# EVERYTHING


*Preparatory drawings for gyroscopically speaking*, New York city, 2010,
set of 4 drawings, Faber-Castell pencil, gouache & laser-printed collage on archival paper,
108.59 x 88.58 x 3.81 cm, Photo: by Sheldon Collins

Lawrence

# SAME TIME

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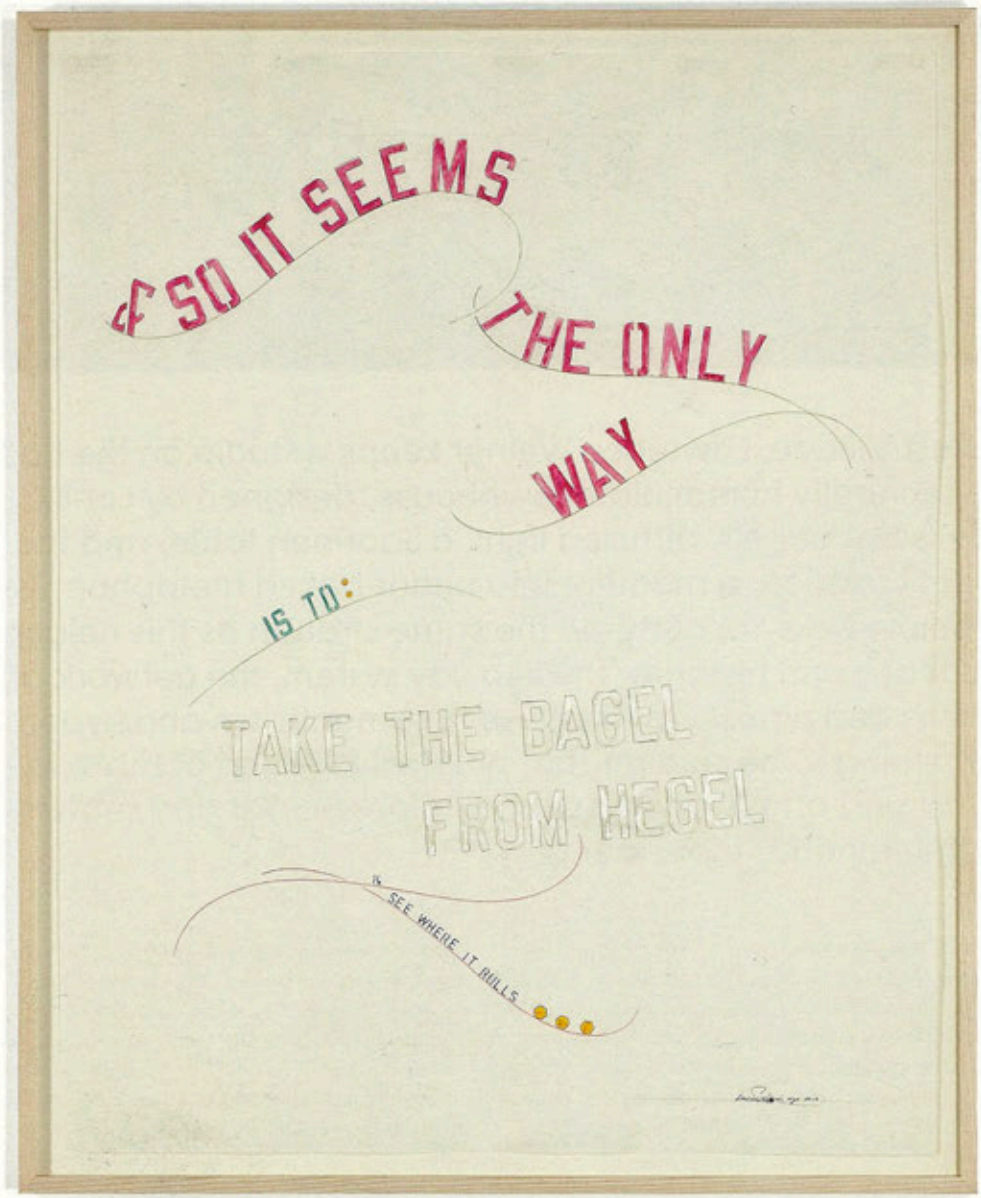
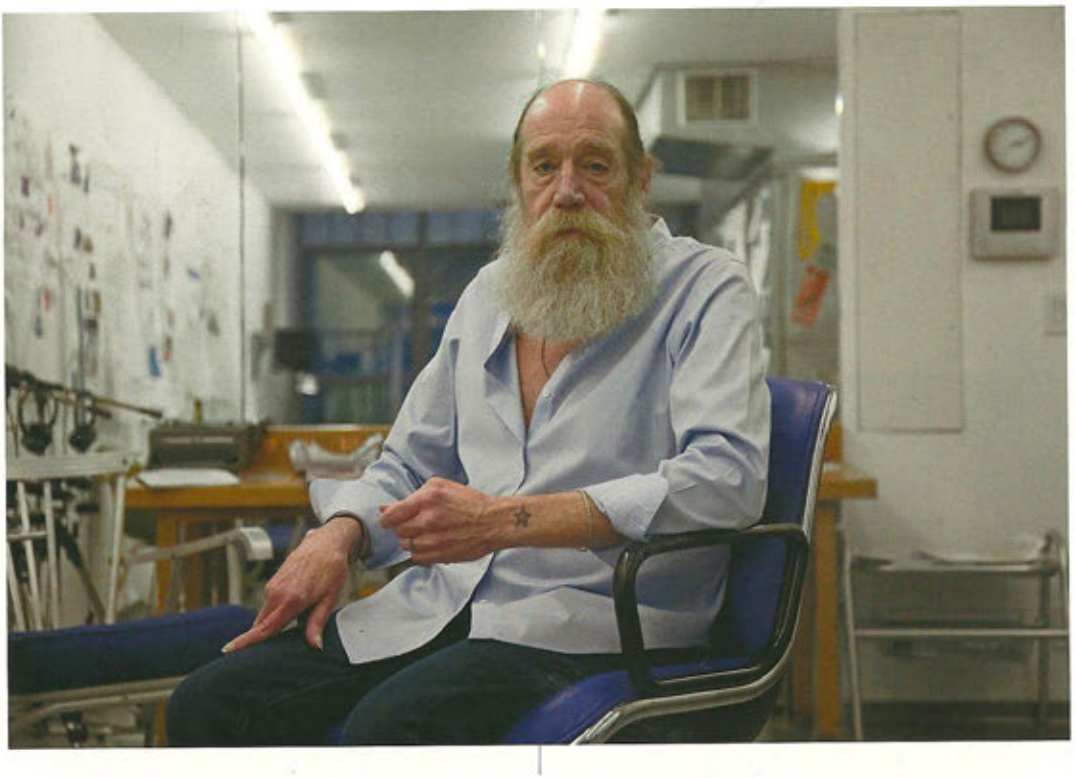
# IS HAPPENING




# AT THE

Weiner

Text by Katya Tylevich
Photography by Alexei Tylevich



**In New York's West Village, Lawrence Weiner keeps a studio on the basement floor of his architecturally immaculate townhouse, designed by Lot-Ek. Seduced by spatial clarity (solar panels, diffused light, a Saarinen table) and the summer rainstorm outside, I fade for a moment into under-baked metaphor: Weiner buried in work below New York City, on the same stratum as this neighborhood's archaeological debris and histories, the subway system, the network of rodents, the maze of screws and pipes. I'm this close to romanticism and hyperbole. Still, there is something to be said for that physical levelling of materials, of persons and objects, of art and art history, mess and tidiness, artist and subway, on the same layer, in simultaneous movement.**

*— You were born in the Bronx?*
The south Bronx – like Vito [Acconci], and Robert Barry. Lucky for me, the south Bronx was connected with the school and library systems of Manhattan, which meant you had an entirely different attitude toward your existence. You never went into 'the Bronx'; you took the subway and came out in Manhattan. As a young person, I first discovered Harlem and, from there, I went further downtown.

*— I understand you were quite politically active when you were young.*
Everybody was, at that time. I think in 2011 it's time we stopped talking about who did what, when, and only talked about the people who *didn't* do anything. The question is: why? Why – during those crises of civil rights and the Korean War – did you not take a public stand, one way or the other? That was a time when you had to be engaged and, yes, I was quite 'active', as they say. I honestly don't remember much of my 'teenage-hood'. Seriously, I find myself in the position now when I'm in an Embassy talking to somebody at the other end and it turns out that *this* is the person who first put me in prison, *this* is the person who first arrested me. And this person is talking to me about rapprochement!

There's really no need for rapprochement. We've become confused about what we need to do. There is always going to be the German problem, where you visit grandmother and have cookies and tea with her – but grandmother was a real mother-fucking bastard and she did the wrong things. Everybody's got a relative who did the wrong things. You just have to hope that the people involved in trying to build the culture didn't do the wrong things.

*— How do you move past the fact that grandmother was a bastard?*
You ask about it. There's nothing more you can do but ask.

*— And what role do you play as the artist in that conversation?*
I try to change the logic structures. My major concern has


EILE MIT WEILE
GRACEFUL HASTE

body has to make a living, I get it. But when that becomes the playing field, the conversation turns into who's better than who; who has more value. The conversation should be about who has more *use*.

*— When do you think that conversation changed?*
I don't know. I remember there was a conversation when I was growing up in the fifties between the abstract expressionists. It was all about saving one's soul. And the 'pop people', their conversations were more about art than they were about finance. I think it's later in the academy that the conversation became confused.

*— What is your relationship with the academy?*
I never taught for many reasons, the major one being that in order to be a good teacher, you have to exude authority. I don't believe in this nicey, nicey shit: taking people who are willing to give you four, five years of their lives to learn something and sitting them around to chatter. That's stealing their time. They came to you to teach them things they didn't know before. You're supposed to know them. You may be wrong about them, but you're supposed to know them. And the one thing an artist is not supposed to have is authority.

*— If not authority, what is the artist supposed to have?*
An artist has to have a certain degree of fame, or else he can't continue to work. You have to pay the bills. And if you're a New Yorker, you are on your own to pay those bills. You don't have a country that does it for you, you don't have a Goethe Institut, you don't have a British consul. You're on your own. Therefore, you have to make a living.

That said, nobody has to know anything about me in order to use the work. When it comes to some of the most successful works I've done in public, most people have no idea who did them. Sometimes in a working class bar somebody who works for Con Ed [Consolidated Edison, U.S. Energy Company] says 'Hey, you're the guy who did the manhole covers, ain't you?' And that's the best compliment I can get: this person was interested enough to find out 'who the hell did that?'

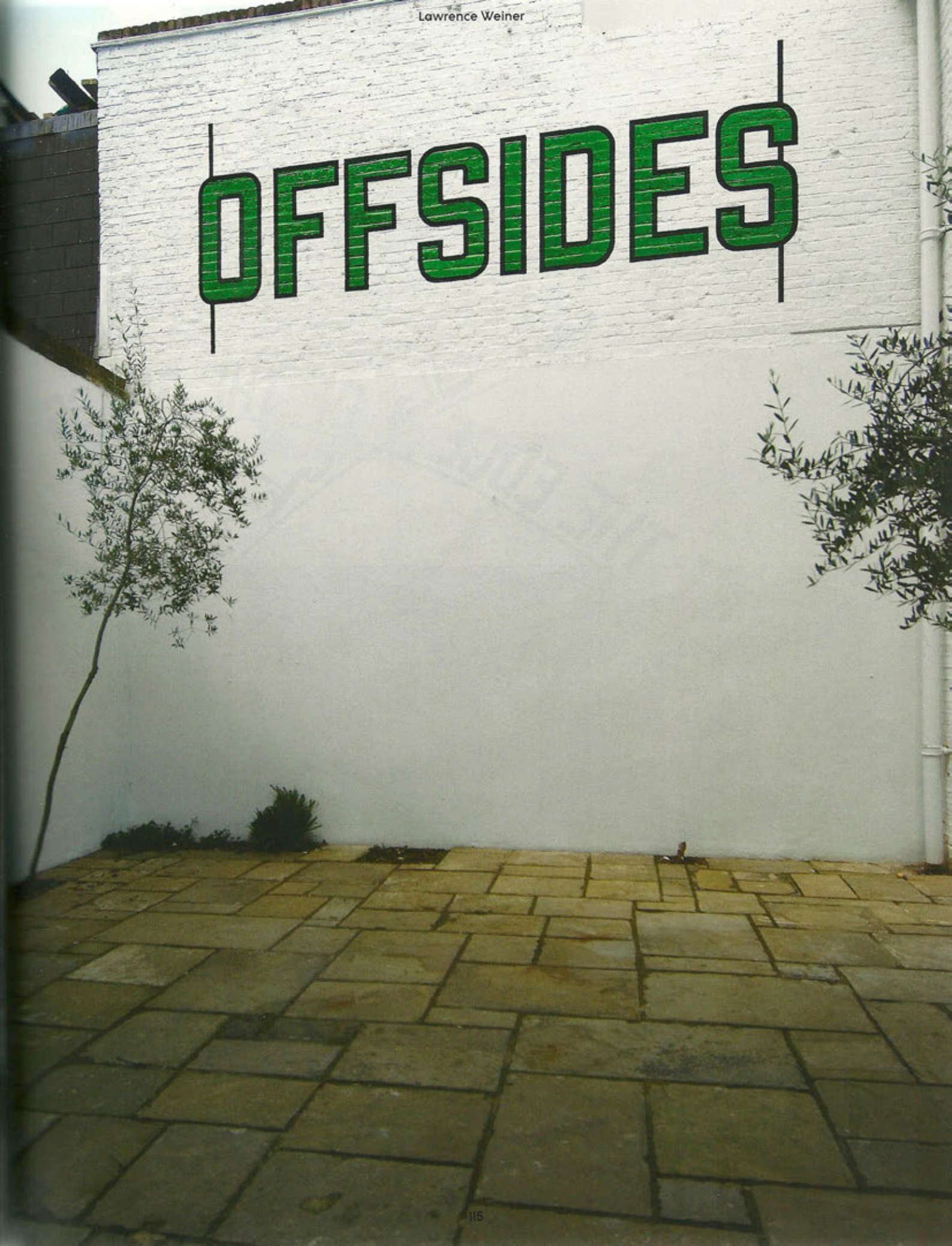
*— You also have a studio in Amsterdam. Are you in a different frame of mind when you work there?*
I go to Amsterdam to draw. I'm a very reclusive person, normally. You can't be reclusive in New York. There's just no way. You end up hurting everybody's feelings. Amsterdam suits me. There's something about Dutch culture that suites me. Although now Dutch culture is very much going 'Tea Party' like it is here, and the racism has become absolutely horrendous. But places go through those phases. I'm not really part of their world. I'm part of their history, but not their world.

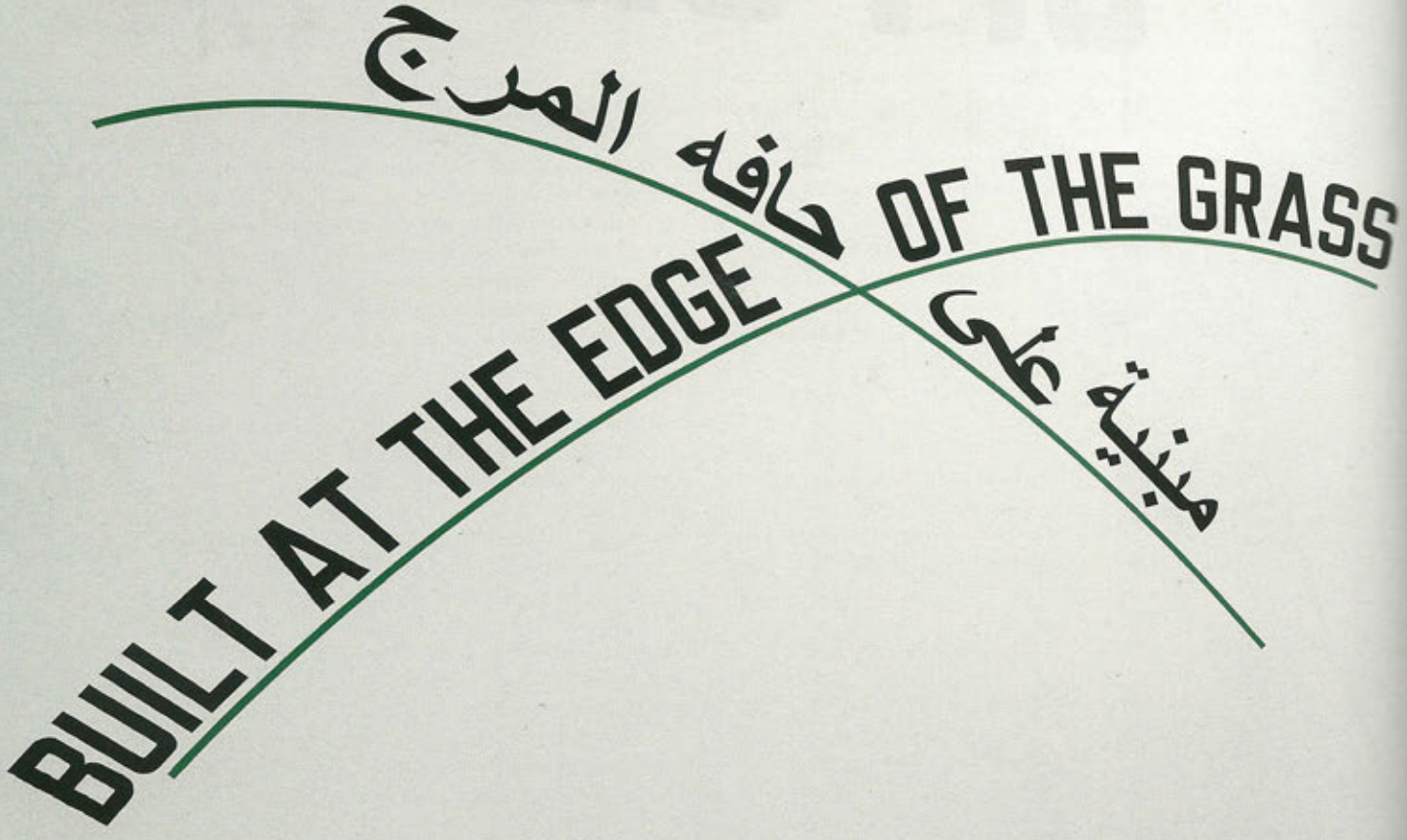
*— Do you feel like you're part of the world in New York City?*
I've been an artist here for a long time. There are people here that I've known for years and years; we've engaged in the same thing and we've survived together. I'm not a chauvinistic New Yorker, but I do think that if I hadn't grown up in New York City, I wouldn't have had the possibility of doing what I ended up doing.

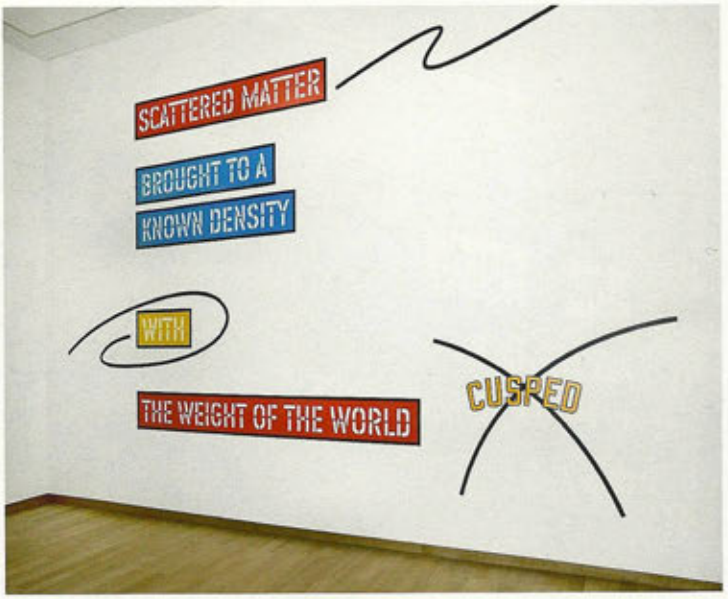
But New York City has become a fantasy for a lot of people. I don't know why, because it is a real city, a real place where people work. Brooklyn used to just be part of New York, now it's 'something', and now that it's something, nothing's coming out of it. Same with TriBeCa: it's no longer a creative hub. It just disappeared.

*— Why do you suppose that is?*
Oh, it's because of domesticity. Once people have to defend a kind of a domestic patterning, they're lost. I mean, everybody knows you're not supposed to eat babies, you really don't have to build a whole structure around it. Why make it a cause?

*— What was your idea of an artist when you were just becoming one?*
I always wanted to be an explorer. When I was young, I hitchhiked a lot, going south because I was interested in music and had an affinity for Southern girls – it was their diction: [Southern accent] 'Would you like another cup of coffee?' My heart would just melt. I was not unpretty then either, so


OFFSIDES


BUILT AT THE EDGE OF THE GRASS
مبنية على حافة العشب




*Scattered matter brought to an ascertainable density with the weight of the world cusped,*
"Taking Place", The Temporary Stedelijk, Amsterdam, 2010
Photo: Gert Jan van Rooij, Photo courtesy of Moved Pictures, NYC


*Matter so shaken to its core to lead to a change in inherent form to the extent of bring about a change in the destiny of the material, Primary, Secondary, Tertiary*, Façade of the Italian Pavilion, Venice Biennale, Italy, 2007
Photo courtesy of Lisson Gallery, London


*Bits & pieces put together to present a semblance of a whole*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, 1994, Photo courtesy of Moved Pictures, NYC


*Paper + stone or fire + water (when in doubt) play tic tac toe & hope for the best*, City of Ballerup, Denmark, 1996, Photo courtesy of Moved Pictures, NYC

# Art is made by people who are not content with the configuration of the world as it is presented to them. Art is an attempt to change that configuration

it all worked out fine. Anyway, those experiences led me to understand that I was looking for something.

I come from a lower-working-class background. There was always food on the table, but I started working at an early age. So, at that time, I was working at the docks from eight o'clock at night until four in the morning. I would get off work and find these bars, where all of these great people liked to commune – people whose works I had discovered in museums, whose works I was enamoured with. And back then you could just talk to these people. Even as a child, aged 15, I was able to go to bars and listen to Ornette Coleman and Monk for the price of a bottle of beer, and talk to people. That's the way it used to be. Once New York became full of restaurants for the Europeans, that was the end of all of that. You can't walk up to somebody's table and strike up a conversation anymore – not if you're brought up well. You never meet anybody that way anymore.

That's why I feel lucky to be in a lot of group shows with young artists now. I like being in big shows where there are at least two people I have never heard of. The whole point is public dialogue. A group show is a lot of marks on the wall that show where each artist is standing, in relation to the world. That's called a mindset, and when different mindsets are competing with each other, that's called a nice conversation. It's a hell of a lot better than pompously sitting on a panel.

*— Do you think your art changes when the culture around it changes? Is your art specific to its environment?*
What's interesting is that my work is never site-specific. Artwork has to find its place, in very much the same way you and I do. You're not in the same place you were growing up. You found a place where you could function as you, though you may not stay there forever. Art functions in exactly the same way. We change because the world turns.

*— Where was your first studio?*
I lived on Bleecker and Bowery for about 25 years. That was after living in San Francisco for a little bit during the Beat thing. The Lower East Side was okay. It was a little better than where I come from in the south Bronx: it still had a lot of cockroaches, but for some strange reason, it did have heat.

*— Do you think the atmosphere or geography that you work in influences the art?*
I don't know if it influences the art, but it influences your sense of generosity. When you live in a clement environment, you find yourself making more concessions for other people, which is not a bad thing sometimes. Living where I was living by the Bowery –long before CBGB – I'd look at other people and think 'You have such privilege. Why don't you have some *noblesse oblige*?' When you find yourself within the same privilege, you begin to forget about *noblesse oblige*; you begin to forget that you are a lucky person, but you also become more open to everybody. People don't threaten you that much.

Where I grew up, the only thing that meant success was crossing the bridge [into Manhattan]. I used to go into Harlem because it was safer than my neighbourhood. There were lots of tough people in Harlem, lots of, you know, gangsters, lots of prostitutes, but nobody was going to bother some kid. So at the age of 15, I finally crossed the bridge for good. At that time, I knew I had to make a personal choice: do I try to *change* the culture through a conventional civil rights path, or do I really and truly attempt to build another culture? I felt a lot of guilt about my decision, afterwards. It really choked me until I was, like, 24, 25. There was even a period where I stopped making art altogether – after I had done the explosions in California [in the early sixties]. Still, there was something clicking in my head, telling me there was a way for my art to mean something. At least to other artists it seemed to mean something. I went along and kept showing. My art was marginal, and it was marginal until the margins grew wider, and then they weren't the margins anymore. The work exists.

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*www.mariangoodman.com*
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