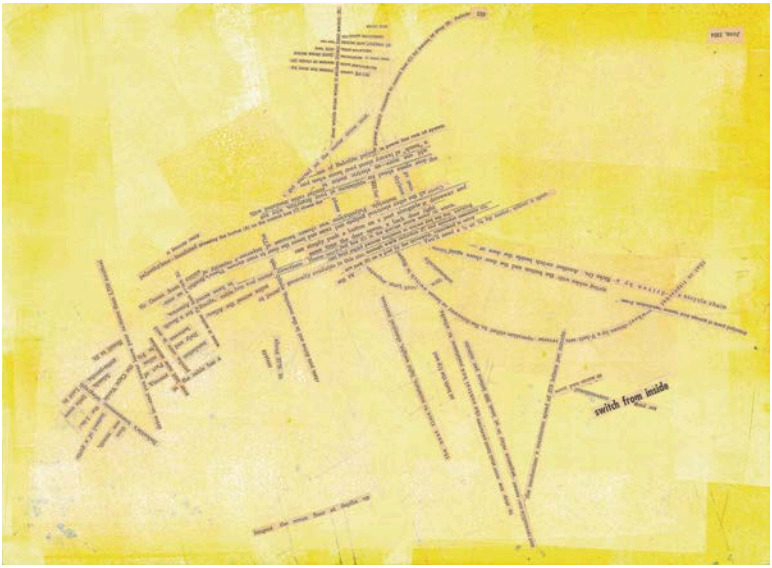
Artist	Rick Griffith
Year	2019
Dimensions	11 × 14 inches (30.5 cm × 22.9 cm)
Medium	Collaged text, graphite, ink
Credit	Courtesy of the artist.



C.

Rick Griffith

Artist	Rick Griffith
Year	2019
Dimensions	11 × 14 inches (30.5 cm × 22.9 cm)
Medium	Collaged text, graphite, ink
Credit	Courtesy of the artist.


switch from inside

A Conceptualist Walks into a Bar: Thoughts on Language, Art, and Absence

Noel Black

Originally appeared on Medium, in response to Tilt West's Roundtable on Art & Language

A conceptualist walks into a bar. The bartender says, "What'll it be?" The conceptualist points to a person drinking at the other end of the bar and says, "I'll have what he's having, but over here in this context."

I like that joke because it gets at something I intuited about language long before I'd read Derrida—that language, which almost all of us *have*, is always about what's absent (*différance oui?*), that it points to what's missing as its way of meaning, and that context is perhaps all we can ever have at any given moment. Bottoms up!

When I think about art and language, I think about *who* was missing from the context of art in the mid-20th century—mainly women, people of color, and queers. What better way to point to absence itself than in the material of what's missing? Critic and conceptual art theorist, Lucy Lippard, understood this. The abstract expressionists had reached the apotheosis of absolute materiality of painting, but they conveniently

ignored the context: their white maleness. Lippard was simply pointing it out via dematerialization, i.e., the emperor's new clothes.

The emergence of women artists like Martha Rosler, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, and Yoko Ono wasn't an accident. The dematerialization of art was a decidedly feminist move, and an ingenious one. Abstract expressionism hadn't just taken art to its purest form of materiality, its presence as product in the total obliteration of meaning was hewn from the metaphor provided by the A-bomb's obliteration of everything. Though there have been several excellent revisionist reconsiderations of the abstract moment's gender problems (the Denver Art Museum's 2016–2017 *Women of Abstract Expressionism* to name one), the heroes at that moment were all white men. *That* was the context to which Lippard and Co. pointed in the language of absence—white male supremacy as embodied by the new hegemony of the ultimate exportable conceptual product: American capitalism. (Is it any surprise that the abstract expressionists' works were used by the CIA as Trojan Horse ideological exports deployed to undermine Soviet propaganda? The genius of capitalism is its ideological triumph over the state, i.e., who needs state propaganda when you already own everyone's minds?) By dematerializing art and its practice, Lippard and Co. managed to point all of this out in a new language: language—the most democratic, if least marketable, medium this side of dust. It leveled (for some) the art landscape, if not the art market, and centered those at the margins. As Lippard writes in *Escape Attempts*, her memoir of the times:

> *The inexpensive, ephemeral, un-intimidating character of the Conceptual mediums themselves (video, performance, photography, narrative, text, actions) encouraged women to participate, to move through this crack in the art world's walls. With the public introduction of younger women artists into Conceptual art, a number of new subjects and approaches appeared: narrative, role-playing, guise and disguise, body and beauty issues; a focus on fragmentation, interrelationships, autobiography, performance, daily life, and, of course, on feminist politics. The role of women artists and critics in the Conceptual art flurry of the mid-sixties was (unbeknownst to us at the time) similar to that of women on the Left. We were slowly emerging from the kitchens and bedrooms, off the easels, out of the woodwork, whether the men were ready or not — and for the most part they weren't.*

I saw the exhibition, *Materializing "Six Years": Lucy R. Lippard and the Emergence of Conceptual Art,* at the Brooklyn Museum many years ago, and it wasn't hard to imagine how un-ready men were for it. It was still

strikingly mundane in its anti-aesthetic—like some museum of fetishized Stasi bureaucracy: index cards full of instructions, documents documenting performances of boredom, labor, domestic rituals, etc.—all still so vital and exciting in their middle-fingers to the preciousness and apartness of the male art that preceded it.

(Brief aside: Dematerialization is of course native to language, which makes it surprising to think that conceptual writing [see: Vanessa Place's *Gone With the Wind* Twitter project; and, speaking of *context*, Kenneth Goldsmith's deeply fucked up reading of Michael Brown's autopsy report] didn't really come along until the early 2000s, more than a quarter century after Conceptual art. Aside from the fact that the movement was—and is—[conceptually] redundant, it was also almost a century late to the game. Argentine writers Macedonio Fernandez and Jorge Luis Borges had already popped the balloon of "authorship" as the ultimate expression of capitalist context in the early 20th century [but hey, what's new?]. And what, after all, could belong to anyone *less* than language? [see: Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*"] Unless, of course, we're talking about computer languages — Python, etc. — in the context of the techno-priesthood Latin of Silicon Valley, the manufactured scarcity of codes.)

And yet, there it was in the Brooklyn Museum. In other words, capital C Conceptual art was as much Python as it was vernacular, as much abstract expressionism as abstract expressionism once the velvet ropes had been moved to let the women, people of color, and queers in. To paraphrase Slavoj Žižek: just because the avant-garde pointed out the structures of capitalism doesn't mean it wasn't recreating the structures of capitalism. The paradox (and perhaps the problem) is, and always will be, that you can't let everyone in without letting in everyone you don't want as well. The context is, was, and always will be, power. Once you remove the ropes altogether, the context that is power looks a lot like what may be the ultimate conceptual art project of all time: Twitter. Is it any surprise that Twitter is Donald Trump's context, that he learned the lessons of the avant-garde and took them all the way to the end of the fence, or the velvet ropes, or the wall he's always pointing toward in hopes he might keep the next group out with the greatest re-materialization since Tara Donovan? It might just make him the greatest artist of our time.

Here's to him, over here in this context, where I'm still (and always will be) waiting for my drink to arrive.

After Fall

Kelly Sears

Artist	Kelly Sears
Year	2018
Medium	Video (color, sound)
Duration	03:25 min.
Credit	Courtesy of the artist.

https://vimeo.com/293611105

Protest images sourced from the Brett Kavanaugh hearing envision an alternative future of collaborative rebellion and radical change. Started 72 hours prior to and finished just a few hours before Kavanaugh's confirmation as a Supreme Court Justice, this work is both a recognition of failure and a gesture toward a more hopeful future.

We Pay Cash for Houses

Suzi Q. Smith

Front yards with grass,
old trees and shiny crab apples
liquor stores here got bulletproof glass
the churches, tattered lighthouses
hold all our secrets
we lost Martin Luther King Boulevard
we hum our shame in moans
old Spirituals shaped the bricks
hand-me-down houses
delicious trees that gossip over fences
Popeye's chicken, Church's chicken
Laundromat-check-cashing-payday-loans
we, who know each others' names
and borrowed cups of sugar
twenty dollars until payday
just until we get on our feet,
And did we not? Get on our feet?
We made this, all of this
We made it.

Fresh cut,
clean as first-day-of-school sneakers
even the mirrors finesse
the new banks on the block
bundles of slow plunder
but the sidewalks ain't cracked no more
the alleyways, smooth as untested promise
of former corner store seedlings
blooming into downward-facing dog
and parks that unwelcome children,
bike lanes and boutique wine bars
or family-friendly microbreweries
hear all the scents and sounds conspiring,
flooding to the teeth in whispered howls,
drowning in hissed welcomes
adrift the taunting memory of ground.
Air, made fat and wet with our breath,
for you.
For you.

Originally published by Suspect Press, Winter 2018.

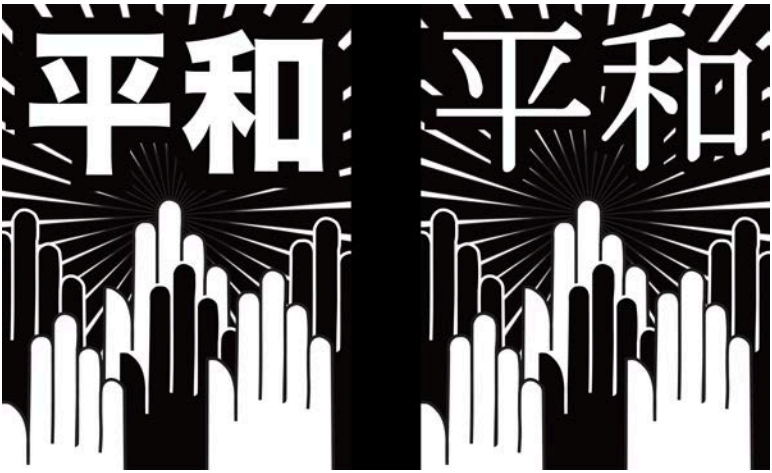
This poem is structured to be read in multiple directions, either across the page, top to bottom, bottom to top, or stanza by stanza.

Peace Prints

Paul Miller

Artist	Paul Miller (*aka* DJ Spooky)
Year	2019
Dimensions	(left and right) 48 x 36 inches (30.5 cm x 22.9 cm)
Medium	Ink jet printed on cotton-bonded architectural vellum
Credit	Courtesy of the artist.

Miller made these graphic conceptual works in a style inspired by propaganda but intended for very different political ends. They were produced in collaboration with the Peace Institute as part of a multi-media concert Miller staged on the grounds of preserved ruins in Nagasaki. This project is an extension of his earlier work, *Peace Symphony: 8 Stories*, honoring eight Hibakusha (被爆者, Atomic bomb survivors).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Let's Call It Home: Learning Language, Translation, and Literary Citizenship

Juan Morales

Ever since I started writing, I have been guided by my parents—an Ecuadorian mother and a Puerto Rican father—who both carried a lifetime of stories. I consider myself lucky that they didn't hold back the stories of earthquakes and ghosts that my mother shared, or the tales of war and battle zones that my father related. They encouraged me to preserve story within poetry, and story found its way into my first two poetry collections, *Friday and the Year That Followed* and *The Siren World*.

When my parents recounted family stories, it was hard to predict whether I would hear the stories in Spanish, English, or Spanglish. I would have to make sure I understood everything and usually asked for important moments to be repeated again in English. This back-and-forth revealed an important tension inside me. I knew I was at home hearing *mama y papa* telling their *cuentos*, but I didn't feel completely comfortable with my limited proficiency in Spanish. As a Latinx writer, I have carried this as a shame and insecurity, but I have since learned that I am not alone. Like me, many Latinx writers in the United States

were raised to speak English and did not learn Spanish, the language of our parents and forbearers.

And so I have endeavored to learn Spanish and to get into touch with my family roots. As a heritage speaker, one who has heard the language and experienced my mother tongue all my life, my learning process had to evolve past the old teaching methods of strict recitation and repetition. Just like my writing process, it had to be done with trial and lots of error and stumbling to find the correct words. After all, language acquisition works better with immersion. It requires us to swim in the river of words, to embrace the pregnant pauses as code switches in our brains, and to undertake the internal search for the exact phrases we want to use.

— — —

"*Poco a poco*" is the mantra my parents taught me to tackle everything. Little by little, I learned about the persistence and patience required to become bilingual and a writer.

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For almost three years, I have been confronting my personal insecurity by using a free app to practice Spanish. I tried auditing classes until I convinced myself I was too busy, and I flamed out on plans to use self-guided lessons from Spanish textbooks since I couldn't assemble a proper structure. Now, I take time each morning to complete three brief lessons, under the guidance of a green cartoon bird. I translate, type, repeat, and listen to phrases. I repeat them out loud so I can feel the words in my mouth. The lessons tap into my competitive brain by using streaks and points to keep me motivated. My knowledge of Spanish grammar and syntax improves. Connections form. Synapses fire. The gamification of language learning exposes my weak points—pronoun placement, consistent gender agreement, misplaced accents, and verb tenses—as I continue fortifying my proficiency. When I make mistakes, I slow down and note the errors I've made. Every day, my phone conversations and Facebook messages with my mother go a little longer, become more complex, and flow a little better. I feel closer to her when she brags about what I've learned. It is helping me to own my sources of personal shame and insecurity, so I can discover what other parts of speech to nurture.

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You see, a few years ago, I asked my mom to speak to me only in Spanish. It would be a challenge, and it would allow me to stay immersed and accountable. Of course, when she followed through, I grew flustered during our phone calls. I struggled to weave her sentences together even with all the phrases I could comprehend. She successfully deflected every attempt I made to shift the conversation into English. Like a good parent, she dragged me along, kicking and screaming.

— — —

I know my parents meant well when they made the decision not to teach me Spanish. I know there was no family meeting where they debated the pros and cons to arrive at a decision; it just happened. The shadows and ghosts of discrimination loomed over them as memories of people telling them to speak English or punishments for speaking Spanish. I still cannot fully understand the struggles they faced. I can only acknowledge them. Looking back, I see it as a regretful choice they made, but I tend to overlook my own decisions from that time. I can now admit how much the younger me took Spanish for granted. I didn't take enough interest in learning it, coasting on the basics throughout school. With my youth, I also carried the arrogance that the world should speak the same language as me. I became frustrated by my parents' conversations, catching scraps that I knew, asking who was *Julio* when they meant the month of July, noting the musicality of my dad saying "*Qué opera!*" when he was mad, and recognizing all the cognates sprinkled in their conversations that gave me hints on the topic. These were the given clues, and all of it humbled me fast.

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As I always remind my university students, we must contribute to our literary communities with what we call literary citizenship. Literary citizenship is made up of the small gestures that allow us to give back and to advocate for fellow writers and our writing communities. These small gestures might include reading slush for a lit magazine; harnessing the courage to read at an open mic; starting a writing group in town; subscribing to the small magazines we love; or even sharing and dialoguing with a lit mag's social media. Our literary magazine, *Pilgrimage,* is one that has been around for more than 40 years, and it has made its home in Pueblo for almost a decade. Its established mission, story, spirit, witness, and place in and beyond the greater Southwest make it easy to serve the literary community. We not only

want to support emerging writers, but we also seek out diverse voices as regular staples in each issue. We want our contributors' pages to mingle writers from all over the US with international authors and accented names. Our southern Colorado geography and our proximity to the borderlands inspire us to continue to find ways we can open the borders.

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It wasn't until I started college that I realized my parents had accents. A friend mentioned that he couldn't always understand them. It surprised me. I lived hearing their syntax and speech patterns for so long that I had never thought of them as accents. Their voices always felt natural. I was accustomed to their jumps between English and Spanish and then back. As I keep studying Spanish, there are times now when it seems like my native English feels awkward because I find myself thinking in Spanish. Maybe someday I will have an accent, too?

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Home was the Spanish tongue they spoke and the one I thought I didn't want. It was me dozing through church services and Bible study held in Spanish. It was the trips to new countries that had been home to mom and dad's younger years where I felt alone at first. Spanish manifested again as homesickness and teenage angst. To my family, I was a gringo, teased for not knowing enough Spanish. "Hello, John Wayne," some cousins mocked, laughing and sometimes even calling me a Yankee. But then, as I got older, I tried to look beyond the jokes, and Spanish started to stir in my writing. I journaled and kept writing poems, discovering moments where the right word didn't exist in English, and Spanish was no longer used just for flavor. Later on, I became grateful to my extended family when they taught me Spanish words and tried their hand at English. I learned quickly that the teasing was an important way of expressing affection.

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Someone once told me you have succeeded in learning a language when you dream in it. I feel hopeful when I have dreams that drudge up the foggy memories of my first trips to Puerto Rico, Ecuador, Mexico, or reflect the imagined experience of the other Latin American countries I will visit in the future. My language study on the app continues every morning, and now my journal entries are sometimes written in Spanish. My practice is coffee for my mind. It's a challenge that emboldens me to

keep going, to take the next steps—to read Spanish books, journal with this new tongue, and translate my own poems.

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Following the lead of other lit mags we admire, *Pilgrimage* started publishing a translation folio that showcases at least two poets and writers doing important work. Translation expands our worldview and opens our eyes to give access to more voices and cultures. We appointed a translation editor, put out the call for submissions, and didn't look back. In a short period, we have featured translations of Honduran poets, Iraqi poets, and poets from the borderlands, along with works in Hebrew, Hindi, Polish, and Chinese. Whenever possible, we publish the translation beside the work in the original language. It's important to witness the story or poem in its original language. As editors, we have learned that publishing translations is another way that literary magazines can reach out across continents and oceans to unify us through storytelling. Translations from other cultures and other parts of the world transcend conflict, stand up to combative administrations and regimes, and challenge government policies that strip away humanity. It is another small way we can give back, an important form of literary citizenship. We observe the world more freely when we learn how it is perceived and described in other languages.

— — —

Almost a year ago, my father passed away very suddenly. I still fear that I have lost a part of myself. I am trying to understand that this is a natural feeling that comes with grief. My father used to walk three miles each morning, until one morning he had a fall that caused the head injury that ultimately cost him his life. He immediately lost the ability to speak and then became unresponsive for approximately five days. His voice was gone. It devastated me to watch so many stories slipping away along with him.

While the family and I gathered around him in the ICU, we shared our stories about him, family members called, my parents' church congregation prayed over him, and we waited for family to come in time to say their goodbyes. All the while, I thought of stories I wanted to hear again and questions I meant to ask him. When he was alive, we mostly spoke in English. It was our mode, even though I knew my father felt more comfortable with Spanish. On those days in the ICU, I spoke to him and the family in both languages, going where the conversations dictated. When the time arrived, I said my goodbyes in Spanish and

English, all the while coming to understand that we have to use language to overcome grief, to bring us closer to the ones we have lost, to our culture, to the ones we want to hold onto, and, ultimately, in order to show the world who we really are. I kept repeating to him my promise, “I will tell your story,” with surprising fluency in Spanish that I didn’t know I had. After all the lessons and work over the years, I was finally at home with the language in my mouth.

Endings

Angie Eng

Artist	Angie Eng
Year	2008
Medium	Video
Credit	Courtesy of the artist.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VdzK0I0ZAAc

Eng created this video at the beginning of the 2008 economic crash as a response to a perceived end or beginning of an era. It is intended to be viewed either on an endless loop or as a short work at the beginning of a film screening to convey the message of ending an ultra-capitalist world marked by overconsumption and repressive gender roles.


The End
TECHNICAL PRODUCTION
by
BURTON HOLMES FILMS, INC.
CHICAGO
VHF
UHF
VOLUME
TUNING

Contributors

Nora Burnett Abrams

Nora Burnett Abrams is the Mark G. Falcone Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver. She formerly served as the MCA's curator, where she organized more than thirty exhibitions and authored or contributed to nearly a dozen accompanying publications. She has lectured throughout the country on modern and contemporary art and holds degrees in art history from Stanford University (BA), Columbia University (MA), and the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University (PhD).

Noel Black

Noel Black is a poet, publisher, translator, and radio producer who lives in Denver, Colorado. He is the author of three full-length collections—*Uselysses*, *La Goon*, and *The Natural Football League*—and several chapbooks, including his most recent, *High Noon*. He is also the coeditor of Kevin Opstedal's *Pacific Standard Time*. Black holds an MFA in poetics and creative nonfiction from Regis University.

Angie Eng

Angie Eng is a visual artist who works in experimental video, conceptual art, and time-based media. Her work has been performed and exhibited at venues such as the Whitney Museum, the Lincoln Center Video Festival, The Kitchen, the New Museum of Contemporary Art, Art in General, and Experimental Intermedia. Her videos have appeared in local and international digital art festivals. She is currently finishing a PhD in intermedia arts at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

Rick Griffith

Rick Griffith is a British-born graphic designer of West-Indian origin and the design director of MATTER in Denver, Colorado. His graphic works, which are often nested in a writing practice, are produced on 19th and early 20th century printing presses using traditional and avant-garde techniques. Griffith is a scholar of typographic history. He frequently lectures throughout North America and internationally on design history, typography, and his unique model of professional practice.

Paul Miller

Paul D. Miller (*aka* DJ Spooky) is a composer, multimedia artist, and writer whose work immerses audiences in a blend of genres, global culture, and environmental and social issues. Miller's work has appeared in such venues as the Whitney Biennial and The Venice Biennial for Architecture. His books include *Rhythm Science*, *Sound Unbound*, *The Book of Ice*, and *The Imaginary App*. He has been published in *The Village Voice*, *The Source*, and *Artforum*, and was the founding executive editor of *Origin Magazine*. A frequent visitor to Colorado, Miller is the current artist-in-residence at Google.

Juan Morales

Juan J. Morales is a poet and the son of an Ecuadorian mother and Puerto Rican father. He is the author of three poetry collections: *Friday and the Year That Followed*, *The Siren World*, and *The Handyman's Guide to End Times* (UNM Press). His poetry has appeared in *Copper Nickel*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Pleiades*, *Poetry Daily*, and others. He is a CantoMundo fellow, a Macondista, the editor/publisher of Pilgrimage Press, and department chair of English & world languages at Colorado State University-Pueblo.

Kelly Sears

Kelly Sears is an experimental animator. Working with appropriated images from American culture and politics, she uses animation to rebuild American histories that shift between the official and the uncanny while exploring contemporary narratives of power. Her work has screened at such venues as the Museum of Modern Art, The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Sundance Film Festival. Sears teaches film and animation production at the University of Colorado, Boulder. She received a BA from Hampshire College and an MFA from the University of California, San Diego.

Suzi Q. Smith

Suzi Q. Smith is an award-winning artist, activist, and educator who lives in Denver, Colorado. She has shared stages with Nikki Giovanni, the late Gil Scott Heron, and many others. Her poems have appeared in numerous publications, anthologies, and a chapbook collection, *Thirteen Descansos*. Her newest collection, *A Gospel of Bones*, is available in 2020. Smith formerly served as executive director of Poetry Slam, Inc., and is co-chair of the Denver Commission on Cultural Affairs. She recently gave the talk, "These Poems Made Me Possible," at TEDxBoulder.

Joel Swanson

Joel Swanson is an artist and writer who explores the relationship between language and technology. His work critically subverts the technologies, materials, and underlying structures of language to reveal its idiosyncrasies and inconsistencies. He has been exhibited at such venues as the Broad Museum in Lansing, The Power Plant in Toronto, and the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver. Swanson is an assistant professor in the ATLAS Institute at the University of Colorado, Boulder. He has an MFA from the University of California, San Diego.

About

Tilt West is a Denver-based nonprofit dedicated to stimulating inclusive community exchange about art, ideas, and culture. Several times a year, the *Tilt West Journal* commissions a range of cultural practitioners to respond to selected topics.

This issue was built on Quire, a multiformat digital publishing framework developed by the Getty.

In addition to its publishing activities, Tilt West regularly hosts roundtable discussions across the Denver metro area and beyond. Roundtable prompt materials, audio recordings, and articles can be found at tiltwest.org. Tilt West maintains an open invitation list for all its roundtables; sign up at tiltwest.org/join-us/.

Tilt West's activities are supported by a talented group of volunteers culled from the region's growing arts and culture sector. We thank board members past and present for their contributions: Olivia Abtahi, Tya Anthony, Ruth Bruno, Maria Buszek, Jaime Carrejo, Whitney Carter, Sarah McKenzie, Bianca Mikahn, Kate Nicholson, Gretchen Schaefer, Geoffrey Shamos, Marty Spellerberg, Derrick Velasquez, and Sarah Wambold.

Tilt West was born of a desire to elevate, amplify, and support the growing arts and culture scene in Colorado. We believe critical discourse—in verbal and written form—is vital to the health of an arts ecosystem. We are committed to supporting artists, writers, thinkers,

and all cultural workers who make Colorado an interesting and inspiring place.

Cover image: Rick Griffith, A., 2019. Collaged text, graphite, ink, 11 × 14 inches (30.5 cm × 22.9 cm). Courtesy of the artist.