



# Broken Off

## LAWRENCE WEINER (DEAD)

By Liam Gillick



©2021 Moved Pictures Archive, New York / ARS, New York. Photo: Alex Yudin

View of “APROPOS LAWRENCE WEINER”, Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, 2022

As the guardians of art battened down, gleefully awaiting a reductive finale, Lawrence Weiner determined a way of stating relationships that brought new horizons into view. Moving beyond end games without disputing their existence, he laid out an articulated set of connections that unlocked infinite potential. Lawrence Weiner reconfigured the classical relationship between the user and the creator of art. Or let's say, he achieved it most elegantly and rapidly at a time of turns to nominalism, formalism, and neo-subjectivity. The work of Lawrence Weiner is not a claim, demand, or a response, but a setting out of material facts that may or may not find use-value within the society. It is not the answer to a question, or stating a metaphor, or fable.

“APROPOS LAWRENCE WEINER” is a blunt and personal exhibition at Marian Goodman Gallery in New York. Alice Zimmerman, his “significant other and Lover”, worked on it and wrote the press release: “It is a feeble attempt to show some sources and remnants of a life well lived, ideas brought to fruition that were presented as something called Sculpture. Or call it Conceptual Art, or describe it as Dialectical Materialism, or by sceptics, as Poetry or Bullshit.” The exhibition is striking in its directness. A lack of excess and artifice makes it a stark memorial that is deeply affecting without sentimentality. It pares things down to a few key works and situations. It is akin to a tour of essential worldly goods, packed up for

the final voyage. A mirrored column, Lawrence’s work desk, some posters and editions, a life preserver in a wall-mounted Plexiglas case. put it aside or put away. reaching for the stars. for use in the event of flooding (*PUT ASIDE OR PUT AWAY*, 2007). And importantly, one of his many films. A good idea to focus on just one taking the form of a soap opera and turning it to good use. (*THERE BUT FOR*, 1980). Due to the pandemic, what had once been an open window at the front desk was now covered with Plexiglas in the face of danger, becoming something akin to a kiosk or ticket booth. In lieu of the usual gallery information, Weiner’s “Declaration of Intent” has been applied to the Plexiglas in matt black vinyl text. Equally clear is his *ONE*

*SHEET OF PLYWOOD SECURED TO THE FLOOR OR WALL* (1968), which is not presented in language but as one sheet of plywood secured to the wall by Philips-head screws. A reminder that, as laid out in his “Declaration of Intent”, that the piece may be fabricated.

- 1. The artist may construct the piece.
- 2. The piece may be fabricated.
- 3. The piece need not be built.

one on top of the other, in yellow bounded by blue rectangles. And applicable to any chosen thing. *ENOUGH* (2021) is that word in English and Japanese on the gallery door, frank and moving. *PLACED UPON THE WATER UNDERNEATH THE STARS TAKEN FROM THE WATER & CARRIED TO THE STARS (1 THING) (2 THINGS) (3 THINGS) (MORE)* (1994) occupies the main wall of the room and its relational

flat and distinctly American. The differences were enough to trick me back into a new dream each time. In the final version the terrain was something like a parking lot in a desert. This parking lot was staked out with a defined and gridded boundary.

It was evident that this grid masked something below the surface that did not correspond to the markers. Some remnant of human action that



View of “APROPOS LAWRENCE WEINER”, Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, 2022

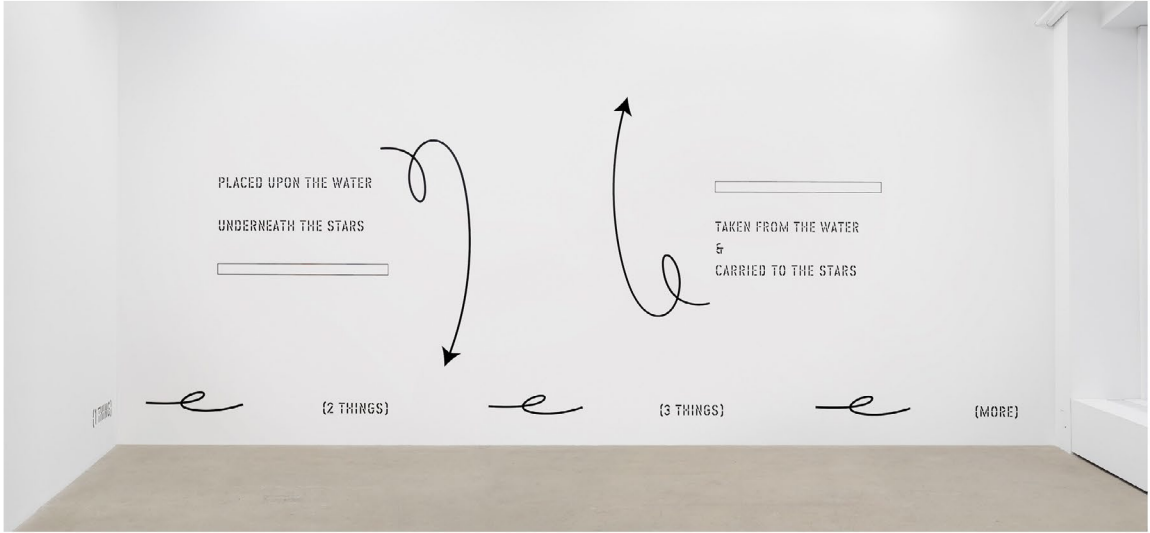
Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist, the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership.

Three key works in the main room each talk to the condition of continuation with and without Lawrence Weiner. One generally useful, one frank, and the final one elevated. *FROM TOP TO BOTTOM* (2021) is those words,

exchange allows us to think downwards and upwards simultaneously. Water and stars often sought each other out in Lawrence Weiner’s later work. Navigation, speculation, and mediation.

I had various versions of a recurring dream shortly after Lawrence Weiner’s death. There was always a terrain. Each time the nature of the terrain was slightly different, but it was generally

did not match the surface structure and could not easily be determined or pictured. It would be nice to define, measure, and resolve it. This was the mental energy of the dream. This was not a bad dream. After many dream hours of contemplation and calculation something slowly emerged into my mind. I could finally visualise a subterranean layer, its depth, and its



*PLACED UPON THE WATER UNDERNEATH THE STARS TAKEN FROM THE WATER & CARRIED TO THE STARS (1 THING) (2 THINGS) (3 THINGS) (MORE)*, 1994. Installation view, Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, 2022

dimensions. This involved immense calculation, speculation, measuring, and scanning – all in my head. This dream has a lot to do with what Lawrence Weiner brought to the world. Not the designation or categorisation or nomination of objects. Not obligations or instructions or boundaries. But offering the potential to imagine and see a structure of materials to use. A relational toolkit unrestricted by indexes or hierarchies.

Lawrence Weiner was interested in other art and artists and made good art for them and in relation to them. He was interested in a material reality where the placement or displacement of an object is not a metaphor. And within this understanding – which applies to all his work – there is something very important also going on about exchange value. Lawrence’s understanding of the gift as a form of radical exchange and a way of creating encounters was extremely particular to his work and not limited to the literal giving of artworks. The gift aspect of his art did not involve some kind of hidden obligation or expectation of return – instead, it set up numerous

artworks in the form of structures “for use” – the use aspect being the form of a gift that created an endless cycle of reciprocity between object and object and people and people. An endless circular giving and receiving.

Lawrence Weiner gave gifts in this radical sense. Although he also gave gifts in distinct and different ways. First, he gave in the form discrete objects (hats, posters, books) that he had made to carry a structure or an artwork in the form of text and mark. Second, he gave artworks in the form of “public freehold”, such as *Broken Off* (1971) or *Shells and Quicklime and Water* (1994). But most importantly, he gave sculptures you could carry in your head. He instigated processes whereby a cycle of unspoken reciprocity could be lifted free of initial concept, agency, category, or structure. This created a cyclical productive development in what constitutes the relationship between an artist, an artwork, and the users of the work. His graphic clarity, so often the focus of his high regard, was merely a way to firmly implant the ultimate gift as a form of a “social bond”. Lawrence’s work offered the opportunity for you to make

something of it. For you to make it totem, spiritual (if you insist), or just some stuff. He gave a gift outside of any obligations to accept a given structure with which to discipline it. The material facts proposed by Lawrence Weiner ensure the possibility of *A PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS ASAP* (2004) in the form of an endless sequence of gifts, reciprocating and non reciprocating with elegant inconsistency, as they will.

Lawrence wanted to argue and play and drink and had many friends to whom he offered gifts and who accepted them with dignity. All in order to accelerate the process of having a real conversation while looking out at the world as it exists. This involved being honest and asking direct questions, but it also involved being funny and aphoristic. I thought Lawrence would live forever. I really did. After all, someone has to at some point, don’t they? It was not to be.

As Alice Zimmerman writes in the press release: If he had constructed his own obituary, it would have looked like this: LAWRENCE WEINER (DEAD)

*LIAM GILLICK is an artist living in New York.*