

Chamberlain, Colby, "Critic's Pick: Lawrence Weiner", ARTFORUM, 1 July 2011.

ARTFORUM

New York

Lawrence Weiner

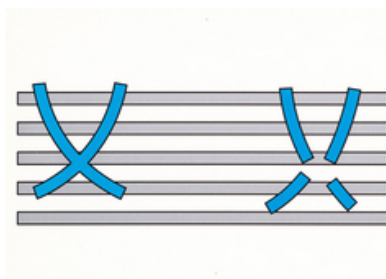
SUSAN INGLETT GALLERY

522 West 24 Street

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Venturing into the periodical stacks, we find in the summer 1974 issue of *Art-Rite* a questionnaire asking artists to make a political statement. Lawrence Weiner responds with a variation on his *Statement of Intent* from 1968: "1) An artist may construct an art, 2) An art may be fabricated, 3) An art need not to be constructed." This minor article, hard to find without recourse to microfilm, bolsters the argument that the core tenets of Weiner's language-based practice were conceived as a Vietnam-era affront to power. That said, it also betrays a hint of self-satisfaction, a presumption that this statement alone guarantees Weiner's leftist credentials. Could Lawrence already be resting on his laurels, in 1974? Thumbing through the more recent press clippings, we find the reception of Weiner's recent (and long overdue) retrospective at the Whitney and at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, to be similarly anchored to this statement, as if his practice had foreclosed the possibility of drift in the forty interceding years.

This presentation of archival material gathered by Jean-Noël Herlin, which consists primarily of exhibition ephemera pinned to the wall in chronological order, is a welcome reminder that Weiner's legacy is still being written. Since an archive's drive toward unchecked accumulation differs from an exhibition's logic of careful selection, it offers a breadth and variety congenial to locating a Lawrence Weiner distinct from the one given to us. For instance, in place of the Weiner whose statement wryly subverts the market (paving the way for, say, the sophisticated financial manipulations of Tino Sehgal), we might find one with a changing relationship to typographic design, leaving behind bureaucratic sans-serifs and open-ended instructions reminiscent of George Brecht's earlier event scores in favor of baroque Franklin-Gothic compositions of word and symbol that wrap his language in a recognizable, trademark style. This in turn registers a change in what Weiner asks of his audience, with the emphasis shifting from considering a proposition to act upon, to reading a complex arrangement of visual signs. Several such provisional Lawrence Weiners emerge from Herlin's archive, proof that we needn't always take the artist at his word.



Lawrence Weiner's exhibition announcement card for his show at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris, 2005.

— Colby Chamberlain