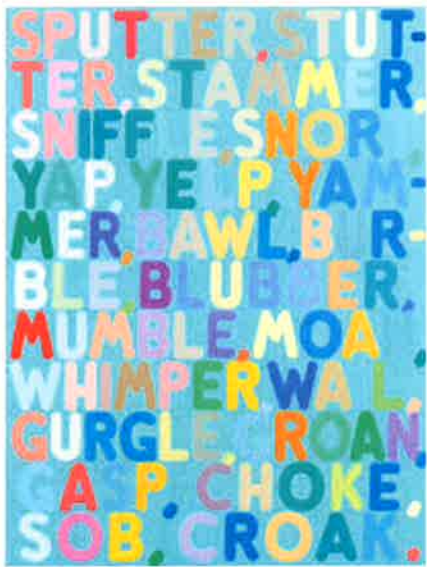


Release Date: October 25, 2011

Mel Bochner's Thesaurus Works on View at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, November 6, 2011–April 8, 2012



Mel Bochner, *Sputter*, 2010
oil on canvas
Courtesy of Hadley Martin Fisher Collection (HMF) © Mel Bochner 2011

Washington, DC—Mel Bochner's renowned innovations in conceptual art come to life in the words he paints on canvas. On view at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, from November 6, 2011, through April 8, 2012, ***In the Tower: Mel Bochner*** presents 43 thesaurus-inspired works from the last 45 years, including many new and unseen works from his studio. The exhibition provides a compelling view of Bochner's early and recent work—of the young as well as the mature artist.

In the Tower: Mel Bochner is the latest installment of the Gallery's series of exhibitions devoted to contemporary art, and the first to be devoted to the work of a living artist.

"Bochner's thesaurus works force us to look at and think about the words we use;

they are portraits of how we speak," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We are grateful to Mel for parting with so many drawings and paintings to make this exhibition possible."

Exhibition Support

The exhibition was organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington.

The exhibition is made possible through the generous support of Suzanne F. Cohen and The Kraus Family Foundation.

Additional support provided by Judith Racht and Irving Stenn Jr., The Exhibition Circle, and The Tower Project.

The Exhibition

Bochner's thesaurus series is a format developed by the artist during the 1960s and reprised in the last decade. Born in Pittsburgh in 1940, Bochner received a BFA from the Carnegie Institute of Technology in 1962 and moved to New York City in 1964, where he became involved in two of the major movements of the period—minimal and conceptual art.

From 1966 to 1968 Bochner made portraits in ink on graph paper based on a descriptive word and its synonyms found in *Roget's Thesaurus*. The shapes and words of these drawings evoke such figures as Jorge Luis Borges, Marcel Duchamp, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, and Robert Smithson. Bochner's famous portrait of Eva Hesse from 1966, a circle of synonyms for the word "wrap," alluding to the rounded forms of Hesse's art, is on view for the first time in its original frame—a delicate tape and glass construction made by Hesse herself. *Portrait of Robert Smithson* (1966), based on the thesaurus entry for "repetition," suggests Smithson's interest in seriality. Several works in this group of drawings represent friends and acquaintances from the early days of the minimalist and conceptual art movements and have never been shown.

In 2001 Bochner again turned to the thesaurus to develop a series of paintings and drawings derived from everyday speech. Writing out lists of words in his notebooks, he produced a new kind of drawing that ultimately led to the Thesaurus paintings.

Boldly colored and impressive in scale, these works are among the most ambitious of his career. These recent drawings include bubbles and arrows that divulge his working method, revealing the paint colors he uses while completing a canvas.

Ten large paintings are installed in the main gallery of the Tower, including four major diptychs that are on view for the first time: *Master of the Universe* (2010), *Oh Well* (2010), *Amazing!* (2011), and *Babble* (2011). Unlike the black-and-white formats of the ink portraits of the 1960s, the large paintings revisit traditions of modernist painting such as the checkerboard works of Piet Mondrian and the Alphabet paintings of Jasper Johns while depicting everyday speech in a variety of color palettes.

Charcoals—including a second, larger portrait of Hesse from 2001—reveal Bochner's process of erasure and covering up. Still drawn from *Roget's Thesaurus* and dictionaries of slang, the language in the later works is informal and crude, reflecting the evolution of spoken English since the 1960s and into the digital age.

Exhibition Curator

The curator of the exhibition is James Meyer, associate curator, modern and contemporary art, National Gallery of Art.

A fully illustrated brochure is available in the exhibition.

Related Activities

LECTURES

Introduction to the Exhibition—In the Tower: Mel Bochner

Sunday, November 6, 2:00 p.m., East Building Auditorium

James Meyer, exhibition curator

Conversations with Artists: Mel Bochner

Wednesday, November 9, 3:30 p.m., East Building Auditorium

Mel Bochner in conversation with James Meyer

GALLERY TALKS

Regular public tours of *In the Tower: Mel Bochner* will be offered by the adult programs department of the education division.

In the Tower: Mel Bochner

Sally Shelburne

November 16, 23 at 12:00 noon

December 13 at 12:00 noon

January 21 at 12:00 noon

February 8, 28 at 12:00 noon

45 minutes

East Building Ground Level, Information Desk

ART TALK: In the Tower: Mel Bochner

James Meyer and Sally Shelburne

January 5, 11 at 12:00 noon

50 minutes

East Building Ground Level, Information Desk

GALLERY SHOPS

The Gallery Shops will offer an array of related items for the *In the Tower: Mel Bochner* exhibition, including a postcard of the artist's brightly-colored text-based work *Amazing!* (2011). A selection of related books will also be available, such as *Solar System and Rest Rooms: Writings and Interviews 1965-2007* by Mel Bochner and *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* by James Meyer, and among others.

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets at Constitution Avenue NW, and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the

Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on Twitter at www.twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

Press Office

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2000B South Club Drive

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Deborah Ziska

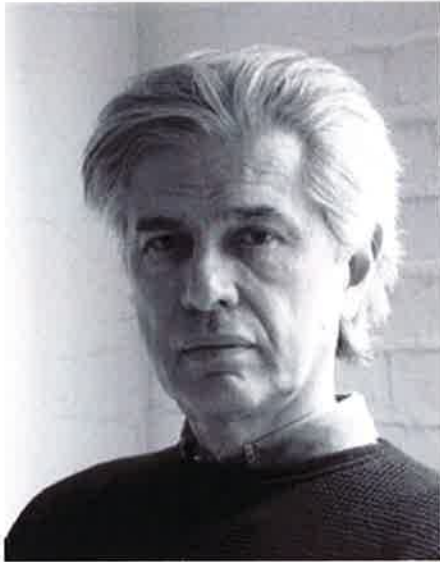
Chief of Press and Public Information

(202) 842-6353

ds-ziska@nga.gov

Biography

Mel Bochner (b. 1940)



Mel Bochner
Photo by Nicholas Knight

Born in Pittsburgh, Mel Bochner received his BFA from the Carnegie Institute of Technology in 1962. Shortly after moving to New York City in 1964, he became involved in two of the major movements of the period—minimal art, which was already being developed by artists such as Donald Judd, Dan Flavin, and Carl Andre, and conceptual art, a movement of which Bochner would become a leading figure. In 1966 he installed his work *Working Drawings And Other Visible Things On Paper Not Necessarily Meant To Be Viewed As Art* at the School of Visual Arts, New York—a show that is now considered to be one of the first conceptual art exhibitions. The same year Bochner began making photo works, including his important *36 Photographs and 12 Diagrams*, which was exhibited at Dwan Gallery, New York, in 1967. In 1969 the artist created his now-famous *Measurement: Room* at Galerie Heiner Friedrich in Munich, Germany.

As both an artist and critic, Bochner has served as an interpreter and interlocutor for many other artists of his generation. His early writings, including "Art in Process—

Structures" (*Arts Magazine*, 1966), "Serial Art Systems: Solipsism" (*Arts Magazine*, 1967), and "The Serial Attitude" (*Artforum*, 1967) explored fundamental ideas at work in minimalism and conceptualism. These and subsequent essays were collected in his book *Solar Systems and Rest Rooms: Writings and Interviews 1965-2007* (The MIT Press, 2008). Major exhibitions of Bochner's work include *Mel Bochner: Number and Shape* (Baltimore Museum of Art, 1976); *Mel Bochner: Thought Made Visible 1966–1973* at the Yale University Art Gallery in 1995; *Mel Bochner: Photographs 1966–1969* at the Harvard University Art Museums in 2002; and *Mel Bochner: Language 1966–2006* at The Art Institute of Chicago in 2006.

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