

Art and Language

14th November – 18th January 2003
52 - 54 Bell Street

Lisson Gallery is delighted to announce an exhibition by Art & Language.

Art and Language played a key role in the birth of Conceptual Art both theoretically and in terms of the work produced. The name Art & Language was first used by Michael Baldwin, David Bainbridge, Harold Hurrell and Terry Atkinson in 1968 to describe their collaborative work which had been taking place since 1966-67 and as the title of the journal dedicated to the theoretical and critical issues of conceptual art. The collaboration widened between 1969 and 1970 to include Ian Burn, Mel Ramsden, Joseph Kosuth and Charles Harrison. The collaborative nature of the venture was conceived by the artists as offering a critical inquiry into the social, philosophical and psychological position of the artist which they regarded as mystification. By the mid-1970s a large body of critical and theoretical as well as artistic works had developed in the form of publications, indexes, records, texts, performances and paintings. Since 1977, Art and Language has been identified with the collaborative work of Michael Baldwin and Mel Ramsden and with the theoretical and critical collaboration of these two with Charles Harrison.

The process of indexing lies at the heart of the endeavours of Art and Language. One such project that will be included in the exhibition is *Wrongs Healed in Official Hope*, a remaking of an earlier index, *Index 01*, produced by Art & Language for the Documenta of 1972. Whereas *Index 01* was intended as a functioning tool in the recovery and public understanding of Art and Language, *Wrongs Healed in Official Hope* is a 'logical implosion' of these early indexes as conversations questioning the process of indexing became the material of the indexing project itself. Where *Index 01* used actual filing cabinets with legible material, the pornographic text in "Wrongs..." has been visited by Mrs Malaprop and is now rendered hilariously senseless but is still recognisable as pornography. The main index is made up of brightly coloured panels and has become aggressively decorative existing only as pattern. As Charles Harrison has said of this piece "The implication is that the two extremes – aesthetically evacuated abstract painting and the vivid but absolutely unaesthetic text – represent the two poles of a single world of now degenerate taste."¹

Art & Language have been included in many international exhibitions including the Documenta exhibitions of 1972, 1982 and 1997. They have also had several retrospectives in recent years: at the Jeu de Paume, Paris in 1993, PS1, New York in 1999 and at the Musée D'Art Moderne in Lille earlier this year. Charles Harrison recently published "Essays on Art and Language" in two volumes available from MIT Press.

¹ Charles Harrison, 'Almost Too Dark to Read', *Too Dark to Read, motifs rétrospectifs 2002 – 1965*, Musée d'Art Moderne de Lille Métropole, Villeneuve D'Ascq, p.175

