



Chris Walla, *Constant Refrain*, 2020. Wood, paint, metal mesh, Plexiglas, ball chain, 41 x 28 x 13 inches.  
Funded through a grant awarded by the Minnesota State Arts Board.

# To the Letter

## Text in Art

DECEMBER 3 – JANUARY 29  
PENINSULA SCHOOL OF ART

From cubists like Georges Braque collaging newspapers into their still lifes to draw attention to the flatness of the picture plane, to conceptual artists like Lawrence Weiner using language to emphasize ideas over visual forms, to Jenny Holzer's *Truisms* confronting societal issues, visual artists have been widely using text since the beginning of the 20th Century. *To the Letter* examines the different ways artists incorporate text today.

Sean Latif Heiser's text comes both from his creative writing practice and from things he encounters in everyday life. The text is large and fragmented, at first site seeming only abstract patters filling shapes within his paintings. His work shifts between the formal, abstract, personal and imagined.

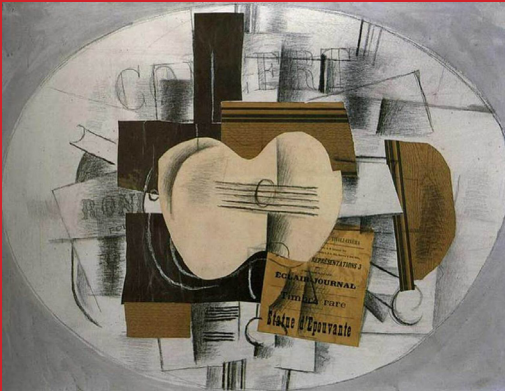


For Meg Hitchcock, the source of her text is as important as its final form. After leaving the evangelical church in her thirties, Meg began reading holy books from other religions in search of the replacement, and discovered they were expressing the same universal spirituality, just with cultural differences. She chose to “cross pollinate” the scriptures in her art, meticulously dissecting the text from one holy book and rearranging the letters to form the words of another. In her *Illuminated Manuscripts* series, she combines sacred texts with painting, drawing, sewing, and burning in a contemporary take on the ancient tradition.

Nicki Shockz, a young artist who recently spent a year creating art in a studio in Southern Door, explores the relationships between digital and handmade. Her densely layered abstract paintings include digital code. Nicki explains:

*Digital art is a form of language. The symbols and imagery used in technology are meant to be simple; to communicate quickly and effectively, yet at the same time is a place where people can struggle to interpret meanings. I see opportunity for combining the digital and fine art, especially in the representation of digital code. I incorporate actual coding text from images into my work as a way to layer the same “image” multiple ways in different forms of language. To further layer meaning, I use many art mediums in my work, including painting, graphic design, and printmaking. This has allowed me to relate shape to the abstracted form of computer coding.*

# 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY EXAMPLES



Georges Braque, *Guitar and Program Statue depouvante*, 1913. Charcoal, collage, gouache, and paper, 73 x 100 cm.

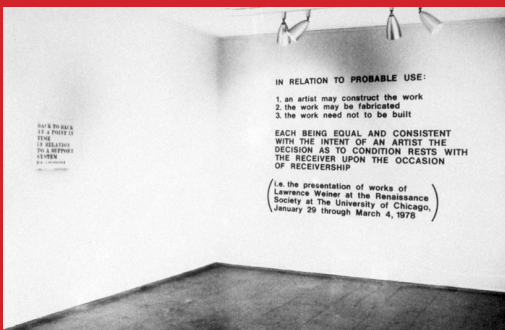
Around 1907, Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso developed a new style of painting—cubism. Instead of trying to make their subjects look realistic, Braque and Picasso broke them down into flat shapes. Although there is some shading creating the illusion of depth in the image above, the collaged text and traced letters contradict that impression, calling attention to the flatness of the paper.



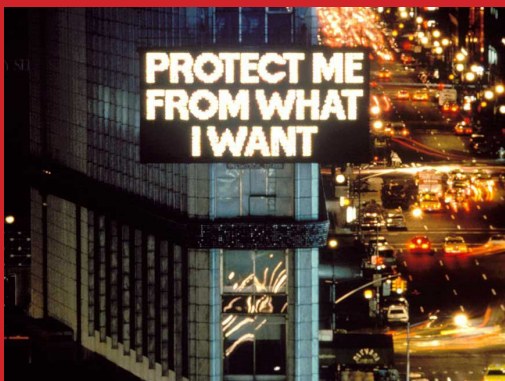
René Magritte, *The Treachery of Images (This is Not a Pipe) (La trahison des images [Ceci n'est pas une pipe])*, 1929. Oil on canvas, 23 3/4 x 31 15/16 x 1 in.

Later, surrealist painter René Magritte used text to again point out the objecthood of a painting and the illusion of what it depicts in *The Treachery of Images*. He used the format of an advertisement to do so.

Lawrence Weiner, *Statement of Intent*, 1969.



An early pioneer of conceptual art, Lawrence Weiner maintained that the art itself was not the object, but the idea. While he at first made objects and titled them with descriptions, he later decided he need not make the object at all. He first published the following formulation in 1968: “(1) The artist may construct the piece. (2) The piece may be fabricated. (3) The piece need not be built. Each being equal and consistent with the intent of artist, the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership.”



Jenny Holzer, from *Survival*, 1983-1985. Electronic installation in Times Square, 1985.

Jenny Holzer considered text the image itself. She tried to keep her statements, often confronting societal issues, short and concise, so people could take them in at a glance. She wants to reach as large a crowd as possible, and so her statements have been placed on billboards, t-shirts, signs, bags, and many other products.

# THE ARTISTS

**ALISON A. GATES** is Professor of Art and Design at University of Wisconsin Green Bay where she heads the Fibers studio in addition to teaching courses in design and Gender Studies. She grew up in the Midwest and on the West Coast, and holds an MFA in Studio Art from the University of Washington.. [AlisonGatesArt.com](http://AlisonGatesArt.com)

**SEAN LATIF HEISER** is a Malaysian-born artist who is a current MFA candidate at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville. He has shown work nationally, with recent exhibitions at The Alice Wilds, Milwaukee, WI, Real Tinsel, Milwaukee, WI, Morgan Fine Arts Building, Brooklyn, NY and LeSwamp, Knoxville, TN. He is represented by The Alice Wilds. [Sean Heiser.com](http://SeanHeiser.com)

**MEG HITCHCOCK** is a painter and text-based artist living and working in the New York Hudson Valley. She received her BFA from the San Francisco Art Institute and studied classical painting in Florence, Italy. Her work with paint and text is a culmination of her lifelong interest in religion, literature, and psychology. [MegHitchcock.com](http://MegHitchcock.com)

**LESLIE ROBERTS** has exhibited her work for three decades, with recent solo exhibitions at 57W57Arts in fall 2021 and at Minus Space in 2019. Her work has been reviewed in *Artforum*, the *Brooklyn Rail*, and other publications. She holds an MFA from Queens College and a BA from Yale. A professor at Pratt Institute, she lives and works in Brooklyn. [LeslieRobertsArt.com](http://LeslieRobertsArt.com)

**NICKI SHOCKZ**'s medium of choice is painting, and she uses acrylic, spray paint, screen-printing, coding, and sewing in her process. She uses these techniques in order to bring the two processes of handmade and digital together. She draws lots of inspiration from graffiti artwork and her travel experiences. [NickiShockz.com](http://NickiShockz.com)

**MELISSA WAGNER-LAWLER** is a book artist and Lecturer at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Her work investigates the perception of landscape and place using the image making properties of printmaking. Her book and print work are held in numerous collections, including the Library of Congress Rare Book Collection, Stanford University, University of Utah, and Yale University. [RedThreadLetterpress.com](http://RedThreadLetterpress.com)

**CHRIS WALLA** works at Minnesota State University Moorhead where he holds the position of Professor of Sculpture. Walla's work as an artist has evolved over the years from explorations in a variety of media, yet his work continues to circle back to the exploration of materials and form. Much of the content of his work stems from his interest in language, queer culture, politics and poetry. [ChrisWallaSculpture.com](http://ChrisWallaSculpture.com)



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