

Lawrence Weiner: “You and I know each other pretty well. And you and I have started off on tons of projects that did not happen...” Liam Gillick: “That’s interesting, I think.” Liam Gillick / Lawrence Weiner: *Between Artists*, 2006 For more than twenty years now, New York-based artists Liam Gillick (°1964) and Lawrence Weiner (°1942), who each represent different aspects of (and/or strands within the complex interplay between) the conceptual, post-conceptual and neo-conceptual traditions in art, have engaged in an intense intellectual and artistic dialogue. In one of a number of conversations between both artists that has been published over the years, and from which the above quote was taken, however, they noted how this dialogue has so far ‘failed’ to produce concretely artistic results – and how that has been ‘interesting’ indeed.

This casual observation on an apparently long history of unrealized projects prompted M HKA to invite both artists to develop a project together in which their dialogue would finally be allowed to acquire material (and not merely discursive) form. Their commitment to exploring the many meanings and possibilities of the dialogical model in art is expressed in the exemplary title of the project, “A Syntax of Dependency:” (Note the apparent orthographic anomaly of the colon at the end, expressing the essentially open-ended, non-conclusive nature of all dialogue.) The resulting ‘collaborative’ artwork, itself a reflection upon the limits as well as the potentialities of artistic collaboration, is a direct response to M HKA’s vast (±1600 square meters), quasi wall-less exhibition space, its scale and immersive quality an emphatic demonstration of the museum’s programmatic dedication to fostering a culture of dialogue – between generations, between artistic cultures and paradigms, between artistic autonomy and cultural heteronomy, and between differing conceptions of art and artishood. More concretely, the project’s ‘syntactic’ spirit blends Gillick’s signature modernist sensibility and feel for an aesthetic of application with Weiner’s command of language as a sculptural, i.e. material form, giving new depth to what could in essence be termed the materialism – as opposed to the mere materiality – of the signifier. A work with unique spatial and experiential features that prioritizes the horizontality of dialogue over the verticality of hierarchy, Gillick and Weiner’s “Syntax of Dependency:” thus resonates with the literalized rhetoric of the level playing field as an essential, defining feature of contemporary cultural production.

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