JOSEPH KOSUTH

Made at Conception

CASTELLI

DECEMBER 8, 2015 – MARCH 7, 2016

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Checklist

'The Sixth Investigation (A.A.I.A.I.) Proposition 7', 1970
Ink on glass
58 x 48 inches
Edition 2/3

'One and Eight—A Description', 1965
Neon tubing
5 x 156 1/2 inches
Edition 2/3

'Titled (A.A.I.A.I.) [Exterior–Interior]', 1968
Photograph mounted on board
7 elements, 48 x 48 inches each

'One and Three Frames (English-Latin)', 1965
Photograph of frame, wooden frame, and photographic enlargement of the dictionary definition of the word "frame"
Dimensions variable

'Any Five Foot Square Sheet of Glass to Lean Against Any Wall', 1965
Glass and metal plaque
Glass: 60 x 60 inches; plaque: 2 1/4 x 8 inches

Joseph Kosuth Interview with Barbara Bertozzi Castelli

December 16, 2015

Barbara Bertozzi Castelli:
The idea behind the exhibition *Made at Conception* is to analyze the issue—or, as you have said, the non-issue—of fabrication in your work. To address this, I want to begin by talking about the nature of your work. At the start of your career, you decided not to label your work with terms like "painting," "sculpture," "photography," "object," "installation," and instead you used expressions that refer to an activity of the mind, like "investigation" and "protoinvestigation." What you did, it wasn't anything defined by the traditional terms, it was different.

Joseph Kosuth:
It was art. Well, I tried to clear away enough stuff—extra meanings—so that people had to confront what this idea of art was. That way, the ontological questions could be asked. But if you don't do it like that, then if you call a work painting or sculpture, you're not asking the question about "what is art?" because you're saying, that's what art is. It's these Modernist, you know, categories of painting, sculpture, lithography, etc. If you take Immanuel Kant out of a sculpture, you just have an object. And that was the point of Robert Morris calling his work "objects." And also of Judd calling his "specific objects." If you consider Bob's background—it didn't come out of a traditional idea of art—and Judd was a painter, his objects were intended to solve his problems with painting. So, calling their work sculpture, I think, is a bad framing of the work. It's simply wrong, it's how the market pressures work to be seen in a conventional way. It doesn't leave open the investigative nature of the work.

BBC: You know, this is unrelated to your work, but do you know that the Japanese artists from the first avant-garde movement of the '50s, they made the point—

JK: Gutai.

BBC: Yes, Gutai. They made the point that all of them were going to call and title their work simply *'Work'*. You know, "work" of art.

JK: Yes, exactly.

BBC: And it's an interesting point because their take was that "painting" and "sculpture" are Eurocentric concepts, which were imported to Japan—why should we call this a painting? This is a work of art.

JK: Yeah, well, that's what I felt. There was no need to say more; the work was to say the rest. And, I know you noticed on the certificates for the "Definition" works, they all have the same title, which is '*Titled (Art As Idea As Idea)*'. Because I thought of the old Duchamp story, that in France there was an expression, "stupid like a painter," and he didn't want to be stupid. And so that's at least part of the explanation of why he really didn't want to be a painter. And I always said, "Well, a *really* dumb painter would call his or her work '*Untitled*'." And, that became such an institutionalized title. So that was the irony behind calling my work '*Titled*'.

BBC: They were all called '*Titled*'.

JK: Yes, essentially. Then I would put in brackets the word being defined, but it was outside the title of the work.

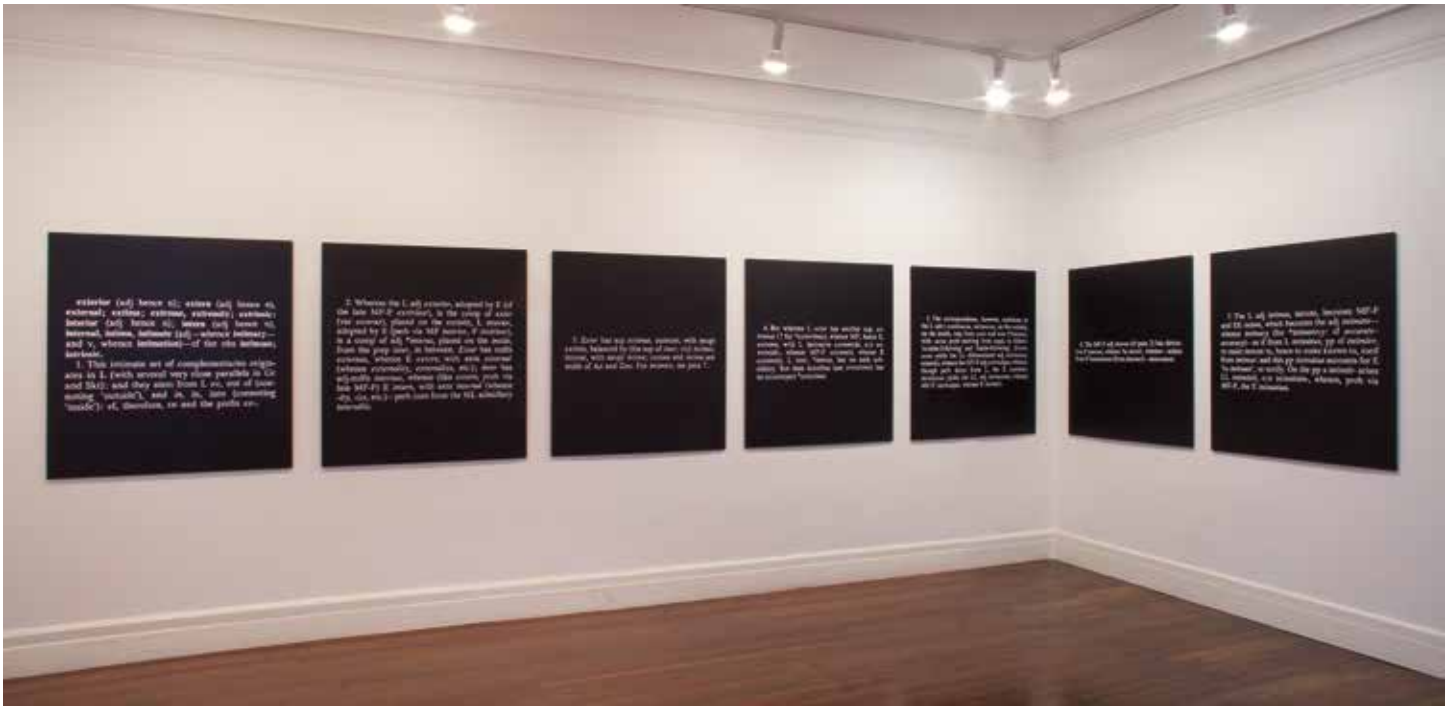
BBC: And you used media that were reflective of this different way of conceiving the work of art: photography, neon, language. Speaking of language, something that I think is very important is the way you use language: the appropriation of language.

JK: And appropriation, in general. I realized early that really *any* element—objects, photos, performers, anything—can be put into linguistic play. These elements can become the "text," which is the genius of Haim Steinbach's work.

BBC: So, we have '*Titled*', something that no longer can be labeled with conventional names, and we have new media, which reflects this change in the nature of the work.

JK: Well, these are "non-media" media, you know, because it is not about media. I mean, Modernism wants this—this is the Kant aspect—about the limits of the medium, right? And it seemed to be that the basic continuity of connective thinking between all the works, within Modernism, was this thing of getting to the edge, to the limit, and this is, of course, the Greenbergian point of view. And this was something as a young artist I was very much opposed to, because it was really about the institutionalization of what we were doing and the idea that choosing a painting or calling it sculpture, that you're *a priori* saying that's what art is, and your work is being eclipsed then by art history before you, as an individual, can construct your *own* meaning for your activity. But it is *your* meaning which concretizes your work and locates it in *your* time and life, which is what gives a work authenticity. It is the moral weight of the artist's subjective claiming that that entity is art, that he or she stands behind it. Which is why work by children or monkeys is not considered art.

BBC: We have the new media, which is "non-media," and then we have 1965: can I call it the "non-date"? I mean, so much of your work is dated 1965 that, paradoxically, the year doesn't mean anything anymore.



'Titled (A.A.I.A.I.) [Exterior-Interior]', 1968
Photograph mounted on board
7 elements, each 48 x 48 inches

exterior (adj hence n); **extern** (adj hence n), **external; extima; extreme, extremity; extrinsic: interior** (adj hence n); **intern** (adj hence n), **internal, intima, intimate** (adj—whence **intimacy**—and v, whence **intimation**)—cf the obs **intimous; intrinsic.**

1. This intimate set of complementaries originates in L (with several very close parallels in Gr and Skt): and they stem from L *ex*, out of (connoting 'outside'), and *in*, in, into (connoting 'inside'): cf, therefore, IN and the prefix *ex-*.

2. Whereas the L adj *exterior*, adopted by E (cf the late MF-F *extérieur*), is the comp of *exter* (var *exterus*), placed on the outside, L *interior*, adopted by E (perh via MF *interior*, F *intérieur*), is a comp of adj **interus*, placed on the *inside*, from the prep *inter*, in between. *Exter* has mdfn *externus*, whence E *extern*, with extn *external* (whence *externality*, *externalize*, etc.); *inter* has adj-mdfn *internus*, whence (like *extern*, prob via late MF-F) E *intern*, with extn *internal* (whence *-ity*, *-ize*, etc.)—perh imm from the ML subsidiary *internālis*.

3. *Exter* has sup *extimus*, outmost, with neupl *extima*, balanced by (the sup of *inter*, viz) *intimus*, inmost, with neupl *intima*; *extima* and *intima* are techh of An and Zoo. For *intimate*, see para 7.

4. But whereas L *exter* has another sup, *extremus* (? for **exterrimus*), whence MF, hence E, *extreme*, with L derivative *extremitās*, o/s *extremitāt-*, whence MF-F *extremité*, whence E *extremity*, L *inter*, **interus*, has no such subsidiary. But then *intestīnus* (see INTESTINE) has no counterpart **extestinus*.

5. The correspondence, however, continues in the L advv *extrinsecus*, *intrinsecus*, on the outside, on the inside, resp from *exter* and *inter* (**interus*), with *-secus* prob deriving from *sequi*, to follow: 'outside-following' and 'inside-following'. *Extrinsecus* yields the LL differentiated adj *extrinsicus*, external, whence the MF-F adj *extrinsèque*, whence, though perh direct from L, the E *extrinsic*; *intrinsecus* yields the LL adj *intrinsecus*, whence MF-F *intrinsèque*, whence E *intrinsic*.

6. The MF-F adj *interne* (cf para 2) has derivative F *interner*, whence 'to *intern*', whence—unless from F *internement* (from *interner*)—*internment*.

7. The L adj *intimus*, inmost, becomes MF-F and EE *intime*, which becomes the adj *intimate*—whence *intimacy* (for **intimatecy*: cf *accurate–accuracy*)—as if from L *intimātus*, pp of *intimāre*, to make inmost to, hence to make known to, itself from *intimus*: and this pp *intimātus* accounts for E 'to *intimate*', to notify. On the pp s *intimāt-* arises LL *intimātiō*, o/s *intimātiōn-*, whence, prob via MF-F, the E *intimation*.

JK: Well, it didn't for me because I didn't know anyone. Even while I observed the history going on around me, I was alone doing what I did. And the artists I did meet, like Sol LeWitt, as much as he contributed to an atmosphere that later made my work capable of being included, he still was part of an object-making Modernism, saying to me when I told him about my work: "Well, Joseph, you know ideas alone can never be art." I mean, I was, at that point, doing it in a vacuum. Although, I did learn a lot just by looking—I realized much later how much I had learned from Warhol (even if I somewhat rejected his cultural play intellectually). He gave permission for a certain approach, which I took farther or at least in a different direction. My use of photos, if I look around, there was really no one else doing photos—I mean, there had, of course, been Man Ray and others, earlier in the twentieth century who had used photography, and you had Bob Rauschenberg, as well as Andy Warhol, using photo-litho and silkscreen, but in the end they made paintings with them. Which at that time, I'm sure, allowed the market to see them as art. And that was what I was trying to rupture.

BBC: Yeah, sure.

JK: In my case, the "Definitions" were close enough to a painting (hung flat on the wall) that the market could embrace them as art. But just using a photo, and an unsigned photo, was quite extreme. And the photos were not even taken by me, because I made sure I got a photographer to do it so no one would think I'm a photographer, as a way to avoid the craft of photography as being part of what made it art. And it was done in a very detached way, as I have always described it, scientific-like, like a recording device, you know. And, so, there was no art there in the conventional sense. It was simply a photograph being used *within* an artwork that had another idea about how and what art was.

BBC: Speaking with you now, listening to you, I understand that dating a work 1965, even if the work has not been made in 1965, is, somehow, the final outcome of having a media that is a non-media, and having a title that is not a title, in a certain way. It all comes up to—

JK: Well, it's important to keep in mind that the work is dated at conception, not fabrication. All the works informed each other, all of these dimensions informed each other, and—very much like a lot of my works are—the parts are a constructive element, and together it's the surplus meaning, which is new and additional, that I take, and I claim authorship of.

BBC: Is this the reason why so much of your work is dated between 1965 and 1969?

JK: All of these ideas came out then. I really thought these aspects out, and, honestly, I enjoyed thinking about the unraveling of the implication of what I was proposing. For example, the by now well-known subtitle '*Art as Idea as Idea*'. I was lurching ahead, and I was claiming not just works based on ideas (art as idea) but, in fact, the idea of doing that as a kind of work itself, thus "art as idea *as idea*." I was a smart kid, and probably very much too intense, looking back at it now, and of course, you know, each of these

works would follow from the other, and it's not because—I'm not painting strange little paintings like Marion Stroud, who used a three-haired brush and would spend several years on one painting, you know, that is not how my work is made. I could do a lot of works and I managed to, so did Warhol. I mean, I love the literary spin that your question puts on it, but the thing is that if there were variations to an idea then I would play off and think through those variations: the dating was based on the idea of *that* work, you know, but each spin had to be perceived as an individual work if my work was going to ask the questions that I wanted them to ask. By the way, this is true of any artist, but I just made it visible and more extreme. Also, another date would be less correct than '65, since that's when this work began. That's the important thing to understand.

BBC: Today, in 2015, people don't seem to give the same importance that they did in the past to ideas in terms of "who did what first." There was a time in the '60s when ideas were very important and people would kind of value a work, in part, also, according to when it was done. And you would say: who is the first artist who used language? And neon? Oh, Joseph did it in '65, and Bruce in '66; but have we seen the neon that Joseph did in '65—

JK: Did we see one by Bruce? Seth Siegelaub and Gian Enzo Sperone were the earliest visitors to my studio, and I was then working on the "Definitions," which were done in '66, '67, and '68, and those were dated in those years. But they said, "What did you do before?" And I had all this work. Now, that wasn't done the week before they came for their appointment. That was already there, you know. Most of it from 1965, in fact.

BBC: For people of my generation, who were not around in the '60s, the work has its own importance, which doesn't necessarily depend on the question of "who did what first." Personally, I have always been interested in understanding the work for what it is.

JK: Well, and the creative spirit that—well, I kind of disagree. If you are talking about what the idea—at least, my idea—of being creative is, that's in the subtitle: *'Art as Idea as Idea'*. This was really "art as an idea, as an idea"; and that was what I felt I provided, that double aspect. There was some art as idea around—and a lot of it came out of my work. But even so, that other work was not quite the same as this "art as an idea, as an idea" that I fought for.

And the only reason ideas, the date of ideas, and the attribution of the artist could be less important—the only reason for this to occur—would be if we are in an environment in which the market is giving meaning instead of the history of the artist's activity. And when the market is giving meaning instead of the artist it's really then just objects on the market, and if it's nice and you like it and your friends are buying them, well, then, maybe you'll buy it, too, and so, really, the history of ideas, the intellectual history behind it, is less important because the motivation behind having this work is not particularly historical or intellectual.

BBC: When you put it in the context of that time, possibly you were going against the concept of the work of art as a fetish that people would pay money for.

JK: It never even entered my mind that somebody would buy these works.

BBC: And this is something that a lot of artists of your generation say. They say, "We thought there was no sense in anybody buying this work."

JK: Only the painters ever had a realistic hope.

BBC: And do you remember the first certificate you ever made?

JK: Well, first, see, they were made as production material, right? And then they were a record, really, of my thinking of the works; it was really a plan for individual works. And I made those things on cardboard into certificates. I don't know when I first did it. I got the idea from Flavin. I heard that Flavin had certificates for his work, and that was a big—that solved the problem for me, of how do I deal with this dimension. But this was early, this was like '66, '67, it was just shortly after. But it wasn't '65, even if that was when the work was conceived.

BBC: Well, I think the reason Flavin was making the certificates is very different than what you were doing.

JK: Oh, for sure it was! Yeah, no, I'm not blaming him for my use of them. But I'm saying, just the idea of a work having a certificate. I'm sure Rodin had certificates, too, but I just didn't know about it, you know.

BBC: I think for Flavin the point was: this is the work, I don't need to fabricate it, but—

JK: Yes, this, for me, was really important. I mean, the thing was—I was approached when some Duchamp exhibitions were being worked on because they looked in the literature and they realized I was the one who spoke about the "unassisted readymade," and I separated it from the whole Dada history of Duchamp as a device of making art. The unassisted readymade, for me, was a key moment—it was the usable moment to extract from Modernism, that we could do something after Modernism. And that's really the idea of appropriation: the idea of taking a chair, actually, which I found on the street, a folding chair that now sits in MoMA. The whole idea of appropriation began there. And it came out of the unassisted readymade of Duchamp. Because the point was that it was a constructive element in making a work that was based on ideas. So it didn't matter: the craft of using my hands to make something had no bearing.

BBC: But you go a step further than Flavin, in a way, because Flavin said: I don't need to do the work, you can fabricate it. You go beyond the fabrication issue, to the point in which you say: not only do I not need to be the one to make the work, but what really matters is my idea.

JK: Yes, that's why I always said the certificates should never be exhibited, because they are not art, and that the fabricated neon, or the object and the photo—that these things are never signed. It's only the certificate, and that's not art, so it can't be exhibited.

BBC: Is it correct to say that at the beginning you were simply annotating ideas you had, the vision you had for a work, and that developed into making something that was more strictly a certificate?

JK: Yeah, exactly. Because I didn't need "certificates" until I had collectors, which was the truth of the matter. And when that began to happen, that's when this all came together. So, the original existence had to do, really, with a drawing for a work I wanted to do. The ones on newsprint are just drawings for ideas for works.

BBC: So the idea of the certificate developed in an organic way. Keith Sonnier does them, partially with a different intention than either yours or Flavin's. Because Keith says: I am making this, but since anybody can make it I'm issuing a certificate that proves this is my work.

JK: Yeah.

BBC: And the certificate is done after the work is fabricated, and so its reason of being is not "I don't need to fabricate the work," and neither is it "it is the idea that is important," but it is "since anybody can do this work, now you have the certificate, so you know it's my work."

JK: Yes, exactly.

BBC: So it's a slightly different way, again, to consider the certificate.

JK: Yes, it's another dimension.

BBC: Let's now speak about the issue of fabrication. About ten years ago you were about to sell a work to a museum; indeed, it was a neon from '65, not yet fabricated. And the curator of the museum, at some point, had some questions and asked, "Is there an original built in 1965?" There was not, and, eventually, the curator was ok without it and was ready to buy the neon, but suggested the information that the work was fabricated in 2007 be added to the end of the description of the work. For you, this was unacceptable. To deliver the year of the fabrication would have been a denial of the full meaning of the work.

JK: Yeah. It's when conservative becomes stupid, really. Because the truth is that the tradition of dating paintings, when the painter's brush is touching the canvas, it's an event context, right? Now, the presumption is that, while the painter is painting, he or she is also thinking. And the idea of the painting is being made by the activity of the brush, right? So, it's because it's the moment of conception, by the nature of the process of painting, that we date it at that point. But if you don't have the craft and the making process as part of the ideational phase, there's no point in adding the fabrication, really. I discussed this with endless museums—MoMA, Guggenheim—and they dated based on conception, which is the only correct way to date Conceptual Art.

BBC: Your position was: if a curator doesn't understand this then that curator shouldn't really buy my work, there is really no point. This is something honorable. Flavin's works were often fabricated after somebody bought them. The acquisition sometimes preceded the fabrication, and I don't know if a curator ever asked to add the date of the fabrication to a Flavin.

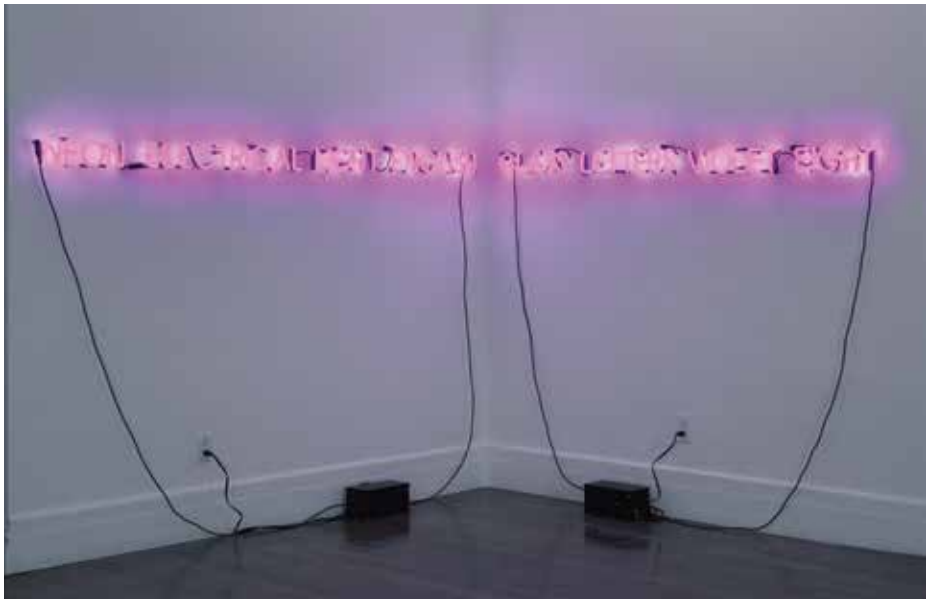
JK: No.

BBC: So, I think, for some reason, it's some kind of baggage that got attached to you.

JK: Yeah, well, it's not knowing the work.

BBC: Some of your works defy the issue of the fabrication by their own nature. The works in our exhibition show this clearly. The one I like the most is *'Any Five Foot Square Sheet of Glass to Lean Against Any Wall'*. As long as the glass is five feet square you can use any sheet of glass, even a sheet of frosted glass, even a sheet of glass from a century ago, am I right?

JK: It could be anything as long as it satisfies what the work needs it to have.



'One and Eight—A Description', 1965
Neon tubing
5 x 156 1/2 inches
Edition 2/3

BBC: That's it. That's the dimensions. It's only the dimensions.

JK: If we use '*One and Three Chairs*', right: when Kynaston bought the work—it was a very early sale, and he paid really nothing for it, which is fine, I was happy to have MoMA buy a work—I made a mistake, which was I gave the museum the photograph I had done at 60 Grand Street, where I was living, and, of course, in the photograph of the chair is the wall and the floor. Well, those are of equal importance to the chair. So, if you change where the work is being viewed, you get a new floor and a new wall, and you have to re-photograph the chair. So, it needs to be re-photographed with each installation. So, every time at MoMA they installed it in a new place, they would have to re-photograph it. And, so, if you want to put a date every time, for every photograph, then you would have a paragraph of dates after ten years.

BBC: Let's say that '*One and Three Chairs*' goes from MoMA on loan to a museum, which has a wall painted red. And now you need to take a photograph.

JK: It's a black and white photo, but yeah.

BBC: That's right. But you don't see the wall as white, you still see it dark.

JK: You'd see it dark, yeah, for sure.

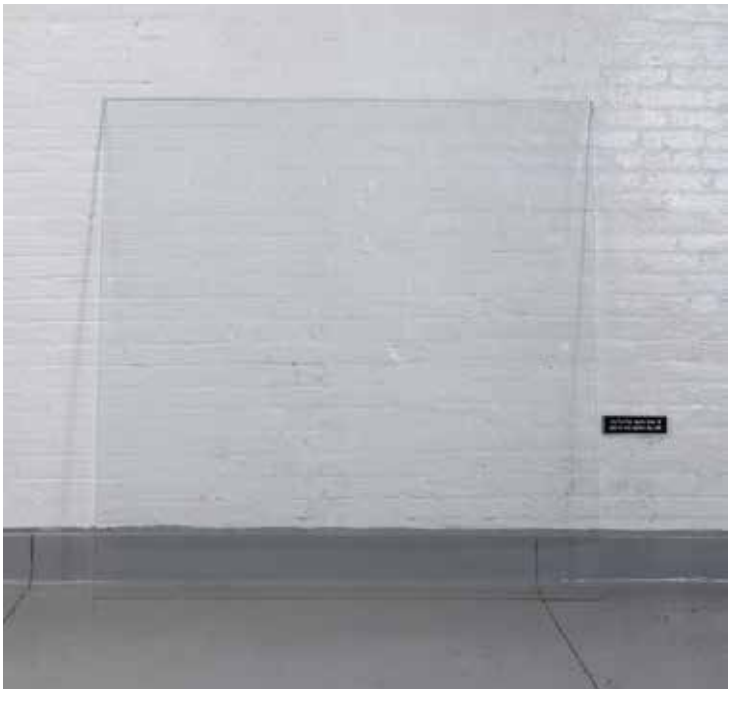
BBC: It's self-explanatory that the date of fabrication coincides with the moment of the installation of the piece. We are exhibiting at the gallery '*One and Three Frames*', 1965, from the same series. I understand there would be no point in adding "fabricated in 2015." It's obvious.

JK: And it makes it too important because the date of the work is when it was conceived of, and that's 1965. That's the point.

BBC: Works like the "One and Three" series or "Any Glass to Lean Against Any Wall" really help to understand why the information about the fabrication is not an element that is needed.

JK: I would think so! If you see a retrospective, it would be easy to understand this. Retrospectives are very informative—and I've done retrospectives—and when people see a room they are really taken by the work, because they really understand. If you don't do a retrospective, you just see fragments of your work.

BBC: You're absolutely right that to see a full retrospective clarifies many issues. Unfortunately, artists often get closed into a certain convention that is either what they did at the beginning of their careers or what was written about them in a certain moment, and sometimes it takes the next generation to look and reopen the conversation.



'Any Five Foot Square Sheet of Glass to Lean Against Any Wall', 1965
Glass and metal plaque
Glass: 60 x 60 inches; plaque: 2 1/4 x 8 inches

JK: Yeah, but with fresh eyes.

BBC: As of today, some of your work has not been fabricated, and yet, your artworks have a very specific look, and we can clearly identify them as yours. If we see a Lichtenstein we know it's a Lichtenstein, if we see a Warhol we know it's a Warhol, and if we see a Kosuth we know it's a Kosuth—even if you say the value is in the idea and not in the artwork itself. It's clearly your work despite the lack of definition of what it is. Despite—

JK: All those definitions.

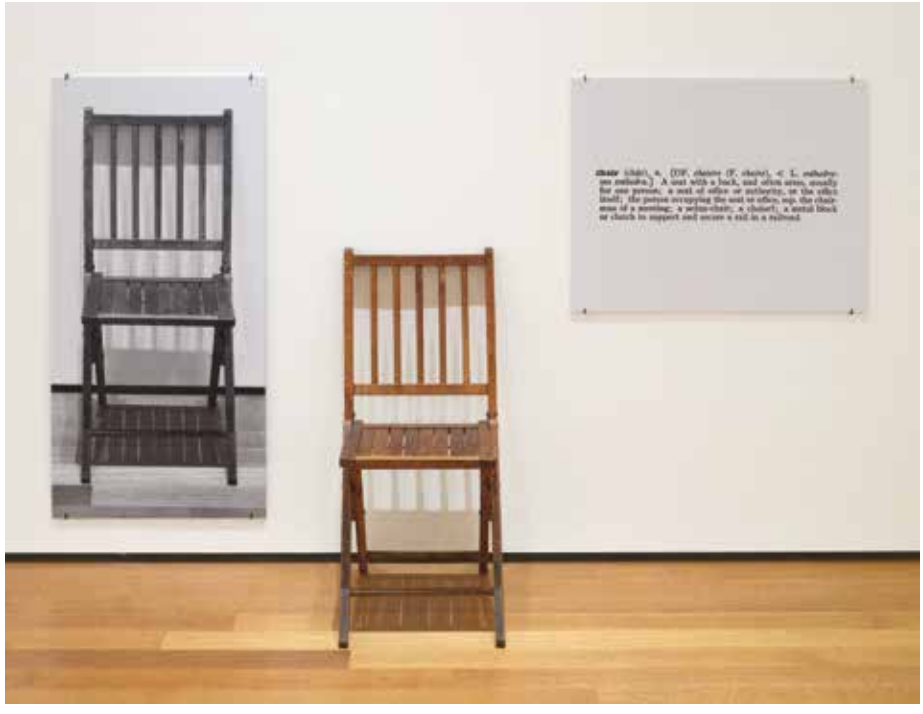
BBC: Well, despite all of that, ok. Now, let's say you are not here, and we have a certificate. After all, even if we value the idea, only you can envision how the idea is translated, how the artwork takes physical shape.

JK: Yes and no, because I have it all set down: certain ways for the work to be made, fortunately. And I have younger people who've worked for me for years, who absolutely know how to make them the right way. So it's not really a problem on that level.

BBC: No, I don't mean it as a problem. I mean—the certificate, it is the value. At the same time, let's take a work by Lawrence Weiner. Lawrence gives a certificate to you, and then you make the work as you like. You want to write in yellow, you want to write in blue, small or big, really you can do what you like.

JK: Right.

BBC: Your work has a very specific look that is yours and is not left to the taste of the collector.



'One and Three Chairs', 1965
Photograph of chair, wooden chair, and photographic enlargement of the dictionary definition of the word "chair"
Dimensions variable
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Larry Aldrich Foundation Fund

JK: But it's a consistency. I think what you are looking at is the visual trace of the consistency of my thinking.

BBC: I think you put the words into something I tried to explain but was not able to. This challenges a common saying about Conceptual Art, that it's visually not strong.

JK: Banal. Well, that is true of Conceptual Art. I agree with them! But I always remember having a conversation with Donald Judd, and he was saying how he had these problems as a painter and how he resolved them by making boxes. And for him it was very much a very personal evolution, that it would come to making boxes. And then Kynaston did *Primary Structures* at the Jewish Museum. And Don walked in, and he was flabbergasted: there were eight, nine artists making boxes, you know, all coming out of nowhere. And it was, of course, ones that—*he* was known, but they weren't, right? But Kynaston, wanting to do a big group show and make it look like a movement, went out and found other artists doing boxes, too, even if they were derivative of Judd, and, you know. Then we watched what happened over the years: these artists disappeared, they were not really part of the conversation, and you ended up back with Judd, Morris, Flavin, Andre, LeWitt. I mean, the original ones that taught us about this kind of art were the ones we ended up with.

BBC: So, sorry for this question but, if you're no longer around, will there be no work left, because you're not here, or will there be certificates that somebody knows how to translate into works?

JK: Yeah, I mean, it's really simple: I have certificates in a bank vault. And, you know, I occasionally bring one out, frankly, when I need money, because those old works sell.

BBC: But it's not going to be like when a painter dies and there might be a storage with what he either couldn't sell during his lifetime or didn't want to sell. We will just find certificates in a vault. And somebody will have to fabricate the work.

JK: Yeah, but that won't be a problem because they have been doing it all these years, so they know how to do it. They don't need me. They need me for new work, which is what occupies my time, but they don't need me for old work.

BBC: It's interesting: I believe many artists who are not painters or sculptors have been considering their legacies and asking themselves, "What am I really leaving?"

JK: No, no, it's an existential question, a profound one. And, you are—the idea of—there is a desire of a resistance to dying that every artist, I think, has, which is that the work—that they will continue to live through their works in the world, even if they don't continue themselves, physically. And there's something very nice about that idea, but that's why I said in an earlier interview—I don't remember with who—but I said I'd rather be right than rich, because I'd rather get it right in terms of art and art history and what my contribution is. And that's why it does matter that I did works before other people, to me. You know? Otherwise, if you're influenced and you—I mean, art comes out of art, and my ideas came out of artists who preceded me, too. But it's not quite the same as somebody your own age, working in the same town, doing it two years, five years later. That's what happened to me.

BBC: To me, it's not so important who used the neon first.

JK: Well, yeah, but, you know, Bruce said in a catalogue in an earlier show at MoMA, I think—he said that I did it before him. Which, I thought, how honorable of him—I never met Bruce Nauman, this is the funny part.

BBC: Oh, that's so funny.

JK: It is funny. But I respect him tremendously because he's an artist who plays. And artists too often end up making a brand, you know—it becomes their work—this misunderstanding of the idea of "style" becomes like the shape of the Coca-Cola bottle. And so, you feel that, you know, Andre's going to throw it on the floor; Judd's got to make a box; Flavin's got to use a fluorescent light; and Lawrence has to do his one-liner. You know, in the end that's really about wanting market identification. This is truly late Modernism, how Modernism ended.

BBC: If we say, "Who used the neon first?" then we can say, "You know, in 1964 there was Rosenquist."

JK: It was actually a Czech artist in something like 1922.

BBC: That is what I'm saying. Also, Fontana used neon in the '50s. But this leads to a dry conversation. If we say something like, "Jasper Johns painted the *Flag* in 1954," we are talking about the idea of making a painting that is an object: there is a full idea there. If we say, "Who used encaustic first?" that's not the same thing.

JK: Exactly. There's a big difference. And those artists: that Czech artist, Chryssa, Antonakos, they all were formalist artists, they all were shaping forms. The only one who did work in that line and made it better than anybody is Keith Sonnier. You know? Because his works are also abstract in that way, but they're interesting in a way that those other works that preceded him are not, from an artistic point of view.

BBC: Well, that is why I believe it's a conversation that has to happen inside a bigger context.
So, we spoke briefly about your use of appropriation of language. There have been endless exhibitions about Appropriation Art, often in connection to Pop Art. In a hypothetical show in which you have Andy Warhol appropriating the work of a commercial photographer, Roy Lichtenstein appropriating Picasso, and so on, would a "Definition" belong in such a show, next to the work of Pop painters who appropriate images, and not quotes from a dictionary?

JK: Well, it's very strange because I had a personal friendship with Claes Oldenburg, with Roy Lichtenstein, with Andy Warhol. I don't even know if you know this story, but when Andy died Leo called me and said, "Andy is dead. Let's have lunch, there is something I have to tell you." Did I ever tell you this?

BBC: I don't know this story.

JK: And so we went to one of Leo's restaurants, and he said, "You should know—and I promised Andy, when he was alive, that I wouldn't tell you—he asked me not to—but now," he said, "you should know that for the last twenty years Andy's been buying your work anonymously from the gallery and donating it anonymously to museums around the world." I was flabbergasted. I was very moved to know this.

BBC: I didn't know this.

JK: And Andy was very interested in my work, you know. Brigid Polk once played a recording because, before Pat Hackett, Andy would call her when he woke up. And in this recording, Brigid was deciding to become an artist. It was quite an amusing, sweet conversation, and Andy said, "Well, what kind of work are you going to do, Brigid?" And she said, "Well, I'm doing cock prints"—remember those?

BBC: I'm not sure.

JK: Well, she would, she did it with Jasper, Bob, and a lot of people. And she was doing this and that. And he said, "Well, what artists are you interested in?" And she said, "Well, I spent last night with Larry Rivers." And

you heard Andy exclaiming, "Oh, Brigid! He's terrible!" I mean, something like this, you know. And she said, "Oh, yeah? Well, who should I be influenced by?" And Andy said, "Well, Donald Judd would be good, and Joseph Kosuth: that's who you want to get to know."

BBC: I'm happy you brought up this memory of Andy Warhol.

JK: So I always—I learned a lot—I mean, there was a lot in Warhol that I learned, and also in Roy. I mean, once, when Roy was working on his show at Leo's, down the street, and he was doing his still lifes, we were having dinner, and I said, "Roy, listen, here's a great idea for your show." This is a little bit too much, but, anyway, I was always a little bit too much. I said, "Why don't you make a still life in the middle of the room, and each painting would be the reflection of that still life and then, of course, there would be no still life in the exhibition. It would be only a theoretical, conceptual still life in the middle of the room." And Roy said, "That is fantastic! Yes, I'm going to do that!" He said, "That's really interesting." And so, after about ten days, Roy calls me and he says, "Joseph, I've been thinking about your idea, what you suggested, but that's *your* work, that's not my work."

BBC: We should escape the conventional way we have of considering Post-war American Art as a succession from Johns and Rauschenberg to Pop Art, and then to Minimal Art, and then to Conceptual Art. I understand the need to give an order to all of this in art books. However, in reality all the artists were working at the same time and in the same place. There is a brief period of time in which everything is happening in New York and all ideas are being discussed.

JK: Yeah.

BBC: It would be nice to delete these categories.

JK: I had a weird realization. Because when I was a student, really, I was looking at the two: I mean, Pop Art was very strong, and Minimal Art was coming, it was beginning to get shown—the art world was, like, really interesting. But, wow, for most people, you know, it wasn't very clear—and then it struck me a couple of years later that, in a certain way, Conceptual Art is a bridge between the contradictions of Pop and Minimal Art.

BBC: This is interesting.

JK: And I never saw any Pop Art element in my work, except if I run into a "Definition" on a wall in a living room you see a little bit of some. Well, as a kid I would have vehemently fought this because I was trying to put into the world another idea, altogether, of art, I didn't want any other reading of another kind of art. You know, in some ways, both Pop and Conceptual Art were born in the 1960s. But, this is work that's now half a century old, so you can re-look at it.

BBC: Well, now we are. Did you ever meet Duchamp?

JK: Oh, but you don't know my story, it's really hilarious. I was in Paris at the Centre américain de Paris, 261 Boulevard Raspail. And I was studying upstairs, and I had a studio, and there was a man named Roger Barr who shared a studio with Soulages. And later on his wife, young wife, married William Rubin. So this is the genealogy. Anyway, so I'd go and there was a big space in the lobby. They did art things there, and I went in one day and there was this event going on with Jean-Jacques Lebel—you know him? He's the son of Robert Lebel, the art historian. And he did what was called the Festival of Free Expression—in French, of course—in Paris, and he did the Happenings, this is the French Happening guy, right? He had organized this: it was a Volkswagen covered with spaghetti with Lawrence Ferlinghetti, the poet, reading a poem, standing in the spaghetti. Like that. And everybody had to stand around this installation while Ferlinghetti was reading. Well, I, who hated anything Expressionistic and had really, serious problems with poetry—with what I called the "myth of profundity"—I mean, I'm nineteen, ok—and so I go there and I'm standing there, and I start making sort of witty comments, shall we say. And the people around me started snickering at my jokes. There's an old guy standing next to me, who was smiling; and then he started doing it, too; and he and I were doing a little duet; and Ferlinghetti started getting more and more upset, because we were really very rude. And so, finally, the thing was over, and the old guy turned and shook my hand, and he said, "That was a pleasure," and I said, "Yes, it certainly was," and he walked off. The guy next to me said, "My god, do you know who that was?" And I said no. He said, "That was Marcel Duchamp."

BBC: Really?

JK: But I never knew! And then years later William Copley did *Letter Edged In Black Press,* where Dorothy Herzka—Dorothy Lichtenstein—worked. She was interested in my work and was trying to help me, you know. And so, Copley had a foundation—and I did a project for one issue. I had my first studio on 60 Grand, where I did '*One and Three Chairs*', and all that. Well, what happened was I was about to be evicted because I hadn't paid my rent in three months, and next thing I knew I got a check for $25,000 in my mailbox from The Cassandra Foundation. The Cassandra Foundation was William Copley's foundation, and on the board was Roland Penrose, various other people, and Marcel Duchamp. Well, it saved my life, really. And I found out later that Duchamp was there when the board voted to give me the money. He died the next week.

BBC: Well—

JK: Yeah. So, as a kid, of course, you know, all of this meant a lot because I felt I was getting some kind of ...

BBC: They are events that stay with you for your life.

JK: Yeah. So when my work was installed in the Duchamp wing at the Philadelphia Museum of Art recently it really meant a lot to me, maybe more than it would necessarily mean for someone else, you know. Years ago I had a work called '*One and Three Stools*', and some collectors wanted to buy it, but it had never been fabricated. And the stool for the guards at the Philadelphia Museum came to my mind, I always loved it.

BBC: And did you get it?

JK: I made contact with Anne d'Harnoncourt, and, as I remember, she gave me one.

BBC: We spoke already about fabrication, but just to clarify it: if I were to own '*One and Three Stools*', I could either save that one stool from Philadelphia in storage or I could dispose of it and find or buy any basic, simple stool when I want to install the work, am I right?

JK: You can. I had a collector who has, like, two or three houses, and he would make two or three copies of my work. He only has one certificate and he only has one work if the time ever comes that he wants to sell it. When Tom Krens was at the Guggenheim—you know, they have a lot of work of mine—he called a meeting, and he said, "This is great! You mean we can have one of them in each of our Guggenheims?" And I said, "Yes!"

BBC: So, even if it is not like '*Any Sheet of Glass*', in a certain way—

JK: Well, it's not Christian reliquary! It only conveys the idea.

BBC: That is what I am saying.

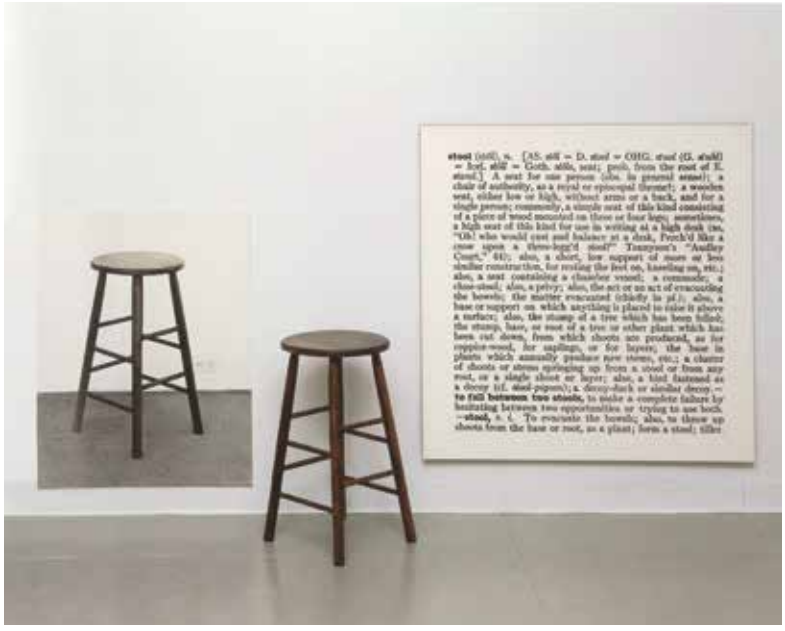
JK: Ok, here's a story you will love. You know Bernard Blistène? He worked in many museums until he ended up at Centre Pompidou, as a curator. The "return to painting" was going on, and I was a dinosaur in terms of what younger artists were interested in. Bernard said, "I think I'd better remind them about Joseph"; he knew the Centre Pompidou owned the French version of '*One and Three Chairs*'. He wanted to install it for display, but the work was missing. They couldn't find it anywhere. They spent three weeks looking for it. Finally, they discovered that the chair had been inventoried as a sculpture in the sculpture department, the photograph was under photography, and the dictionary definition for chair was under graphics.

BBC: Well, you see.

JK: There we have it!

BBC: Even if we intended to analyze the issue or non-issue of fabrication, there are other aspects of your work from the 1960s that I would like to briefly ask you about. I think there are many people who wonder how you select the subjects for your "One and Three" series, as well as the subjects for your "Definitions." There is a certain simplicity in the work that makes the viewer feel he could almost suggest the subject to you. It's happened to me that people have asked if you ever did a "Definition" of "why." What is the logic behind the subjects of the "Definitions" and the "One and Three" series? The "One and Three" series often relates to common, ordinary objects of our lives: table, chair, broom, frame, curtain. The subjects of the "Definitions," on the other side, seem to be abstract concepts, like idea and meaning, and often names of colors. Can you say something about this?

JK: Yes, there is a big difference between the two groups of works even though they both utilize dictionary definitions. The earlier work, from "The Protoinvestigations" looked *out* at the world in a sense, taking common objects, and looking at language and how our language affected and coped with our looking at the world. The "First Investigation" (the "Definitions") was an internal, interior confrontation and looking *in* to our relationship with language itself. I did a work some years later in the late 1970s, I think, called *'Ten Partial Descriptions'*. These were ten paragraphs, type set in black, with a section dropped out where in ten different colors I inserted a quote by ten different people—philosophers, authors of different types. In each case, what they said articulated something about this whole work as a work, each being a partial description of the whole, even if "theoretical," work. The idea for this work came from the "First Investigation," because each word I chose in that series was a description of some aspect of the total "theoretical" work of the whole series of definitions. The series together comprises a definition, one could say, of all those qualities, aspects, whatever, of what constitutes art, however oblique or limited the reference is.



'One and Three Stools', 1965
Photograph of stool, wooden stool, and photographic enlargement of the dictionary definition of the word "stool"
Dimensions variable

BBC: In 1989 Benjamin Buchloh wrote an essay in which he makes an early attempt to historicize Conceptual Art and frames it between 1965 and 1975. He writes about your book, and—

JK: Yes, but he doesn't deal with my work, he actually has never written about my work. Well, he can't really, can he? My work precedes and in many cases is the source for the work of other artists that he promotes.

BBC: Well, reading the essay made me wonder: doesn't the nature itself of Conceptual Art elude the possibility of its being historicized? Of course, you can name the Conceptual artists and define a time in which Conceptual Art appears, but beyond this, in a certain way—

JK: Well, because of the conceptual aspect, as I write in my early writings, that was really an important aspect of the history, and, basically, it's a shift—for reasons within our culture in general—that we went from "how" to "why." This, one could argue, is the difference between Modernism and Postmodernism. And "why" is a philosophical aspect.

BBC: And that is exactly what I'm saying. I understand doing an exhibition in which you show ten artists who are all Conceptual artists, and you try to define a movement, but is it really possible to say, "The very first work of Conceptual Art was done in 1965, and 1975 is when the movement faded away"? My perception is that Conceptual Art is something different than just another "-ism."

JK: Well, I felt, I always felt, that it was a sea change. It was—it really changed our approach to art, and it wasn't just a new kind of painting. One needs to try to see art independent of how the market sees it. To really see art one needs to understand how the artists see the activity.

BBC: It is a completely different way to think about art. We have Conceptual Art—and what comes after 1975? You are saying Conceptual Art really never ended because it changed the way we think about things.

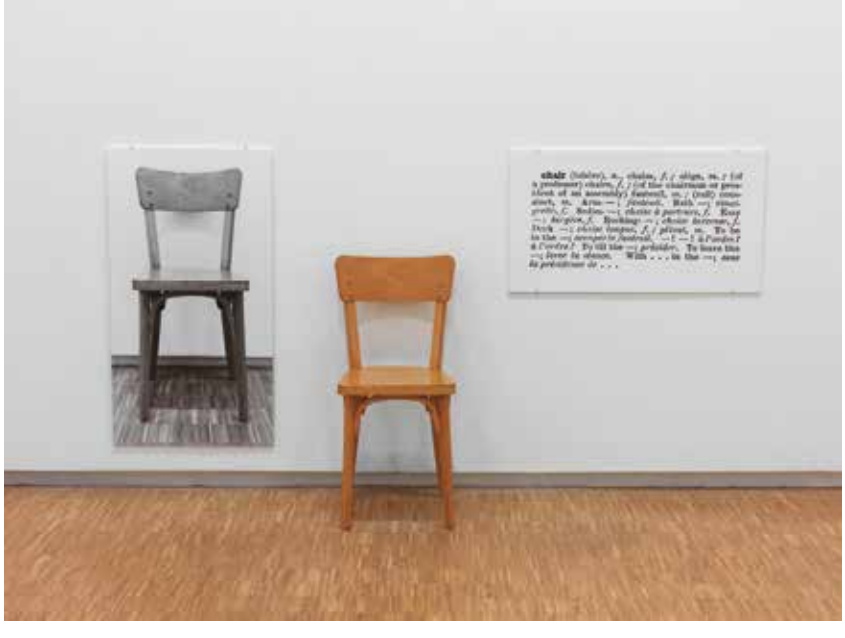
JK: Exactly.

BBC: And some movements after Conceptual Art—take Arte Povera or Post-Minimalism—they still maintain a huge conceptual component.

JK: Yeah, and that became the view of art history after that; it was a new idea. How we consider art now has internalized the tenets of Conceptual Art as part of how we assess art in general.

BBC: And maybe this really opened the doors to everything we see today, a time in which we see many names, many people, but no movements anymore.

JK: Yes, but also something you really have to take into account in order to understand the art of today—and this happened fifteen or twenty years ago—is that a second art history emerged. I mean, we always had art history, who did what, when: the history of ideas within art. But now we also have a new art history, the history according to the art market. People don't have time to cope with the nuance and complexity of art, they want to know quickly who are the heroes, and sometimes it is far easier to simply look at who is the most expensive. But much art, when viewed within *actual* art history, shows itself to be derivative.



'One and Three Chairs (French)', 1965
Photograph of chair, wooden chair, and photographic enlargement of the dictionary definition of the word "chair"
Dimensions variable
Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

'Ten Partial Descriptions', 1979
Text on paper
10 sheets, each $5\frac{3}{8}$ x $14\frac{3}{4}$

Code A (Partial Description): A construction made up of parts, some of which are included here, some of which are not. A part of this construction (being framed by that which it frames) includes a fragment of something else, stolen from another context: *"A picture represents its subject from a position outside it. (Its standpoint is its representational form.) That is why a picture represents its subject correctly or incorrectly."* What we have (here) is a suggestion of elements, qualities, assumptions, limitations—all of which, when together, suggest a partial state of blindness. The part which is visible blocks from sight the whole it presumes. Particular parts, like the fragment above, must cancel some of what they say in order to speak here. Yet, what they become part of alters what is—beyond this frame—in a way which will alter what it is. *June, 1979*

Code B (Partial Description): A construction made up of parts, some of which are included here, some of which are not. A part of this construction (being framed by that which it frames) includes a fragment of something else, stolen from another context: *"And I compared myself to palimpsests; I knew the scholar's joy, who discovers an older and infinitely more precious text beneath more recent lines upon the same paper. What was that hidden secret text? And would it not be necessary to erase the more recent ones in order to read it?"* What we have (here) is a suggestion of elements, qualities, assumptions, limitations—all of which, when together, suggest a partial state of blindness. The part which is visible blocks from sight the whole it presumes. Particular parts, like the fragment above, must cancel some of what they say in order to speak here. Yet, what they become part of alters what is—beyond this frame—in a way which will alter what it is. *June, 1979*

Code C (Partial Description): A construction made up of parts, some of which are included here, some of which are not. A part of this construction (being framed by that which it frames) includes a fragment of something else, stolen from another context: *". . . the allusive virtue of style is not a phenomenon of speed as in speech, where what has not been said remains as a kind of linguistic interim, but rather a phenomenon of density, for what persists in solidity and depth beneath the style, harshly or tenderly assembled in its figures, are the fragments of a reality absolutely alien to language."* What we have (here) is a suggestion of elements, qualities, assumptions, limitations—all of which, when together, suggest a partial state of blindness. The part which is visible blocks from sight the whole it presumes. Particular parts, like the fragment above, must cancel some of what they say in order to speak here. Yet, what they become part of alters what is—beyond this frame—in a way which will alter what it is. *June, 1979*

Code D (Partial Description): A construction made up of parts, some of which are included here, some of which are not. A part of this construction (being framed by that which it frames) includes a fragment of something else, stolen from another context: *"These forms, there is no reason to doubt, are of a limited number and it should be possible to list them in their entirety. Their often extreme discretion, the fact that they are occasionally hidden and surface through what seems chance or inadvertance, should not deceive us; or rather we must recognize in them the very power of illusion, the possibility for language (a single stringed instrument) to stand upright as a work."* What we have (here) is a suggestion of elements, qualities, assumptions, limitations—all of which, when together, suggest a partial state of blindness. The part which is visible blocks from sight the whole it presumes. Particular parts, like the fragment above, must cancel some of what they say in order to speak here. Yet, what they become part of alters what is—beyond this frame—in a way which will alter what it is. *June, 1979*.

Code E (Partial Description): A construction made up of parts, some of which are included here, some of which are not. A part of this construction (being framed by that which it frames) includes a fragment of something else, stolen from another context: *"We should have no illusions as to the incredible force of that prejudice, which still dominates us all, which is the very essence of contemporary historicity, and which attempts to make us confuse the object of knowledge with the real object, by affecting the object of knowledge with the very 'qualities' of the real object of which it is knowledge. The knowledge of history is no more historical than the knowledge of sugar is sweet."* What we have (here) is a suggestion of elements, qualities, assumptions, limitations—all of which, when together, suggest a partial state of blindness. The part which is visible blocks from sight the whole it presumes. Particular parts, like the fragment above, must cancel some of what they say in order to speak here. Yet, what they become part of alters what is—beyond this frame—in a way which will alter what it is. *June, 1979*

Code F (Partial Description): A construction made up of parts, some of which are included here, some of which are not. A part of this construction (being framed by that which it frames) includes a fragment of something else, stolen from another context: *"It's wrong to think that the unconscious exists because of the existence of unconscious desire, of some obtuse, heavy, caliban, indeed animalic unconscious desire that rises up from the depths, that is primitive, and has to lift itself to the higher level of consciousness. Quite on the contrary, desire exists because there is unconsciousness, that is to say, language which escapes the subject in its structure and effects, and because there is always, on the level of language, something which is beyond consciousness, and it is there that the function of desire is to be located."* What we have (here) is a suggestion of elements, qualities, assumptions, limitations—all of which, when together, suggest a partial state of blindness. The part which is visible blocks from sight the whole it presumes. Particular parts, like the fragment above, must cancel some of what they say in order to speak here. Yet, what they become part of alters what is—beyond this frame—in a way which will alter what it is. *June, 1979*

Code G (Partial Description): A construction made up of parts, some of which are included here, some of which are not. A part of this construction (being framed by that which it frames) includes a fragment of something else, stolen from another context: *"a moment in which mythical thought transcends itself and contemplates, beyond images still adhering to concrete experience, a world of concepts freed from this slavery, their relationships now freely defining themselves."* What we have (here) is a suggestion of elements, qualities, assumptions, limitations—all of which, when together, suggest a partial state of blindness. The part which is visible blocks from sight the whole it presumes. Particular parts, like the fragment above, must cancel some of what they say in order to speak here. Yet, what they become part of alters what is—beyond this frame—in a way which will alter what it is. *June, 1979*

Code H (Partial Description): A construction made up of parts, some of which are included here, some of which are not. A part of this construction (being framed by that which it frames) includes a fragment of something else, stolen from another context: *"The process which produces a concrete object on the level of knowledge takes place entirely within the realm of theoretical practice: it has to do, of course, with the concrete object on the level of reality, but this concrete reality 'subsists after as before in its independence, on the outside of the mind' (Marx), without every being able to be assimilated to that other type of 'concrete object' which is knowledge of it."* What we have (here) is a suggestion of elements, qualities, assumptions, limitations—all of which, when together, suggest a partial state of blindness. The part which is visible blocks from sight the whole it presumes. Particular parts, like the fragment above, must cancel some of what they say in order to speak here. Yet, what they become part of alters what is—beyond this frame—in a way which will alter what it is. *June, 1979*

Code I (Partial Description): A construction made up of parts, some of which are included here, some of which are not. A part of this construction (being framed by that which it frames) includes a fragment of something else, stolen from another context: *"Only in the highest art are idea and representation adequate to each other, so that the shape of the idea is true in and for itself because the content of the idea, which that shape expresses, is itself the true content. Related to this is what we have already indicated, namely that the idea is determined in and through itself as a concrete totality, and thus carries within itself the principle and standard of its own individuation and of the determinancy of its appearance."* What we have (here) is a suggestion of elements, qualities, assumptions, limitations—all of which, when together, suggest a partial state of blindness. The part which is visible blocks from sight the whole it presumes. Particular parts, like the fragment above, must cancel some of what they say in order to speak here. Yet, what they become part of alters what is—beyond this frame—in a way which will alter what it is. *June, 1979*

Code J (Partial Description): A construction made up of parts, some of which are included here, some of which are not. A part of this construction (being framed by that which it frames) includes a fragment of something else, stolen from another context: *"The usual notion of writing in the narrow sense does contain the elements of the structure of writing in general: the absence of the 'author' and of the 'subject-matter,' interpretability, the deployment of a space and a time that is not 'its own.' We 'recognize' all this in writing in the narrow sense and 'repress' it; this allows us to ignore that everything else is also inhabited by the structure of writing in general, that 'the thing itself always escapes.'* " What we have (here) is a suggestion of elements, qualities, assumptions, limitations—all of which, when together, suggest a partial state of blindness. The part which is visible blocks from sight the whole it presumes. Particular parts, like the fragment above, must cancel some of what they say in order to speak here. Yet, what they become part of alters what is—beyond this frame—in a way which will alter what it is. *June, 1979*

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