This year at FIAC, the international art fair in Paris, the writing's everywhere: canvasses, photographs, metal bars, neon lights. Spreading outside the Grand Palais, it took over the Avenue, closed to traffic, with Lawrence Weiner's Wonderland-like signage system (« On Above Up Sur Dessus du Haut ») and Jacques Villeglé's giant symbol typing.

The edifying (Lawrence Weiner), playful (Laure Prouvost), inked (Gilles Barbier) or crying (William Pope.L) letter connects graphic design to conceptual arts. Both domains were widely represented this year at la FIAC.

What is lying under the sudden urge for all to speak? For contemporary artists to produce letters and for galleries to show either recent work or works from previous generations displaying the alphabet?

Are we on the eve of an iconographic revolution?
Tired of images? Need to talk? Need subtitles? Need meaning?
What is the urge for words all about?
Freezing the frame

Are written words the ultimate «thumb-stopping» trick like they say on Instagram? Maybe. Where images are legion, text, clear and concise, stands out.

Are we headed towards an Instagram of words? It is the choice Hans Ulrich Obrist has made since his very beginning on the media. One of the most influents curators and art critic of our times, he is also head of international programs at Serpentine Gallery in London.

Despite the spontaneous nature of writing, its form requires the passer-by to stop and read. It demands an extra effort, and it's sticky. Words are read, processed and trigger a reaction, when in their intense proliferation, images have become invisible.

Coming to think of it, text is immediate yet complex enough to stop the passer-by. This applies to the FIAC, the Internet, or everyday life. FIAC is a good representative of what our world is about: an orgy of galleries (186) / exhibited pieces increasingly hard to decipher. Attempting to spot anything in this maze requires years of training so it's only natural that clear, loud pieces stand out -and we feel such a relief when they do.

Furthermore, in a way, writing eliminates barriers to enter the Art world. No matter one's reference or knowledge of arts, everyone who's found their way to a place such as la FIAC can read, and text has the potential to win even the biggest art skeptics over.

All sorts of writings

Fabrice Hyber surrounds his drawings with captions, almost like a child would, in a very playful fashion. Roni Horn’s style is almost documentary. Gilles Barbier’s recalls monastic writing from the times of illuminations. Atul Dodyia pays a tribute to Tristan Tzara with writing in white on a black board, just like a teacher would with white chalk on a school board.

Marie-Thérèse Zerbato-Poudou, a Doctor in Sciences of Education highlights the importance of writing as a mean of cognitive development and emancipation. Her work underlines «the role of langage in building one's thinking» as well as the relationship between the mind and the trace. An intimate gesture in the eye of graphologists, print is a tell-tale in itself. According to Fabrice Hyber, «the world can only be framed in questions». 
As far as graphic design is concern, typography is not just writing, it's a manifesto. Often related to politics or propaganda, it's an instrument of power. Some fonts have become iconic, as Leigh Ledare (Mitchell-Innes & Nash gallery) proves by unearthing pages of the New York Times.

Writing in itself is a work of art anyways, an artistic performance (William Pope L.). Joseph Kosuth, who was the editor in chief of Art and Language magazine, explained as early as 1969 that «the usage of the artistic language» can be considered art.
This year, street art was a rare commodity. Its skyrocketing success amongst the bourgeoisie and subsequent massive association with retail through a dizzying series of collaborations with brands (JonOne x Guerlain, Mambo x Goyard, Pro176, Nasty et Tanc x Monoprix, etc.) appear to have dramatically lowered collectors interest in street artists.

In the meantime, Murakami spray paints zen circles, black on a white canvas at Perrotin's. And it's a JonOne photograph and not graffiti that the same gallery chose to exhibit in their corner, entirely in Black and White.
It all starts with a concept

Conceptual is about the pre-eminence of the idea over its production. Applied to a commercial creation logic, this translates into having a strong concept first and worrying about spreading it afterwards. It might look like we’re stating the obvious but when consulted by a variety of brands on digital communication related issues, we invariably answer that the idea comes first. A great effect of aesthetics without meaning is pointless.
Writing can be the talkative witness of a silent creation process. According to Sol LeWitt, the process of making with its hesitations, scribbles, repentirs, mistakes, notes, is more interesting than the end result.

And this is how Lawrence Weiner works. His phrases are titles for works he's made in his studio, without showing them to the public, and that he shows as a different version of the work. And it becomes a stand-alone piece. The colour, shape, and size are chosen by the sponsor, who thus actively participates in the making. The word «Transferred» in massive block letters on a white wall would snatch the audience as they approached Jan Mot's corner (Bruxelles, Mexico).
Conversations are another pillar of the creative process highlighted in this edition of FIAC. Ian Wilson crystallizes them in his work on invitations (There was a discussion at 16-18 rue Littre, Paris 1974). As early as 1969, the Art & Language collective based their work also called «conversations» on an investigation of the relationship between theory and artistic performances.

This year, the FIAC made the concept its own by opening a space dedicated to Conversations, and namely talks about connections between art and science, art and architecture, art and diplomacy.

Is poetry the future of contemporary art?

In Jurgen Klauke's work, days of the week appear on black and white photographs like x-rays. In a dark atmosphere, they compose an odd poetry, prompting a feeling of loneliness and uneasiness (Thomas Zander Gallery, Köln).

© Jürgen Klauke / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2016, courtesy Galerie Thomas Zander, Köln
It was very hard to miss the work of rising artist Laure Prouvost, represented by Nathalie Obadia in Paris and Brussels and Carlier | Gebauer in Berlin. A French artist based in London, Laure Prouvost was awarded the Turner prize in 2013. The Consortium in Dijon has just offered her a solo show which ended on September 26.

Although she claims not to be a poet, Laure Prouvost is undoubtedly a remarkable storyteller. She doesn’t create fiction; she substitutes one reality to another: hers. Her show in Dijon was a collection of stories, depending or not on each other, a rebus to decipher in the dark, a journey dedicated to picking up hand-written letters on the floor and nibbling raspberries.
Her playful boards with their white letters printed on a patent black board help people find (or lose) their way: «In the dark this sign wishes to show you the way» or «You are gaung in ve rong direction», 2016. The plates beneath her works «This butterfly died here to be looked by you» and «This apple here has the power to turneverything here into moldy dust» give any object, whether ordinary or extraordinary, a completely different purpose. And by doing so, she's walking straight into the footsteps of René Magritte.

Is it marketing or politics?

Text equals tagline, equals advertisement, equals consumerism, equals... Pop art. Writing flirts with Pop art and everyday life objects. Lucy Mc Kenzie is mapping out new territories (Buchholz Gallery, Berlin, New York). Annette Kelm lays down dead leaves on one dollar bills (König Gallery, Berlin).
Andy’s Silver Clouds inspire Canadian artists collective General Idea their *Magi*© *Bullets* (1992), who left a significant mark on conceptual art in the late 1960s onwards, (Esther Schipper / Johnen Gallery, Berlin).

Graphic design is having a revival, recalling Bauhaus aesthetics with K.P. Brehmer at Vilma Gold (London) or conveying a comic strip touch on screaming flowers at Francesca Pia (Zürich) with «*Here here*» by Rochelle Feinstein. Her «*Yes yes*» calls to a heavy-hearted «*we can*». 
Barbara Kruger, represented by Sprüth Magers (Berlin) has worked a series of Untitled, Project for Dazed and Confused, 1996/2015. Her toying with the codes of printed press became her artistic signature. Her pithy strong headlines printed in white on a red background complete and caption savvy photo arrangements. Her work tackles societal issues such as relations between men and women, gender stereotypes and heavy consumerism. Barbara Kruger lives in LA and says she wants to question our relationship to images, established codes and dogmatisms carried by press and advertisement.

So it was made clear this year at FIAC, that art doesn’t intend to yield to the dumbing-down vicious circle of the ever-increasing consumption of faster more disposable goods. Art was crying out loud:

• The end of the image almighty;
• The rebirth of a political conscience;
• The necessity of collective thinking;
• The need for individual to reclaim the ownership of their own thinking.

© 800 Signes 2016. Please contact us for further developments.