

THE  
WORD  
IS  
ART

# The WORD is Art

MICHAEL PETRY

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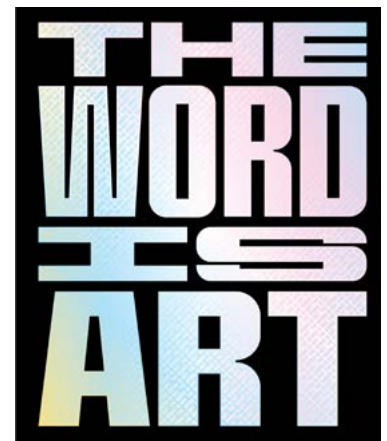
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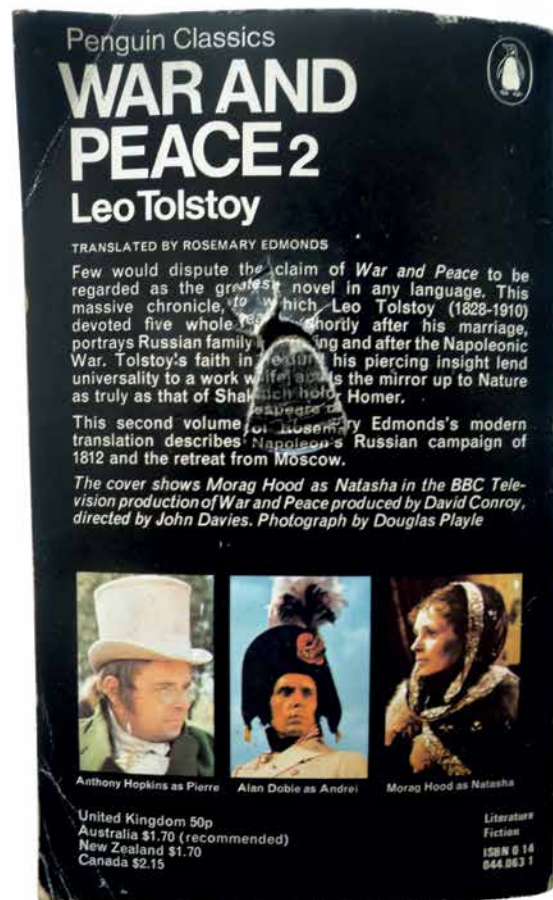
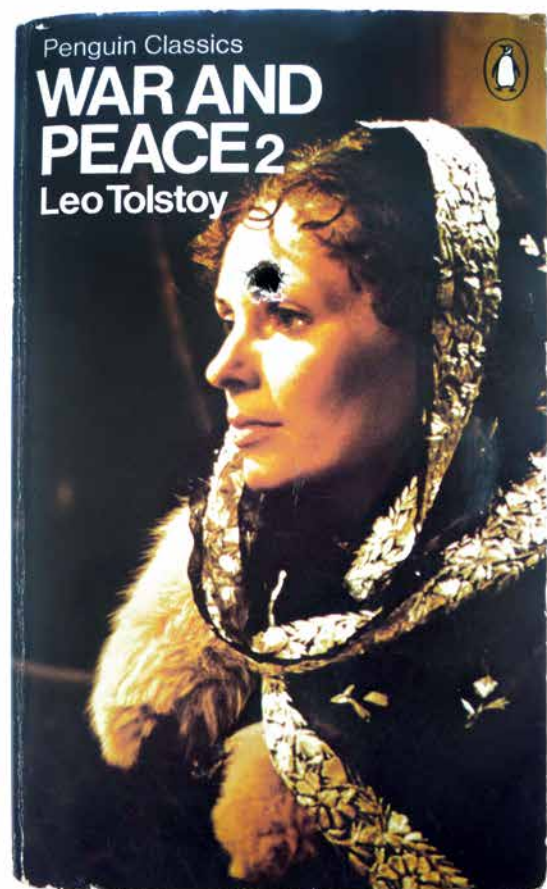
A fascinating global overview of how contemporary artists incorporate text and language into work that speaks to some of the most pressing issues of the 21st century.

There has been much scaremongering about the 'death of the book' and how, as words find new ways and means of transmission, people might gradually begin to shun writing. In the digital age, text becomes information, and information strives to become free. But what value can text hold in the sphere of visual art? How is such text different to poetry? Can the poetic itself be visual art, or is text in this context consigned to the realms of gimmick and catchphrase?

Looking at the work of a broad range of artists including, Ghada Amer, Fiona Banner, Tania Bruguera, Chun Kwang Young, Martin Creed, eL Seed, Jenny Holzer, Roni Horn, Joseph Kosuth, Barbara Kruger, Christian Marclay, Annette Messager, Harland Miller, Raymond Pettibon, Laure Prouvost, Kay Rosen, Rachel Whiteread, Christopher Wool, Cerith Wyn Evans, Zhang Huan and many more, *The WORD is Art* examines each of these questions, contending above all that in the digital and online age, words have become more important than ever. With the advent of texting and social media, many predicted the debasement of language, and some have pointed to evidence of this in our 'post-truth' culture. Michael Petry demonstrates that, on the contrary, words remain critical, powerful and central to art practice.

Digital communication has seen the word as text permeate life in ways that the poets and artists of yesterday could never have imagined. Presenting a brief history of word- and book-based art, and examining major areas where the word has dominated artistic practice – **Installed Words, Three-Dimensional Words, Light, New Media, The Conceptual Word, Social Comment, The Drawn Word, Books** – *The WORD is Art* takes us on a fascinating and richly illustrated global tour of diverse contemporary art forms.

**Michael Petry** is an artist, author and Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), London. The *Trouble with Michael*, a monograph of his practice, was published in 2001, and his 2012 one-man show, 'The Touch of the Oracle' at the Palm Springs Art Museum, was accompanied by a ten-year career retrospective publication. Petry was the first artist-in-residence at Sir John Soane's Museum. He has written a number of books, including *Installation Art*, *The Art of Not Making: the new artist / artisan relationship*, and *Nature Morte: Contemporary Artists Reinvent the Still-Life Tradition*, all published by Thames & Hudson.



The Greek artist Christina Mitrentse has made multiple series of works involving the alteration of pre-existing books. Many are stacked, folded and sanded into new objects. Other works consist of several books merged together; in *Beethoven versus Mozart* (2010), two music scores are folded together. For the 'Wounded Books' series (above), Mitrentse took Penguin and Pelican paperbacks and titles from the Wiener Library in London (devoted to the study of the Holocaust) to the Imperial College Union Rifle and Pistol Club, and shot them with a Winchester 4.8 calibre rifle under licensed conditions. The books were then placed in clear plastic sleeves and exhibited. The front covers have a clean wound, while the backs display greater evidence of violence. Mitrentse's aim is that the viewer becomes a conceptual reader of books that are themselves endangered, as the digital age disrupts old models of information production, distribution and delivery.

Aleksandar Duravcevic's exhibition 'Memory Keeper', at Ordovas, London, in 2017, explored storytelling, the endless passage of time and the ways in which humans often repeat the mistakes of the past. Duravcevic was born in the former Yugoslavia and fled to Italy during the civil war of the early 1990s. Many of his works address war as a global phenomenon. His wordless book *Touch Me Not* (opposite) is carved from marble, and the only story within is that written by the grain of the stone. The obvious weight of the volume comes into focus, together with the weight of history, as it attests to more than one period of human conflict and our apparent inability as *Homo sapiens* to learn.

ABOVE · Christina Mitrentse  
*War and Peace (Wounded Book)*, 2013  
Found book and bullet casing  
18 × 11 × 4 cm (7<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 4<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 1<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.)

OPPOSITE · Aleksandar Duravcevic  
*Touch Me Not*, 2017  
Travertine with steel base  
82.5 × 89.5 × 70 cm  
(32<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> × 35<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 27<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in.)



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Michael Petry

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# WRITTEN WORD

# IN

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