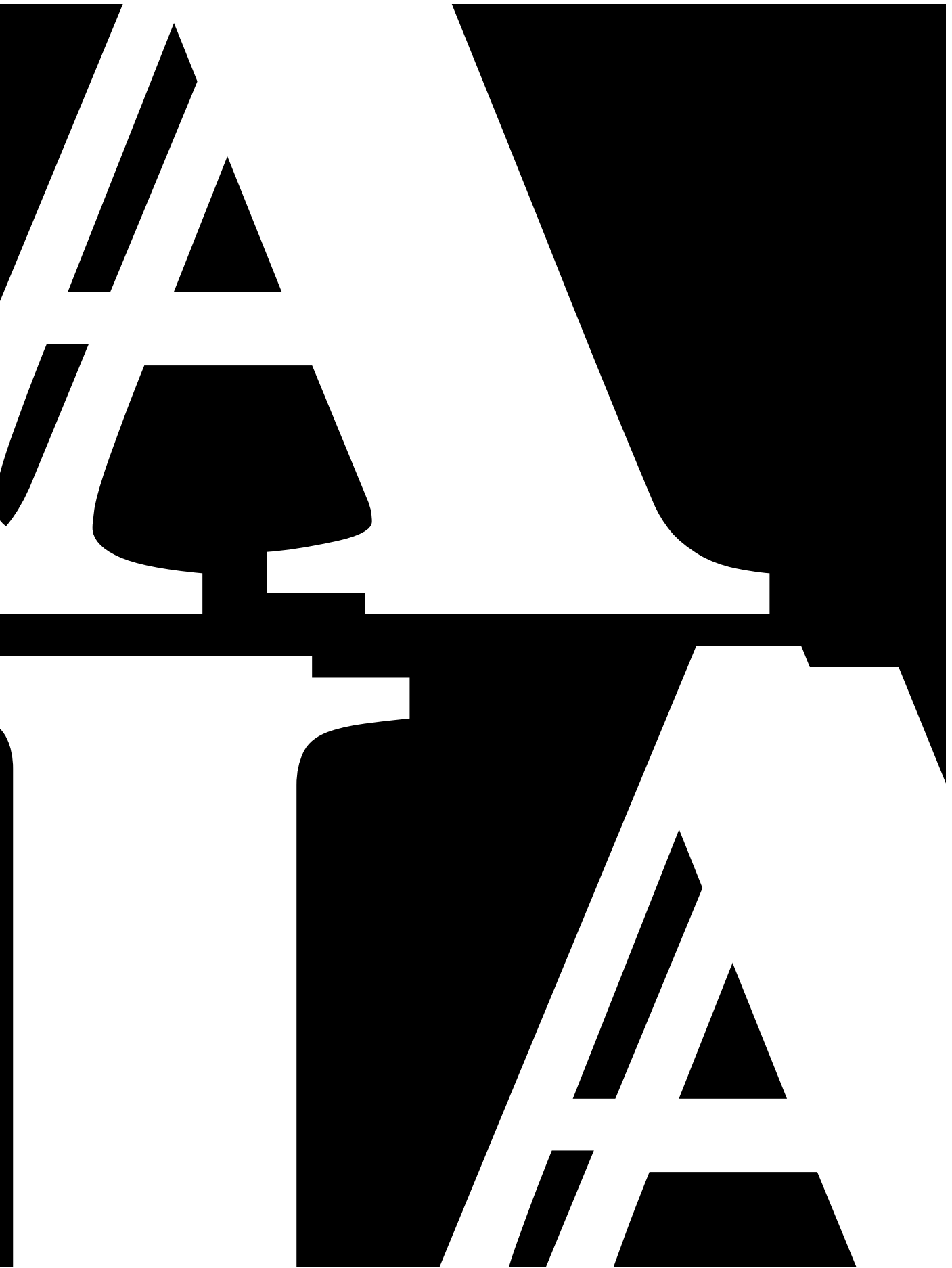


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COLOUR

In
Contextual
Play an instal-
lation by Joseph
Kosuth *works by*
Enrico Castellani,
Lucio Fontana, Yves
Klein, Joseph Kosuth,
Piero Manzoni
Curated by Cornelia Lauf

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COLOUR IN CONTEXTUAL PLAY

The Mazzoleni Gallery worked for over a year on this project. In addition to the gallery team, the project also involved the curator of the exhibition, Cornelia Lauf, together with Joseph Kosuth who was responsible for the installation design, and Nero the publisher of the book that was conceived and designed by Joseph Kosuth as well. The project of presenting colour in conceptual play is a complex, comprehensive undertaking. In addition to the presentation of individual works of art, it is also made up of an installation that connects them together and a book containing texts commenting on the exhibition. So the presentation of this project includes not only analysis of the exhibition but also the content of the texts, because they both support each other.

Let's start this overview of the project from what constitutes our first contact with it, and therefore the installation we encounter when we enter into the gallery. The space of the gallery is in fact the first work of art, and has been carefully designed. In this case, it is not just a background

display. The images here form the material for creating an installation. Their artistic properties are added and complemented within the whole spatial arrangement. Installation art, as a coherent ordering of elements in real space is a form of conceptual art *par excellence* and it was created as a carrier of content in the conceptual discourse of art. It is also a form of art that directly takes into account the physical presence of a person in the space, the human condition, the body and mind. It is the art of a conscious presence in the world (of being in the world) that gives the possibility of critical reflection on it.

As installation is a very conceptual form of presentation, it was and it is a form of art developed by Joseph Kosuth from the beginning, accordingly to a famous and basic pair of notions coined by him: 'making meaning' / 'form of presentation'. The installation in Mazzoleni is anchored in conceptual art in many ways. One way is the way of art history, where a cultural background constitutes the exhibition content conceived by curator and exhibition designer out

of the most outstanding works of contemporary art heritage. The process of making an exhibition is at the same time the process of making art as it requires the conceptualization of many aspects to merge them together as one.

But it is unusual as well. Color is a form of expression. However expression was expelled from the conceptual art world. In the preface of the book, Davide and Luigi Mazzoleni in their recollections, underlined that the collaborative work on this exhibition was a process. And 'process' is another key word for conceptual activities of any kind. Since the art, an artifact, became a 'form of presentation', the 'making meaning' as a sole art making act is by nature a process in itself. So the process by nature is an inevitable element of any conceptual work as it is based on reasoning or speculating. Process in general implies time, action in time. In this respect conceptual artworks are dynamic, or performative ones as well, to use the more up to date terminology. To put it in another discourse, the 'performative turn' refers to all art, and contemporary culture as a whole, by describing its key aspect. But the performance as a way of art making was always as alien to Joseph Kosuth's practice as it could ever be. He of course somehow admired and benefited from performers, like Jan Świdziński who adopted live action as his art practice (finally). However we should underline that Świdziński met Kosuth in the early stage of development of his idea, in the mid of seventies, when both of them elaborated another conceptual key-word, the notion of 'context', and filled it with a content that served to define a new role for art in the decline of Modernism and at the border of Postmodernism. Large-scale installations by Kosuth, as well as performances by Świdziński, were the answer to the question of what could be a new role for both art in culture (Kosuth) and the human position (Świdziński). Any spatial form includes presentness in it as a rule. It is relational in its basic assumptions. 'Relational' means here that it includes context in any sense: social, cultural or interpersonal as well. Therefore installation makes us consider the art as a whole, as an artwork within human culture (*art cum culture*).

As a form of art, installation is a dialectic, the elements of which construct a third part that is a whole venue space, an environment. All these features of installation art works described above were the usual practice of Joseph Kosuth in his installations formed out of museums' collections and buildings involving human heritage within the work of arts.

Colour In Conceptual Play, also incorporates the artworks and the pieces of art history, however smaller in scale, but it involves another everlasting aspect of art – colour. Let us begin these considerations on colour from a word, i.e. from the language, as it is prompted by the philosophy that conceptual art refers to in its foundation, and as it was applied by Joseph Kosuth in his art during the early stages of the formulation of his ideas. To understand - begin with the word. In the book one can find a reproduction of the work by Joseph Kosuth from the series *Titled (Art as Idea as Idea)*, dated 1968, presenting a definition of 'colour'. This definition, selected among many existing vocabularies or other bibliographic sources, highlights in the first place the meaning of color as a sensation i.e. the psycho-physical or the somatic aspect of viewing colour, and thus linking it to the human condition. Only then comes the physical or technical aspects of producing colour. In the same book there has been published a fine reproduction of Joseph Kosuth's other works from the same series presenting definitions of particular colours: 'red', 'green', 'yellow', 'violet', and also 'black', 'grey' and 'white'. Despite its linguistic aspect and the subject matter of the definitions, part of the issue here is how these works were initially made: these are photostats which is an obsolete office technique for copying documents using a photographic process (optical). The reason for applying this photo technique is that it enables one to objectify the process of art making by eliminating any of the personal, removing any expressive factor from the artwork. In other words, the artist-photographer is not the one who pressed the camera button. Here we could point out more concurrent solutions used in parallel by Joseph Kosuth and Jan Świdziński:

both never made the photographs by themselves. This way the color has been described by its essence (definition) and not by its accidents, to use the Aristotle juxtaposition. And now, when considering the two works by Joseph Kosuth – the series *Titled (Art As Idea As Idea)* in its part comprising ‘colour’ plus seven colours and the installation *Colour In Conceptual Play* – we discuss the idea or meaning we make in the process of interpreting (conceptualizing) in a given context, and not the particular values of colour with regard to personal sensation.

Colour read as such is a ready made, in a broad sense as it was used by Joseph Kosuth who expanded Marcel Duchamp’s concept to its limits in his large scale, ‘architectural’ installation made in the later period, especially in the nineties. A ready made could be then a whole cultural discourse contextually understood. Accordingly to Duchamp we seek in a ready made items the “art coefficient”. To dada and the surreal mind it could be (and should be) found in any commonplace activity or in the course of life. Thus the ready made can be filled up with any meaning as it is meaningless in itself. *Colour In Contextual Play* comprised at least seven colours (even to subtract three non-colours), listed above. It results from the colour used in the works of other artists selected to build the installation. The “art of colour” begins with three primary colors that are the basis for all colours, forming its entire richness. The meaning of this richness can be read only psychologically. And to reach beyond such a reading we need to abstract ourselves from it or omit it, that is to reduce it to a common denominator – these three colors taken as ready made which enable us to seek an “art coefficient” or an art idea. Here, seven primary colors – as it was designed for this installation – involved in the conceptual play, enables us to make meaning of the chosen works by artists that belong to the history of the avant-garde (arte povera or blue monochrome by Yves Klein) and thus reread them in a contemporary context which proves in the same time that conceptual play never ends. By designing this installation, Joseph Kosuth has made the historical contemporary, readjusting exhibited

works (his own included) for a new context or a new discourse. He has made it by using this works as a ready made in a colorful environment treated as such. His method of art making proved to be effective once again. It should be highlighted that however Joseph Kosuth refers to colour, as it has been pointed out in this article, he also always avoided the use of it for its expressive qualities or emotive value. Any form of expressionism was hostile to his concept of art and to him as an artist. Colour exists here beyond emotions. This is how he perceived his role as a creator. To him colour is not a means of expression and an analytical category in search of new definitions for art.

Cornelia Lauf in her text titled “Living Colour” included in the book, stated that ‘color in context’ means at the same time ‘colour in society’ which is far different from the usual application of colour. As for Joseph Kosuth, context means always the context of art. Could it be defined by colour, which seems to be obvious as long as we think about painting as a quintessential art practice and we are unable to imagine art beyond painting. Firstly, it was Emilio Prini who proposed the list of artists for this exhibition, inspired and challenged by Cornelia Lauf. Her text suggests that it was also Emilio Prini who pointed to Joseph Kosuth to assume the role of designer of the exhibition and later the book – the two complement each other. So it was Joseph Kosuth who conceived both – the installation and the book layout. Thus it is his view of art responsible for the visual form of the project. Regarding this we can call it a conceptual work of art. And, concerning his untimely death Emilio Prini is the one who could be called in this context, an instigator rather than a curator. Despite Emilio Prini’s actual role, Cornelia Lauf referring to him makes her text more personal. Thus she personalized the whole project. This is a second factor to be considered here. Both make this project unusual – yet the personalization and expression – both never existed in conceptual art, in its authorship version of Joseph Kosuth which means it wasn’t existed in its foundations. But time is passing. Which means that it changes and invigorates the existing structures. Is the

conceptual work still a proposition? Absent of a person, a living creature? Does a 'performative turn' matter here? Cornelia Lauf writes:

This moment is different. Granted, the point size for my name is just a few points smaller than that of Joseph Kosuth on the Mazzoleni invitation he designed. And his name, unlike that of the others, appears twice. And he is probably going to edit this sentence out, when he reads my text. But that is the nature of collaboration, with the artist born in Toledo in 1945, who left Ohio and all association to the Mid-western domesticity that spawned Wright, to embark on a world career at the age of twenty.

From her recollection of Joseph Kosuth's family house where his room was painted in different colours, there is a clear suggestion that his current stage of developing a conceptual art idea is rooted in his childhood, which drives us to a very Freudian reading of this colour project. If one considers how Freud was researched and elaborated on in many of Joseph Kosuth works, we see how he depicts that under words there are other meanings. This in turn casts new light on his definition of art as 'making meaning'. Art is layers of meaning, or here a sub-meaning hidden and subsequently unveiled, to reach to Freudian terms of discourse. So the usual catch-phrase that the interpretations are always different - regains a new concrete concern.

Joseph Kosuth in a conversation with Mira Dimitrova (Mazzoleni team), provided at the beginning some important points that enabled them to understand his current position of discourse. Although being successful in the art market, he is (still) a critic of this art market. He highlighted that, in spite of the fact that his works are seen as un-sellable to any art collectors, he has managed to defend his art. And his art idea (*Art As Idea As Idea*) finally appeared to be collectible and possible to value. A good lesson for young artists worrying about the future. However, he has never had a substantial, one-person exhibition in New York MoMA, in the heart of the place where conceptual art were

born. He has still something to prove to the art world and those who govern it. Later in the same conversation he draws our attention to the aspect of the struggle to transcend the presumptions of Modernism in art as a particular medium defined into defining art itself. The artists chosen for this exhibition are the ones who are situated on the border, *lines*, at the verge of Modernism, leaning towards Postmodernism. Joseph Kosuths' works transcended this borderline, however they stayed for a long time in this liminal space of tautology based art. Finally, it was the context driven artworks and large-scale installations that were conceived as fully fledged Postmodernism. In this respect the project of colour in Mazzoleni showcased the art pin-up at the verge of modernism. A monochrome painting marked the limit of this medium beyond which art reached the definition of 'making meaning'. In other words art is looking for the Duchampian "art coefficient" in the surrounding reality (a context) and not in the object of art or a medium. Thus the monochrome was put at the verge of Modernism. And only the dialectic that is natural to installation allows it to transcend into contemporary art and convey meaning. That was the groundbreaking role of conceptualism. We still can learn from it. And we are indebted to it. Joseph Kosuth stated:

It's important not to confuse the truck that delivers the art with the art itself. Seeing art as media define – painting, sculpture, lithography, etc. – is a correct way to understand Modernism, since working to find the limits of the medium was what it was about as a shared general philosophy, but that began to unravel, and I mean by that lose meaning and belief, a half century ago. Conceptual art and the rest of post-Modernism was a sea-change away from seeing art in those terms. I know my work began to ask *why*, not *how*, already in the mid-1960s. Art is defined by the ideas conveyed, not simply how they are conveyed – unless that 'how' is the idea itself. (...) We are no longer looking at the magical fictive world through that

painted surface, we were seeing an object that was in the same room we are in, and increasingly that became the context for art, with our questions asking what these objects meant. They didn't transport us into the fiction of another place, they insisted we stay right there in that room and face an ontological enigma. This enigma concerned our own time and place in the world and forced us to ask about the cultural context that provides meaning for those things in our lives. By looking at art, we were faced with seeing philosophy, not as an academic activity but something that connects with us and forms what makes us human, and doing so in terms of the objects of our culture, beginning with those of the horizon of mass culture which forms our consciousness. (...) Once philosophy became concrete, as art, and was no longer simply academic speculation or its history, we began to satisfy the questioning process through what we show, as Wittgenstein admonished us to do.

Colour In Contextual Play

Mazzoleni London Gallery, 19 May-28 July 2017

Curated by Cornelia Lauf

An installation by Joseph Kosuth

Works by Enrico Castellani, Lucio Fontana, Yves Klein, Joseph Kosuth, Piero Manzoni

Book published by NERO, conceived and design by Joseph Kosuth