

do it (australia)

Learning resources
Activity 2

Kaldor Public Art Projects

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Activity 2

Rules of the game: Language and text in art

Artists often use language and text to communicate ideas. But is the idea of an artwork more important than the end result? What happens in the process of translating or realising these ideas?

Watch

Watch the video documentation of *Thirteen Colorful Inside Jobs*, 2013, from Kaldor Public Art Project 27: *13 Rooms*. (Silent, duration 1:13 minutes)

In this work by John Baldessari, a team of painters change the wall colour in one room for the duration of the exhibition, carefully following the instructions of the artist.

React

After watching the video, try to imagine that this artwork is like a recipe.

Brainstorm a list of ingredients required to make the artwork (including people).



John Baldessari,
*Thirteen Colorful
Inside Jobs*, 1970.
Performed for
Kaldor Public Art
Project 27: *13
Rooms* at Pier 2/3,
Sydney, 2013.

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Do it

1. Find examples of written instructions or rules from everyday life – such as recipes, IKEA assembly guides, sports rules, product labels, road signs, government regulations, or school rules.
2. Look closely at the language that is used to communicate these rules.
3. Take a sheet of paper. Write a list of 10 examples of verbs that you find in your everyday rules. (These can be positive or negative, eg. “Throw” or “Do not park”). Cut out each individual verb, and place these pieces of paper in a container.
4. Write down 10 nouns that you find in the rules. (These can be things or people, eg. “cucumber” or “teachers”). Cut out each noun, and place in another container.
5. Write 10 measurements that you find in the rules. (These can be measurements of time, distance or quantities. They can be precise or descriptive, eg. “5cm” or “until golden brown”). Cut out each measurement, and place in a third container.
6. Pick one piece of paper from each container in order – verb, noun, measurement. What do you find?
7. Shuffle the papers in each container, and pick another verb, noun and measurement. What new combinations can you make?
8. Can you act out these new instructions that you have created? Can you add illustrations or diagrams, showing the process or the finished product?

Reflect

- What do you notice about the language used to convey instructions and rules? Who are the “authors” of these rules? How do they convey authority or expertise?
- What happens when you shift that language into a different context? How might these shifts affect the audience’s perception of authority and expertise?

Do it (optional)

1. After completing the activity above, select one of your new instructions.
2. Use graphic design, collage or photomontage to create a mock-up for your instruction – such as an instruction booklet, recipe card, “how-to” guide or poster.
3. Choose fonts, colours, diagrams or illustrations, and a format that makes your new instruction as persuasive as possible.
4. What is the impact of adding visual elements to your instruction? What effect might this have on an audience?

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Further research and discussion

- Choose two of the instructions from *do it (australia)*. How would you describe the mood or tone of these instructions?

Research the artists or creative practitioners who wrote these instructions. Find at least two examples of their past works.

Discuss each artist's instruction in relation to their creative practice and past works. What do the instructions convey about the artist's values, personal identity, philosophical or political viewpoint, preferred mediums or method of working?

Compare and contrast each artist's use of language and text to convey their ideas. What are some of the visual and linguistic tools that they use in their instruction? How have they allowed for different audience interpretations?

- Research a number of artists who use text and language in their work – such as Tristan Tzara, Yoko Ono, John Baldessari, Bruce Nauman, Jenny Holzer or Vernon Ah Kee.

Choose 2-3 of these artists, and compare and contrast their use of text and language. What are some of the visual and linguistic tools that they use?

Focus on one work from each artist. How do these works comment on or subvert the codes and conventions of language?

With reference to the social and historical context of the works, discuss how and why these artists have used language to challenge governing systems and rules.

- Research the wall drawings of Sol LeWitt. What was the role of the artist in creating these works? Who else was involved, and what were their roles? What do you notice about the titles of these works?

Often the same instructions would be used for installations in multiple locations. Would you consider these the same or different artworks? How do these works challenge conventional understandings of "drawing" as a medium?

Sol LeWitt once stated, "The draftsman perceives the artist's plan, then reorders it to his own experience and understanding." What are some of the changes that occur in the translation from instruction to finished work to reception by the audience? Discuss the role of written text and systems in LeWitt's work.

LeWitt's instructions are often perceived as objective and factual. Discuss the importance of subjectivity and interpretation in the artist's wall drawings.

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References

do it (around the world)

Kaldor Public Art Project 36: *do it (australia)*

<http://doit.kaldorartprojects.org.au/>

do it (around the world), Google Arts & Culture

<https://artsandculture.google.com/project/do-it>

do it (around the world), Serpentine Galleries, London

<https://www.serpentinegalleries.org/exhibitions-events/do-it-around-world>

do it (home), Independent Curators International

<https://curatorsintl.org/special-projects/do-it>

Kaldor Public Art Projects

Kaldor Public Art Projects learning resources

<http://kaldorartprojects.org.au/education/learning-resources/project-resources/index>

John Baldessari, *Thirteen Colorful Inside Jobs*, 2013, performed at Kaldor Public Art Project 27: *13 Rooms*, 2013

<http://kaldorartprojects.org.au/13rooms/john-baldessari>

Language and text

Tate Learning, Letters and Words

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/student-resource/exam-help/letters-and-word>

Conceptual art

PBS Digital Studios, The Art Assignment, *The Case for Conceptual Art*, 2018 (Video, Duration 11:25 mins)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VHLS76HLon4>

MoMA Learning, Conceptual Art

https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/themes/conceptual-art/

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Sol LeWitt

Kaldor Public Art Project 6 and 11: Sol LeWitt 1977 / 1998

http://kaldorartprojects.org.au/assets/download-kits/6.%20Kaldornotes_Lewitt.pdf

Art Gallery of NSW exhibition kit: Sol Lewitt

<https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/resources/exhibition-kits/sol-lewitt/focus-works/>

Art Gallery of NSW, Installation videos of Sol Lewitt works

<https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/channel/clip/522/>

<https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/channel-archived/clip/213/>

MASS MoCA, *Sol LeWitt: A Wall Drawing Retrospective*, 2008

<https://massmoca.org/sol-lewitt/>

Anna Lovatt, *Ideas in Transmission: LeWitt's Wall Drawings and the Question of Medium*, Tate Papers no. 14, Autumn 2010

<https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/14/ideas-in-transmission-lewitt-wall-drawings-and-the-question-of-medium>