

Kunstlicht Vol. 47, No. 3/4: The Grammar of Art

Deadline: May 14, 2026

Tijdschrift Kunstlicht

For our next issue of Kunstlicht, we are looking for submissions that address the historical, situated, embodied, and fractured conditions of language in art, moving between theoretical and philosophical perspectives that situate particular linguistic and cultural ruptures, and artworks that test the limits of language as a tool.

Now on view at Fondation CAB in Brussels: an exhibition that celebrates the sixtieth anniversary of conceptual art collective Art & Language.^[1] Created in 1965, the collective was one of the key contributors to the “turn to language” happening in conceptual art in the 1960s and early 1970s. Difficult to define, yet recognised through their sustained use of text and linguistic forms within the gallery space, the collective adopted a theoretical and stylistic approach to the overarching question: what is art? In response to critic Clement Greenberg’s emphasis on materialism and abstraction in modern art, conceptual artists of that time developed an impulse toward dematerialisation. This shift is viewed as a form of institutional critique that questions both the art world and the modernist art historical discourse, as well as the concept of authorship.^[2]

The dematerialisation of art marks the shift from object to idea, image to text, and from viewing to reading. In this sense, the turn to language did not only involve artists, but also involved the viewers of art, as they are transformed from passive observers to active readers.

Art & Language specifically used text to situate art within an intellectual space by exploring theoretical analysis as an art form.^[3] By employing typographic language and the concept of “editorial/essay as artwork,” they created, for example, journals, which they regarded as an exhibition form.^[4] Drawing inspiration from, but not limited to, Art & Language, this “exhibition” of Kunstlicht takes a wider scope and calls for papers and contributions at the intersections of art and language.

In Art & Language member Joseph Kosuth’s seminal installation “One and Three Chairs” (1965), three representations of a chair are displayed—a material one, a photograph of one, and a definition of the word “chair” from a dictionary—thereby troubling the definition of art. Descriptions became an important element of his practice, working towards the idea of art as pure information.^[5]

Beyond language, the conceptual art movement can be regarded as a continuation of Dadaism, in which artists experimented with visual and poetic representation through textual and typographical investigations. Also drawing from the spatialisation of text as well as Dadaist practice of performance, poetry, and art, the Concrete Poetry Movement arose in the 1950s in Latin America, Northern Europe, and East Asia. The Concrete Poetry Movement aestheticised language as a visu-

al form, resulting in linguistic art. The movement was focused on (re-)building national cultures (quite literally since Concrete Poetry is closely related to Concrete Architecture). They made visual arrangements while addressing political and social themes, emphasising the political aspect of language. An example of this movement is “Sem um numero” (1958) by Augusto de Campos, who was part of the Noigandres poets and seen as a founder of the Concrete Poetry Movement. This concrete poem shows the aesthetics of patterns of short groups of letters and words, in which the repetition of themes, visuals, and/or phonetics occurs.

Contemporary examples of text-based art can be found in the work of artists Barbara Kruger and Martine Syms. In 2010, Barbara Kruger created “Untitled” (Past, Present, Future) (2010), a site-specific gallery-scale installation for Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam consisting of a wall wrap that addresses the viewer through her own writing, as well as quotations from the novel “Nineteen Eighty-Four” by George Orwell and theoretical concepts associated with Roland Barthes. Following a similar aesthetic within the collection of Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam is Martine Syms’ “GIRRRLLGIRLLLGGGIRLGIIRL” (2017), in which the artist explores concepts of feminism and identity through everyday language.

Alternative and more abstract examples of the use of language can be found in the work of artists who perceive or use “language” in different ways, revealing divergent approaches to experiencing time, meaning, and relation. In the ongoing project “Stuttering Can Create Time” (2024–), artist and writer Jjjjjerome Ellis explores how stuttering reshapes the structure and temporality of language. Through spacing, repetition, prolongation, and the interplay of multiple languages (including Spanish, Chinese, and English), Ellis visually and sonically represents stuttered speech. Rather than framing stuttering as a deficit, the work proposes it as a generative form of expression that creates time within language. In doing so, Ellis invites a reconsideration of listening practices, suggesting that stuttering can teach us about patience, generosity, and justice. Similarly, artist Christine Sun Kim explores the relation between elements of spoken and signed language. Her practice, in which she combines American Sign Language (ASL), writing, and drawing, questions key principles of language: communication, interpretation, and signification.

The relationship between language and meaning also shapes how we relate to the more-than-human world, and is critical in preserving Indigenous Cultures and knowledge. In “Braiding Sweetgrass”, artist Robin Wall Kimmerer reflects on how the structure of the English language limits ways of expressing respect for nonhuman beings. English grammar typically divides the world into humans and objects, offering few linguistic tools to recognise other beings as living relations. Kimmerer writes that “a bay is a noun only if water is dead.”^[6] When the bay becomes a noun, it is defined and contained by human language. In contrast, the Potawatomi verb “wiikwegamaa” – “to be a bay” – treats the bay as a living process rather than a static object. Through animate grammar, relationships shift from extraction and consumption toward kinship and reciprocity.

These questions regarding language and representation become more complex again in the context of computational systems. As language models and other AI technologies become more widely accessible, open-source infrastructures allow artists, researchers, and programmers to experiment with code and machine learning systems. Platforms such as GitHub repositories and coding environments like Google Colab or Jupyter notebooks provide tools for building and sharing models. Yet this accessibility is often unstable. Open-source code may become difficult or

impossible to run in its original form when platforms discontinue support for certain frameworks or libraries. Such changes reveal a contradiction within the open-source ecosystem: while code may be publicly available, the technical conditions required to run it are constantly shifting. Accessibility, therefore, depends not only on openness but also on the evolving infrastructures that support technological tools.

For this issue of *Kunstlicht*, we are interested in exploring the different ways in which language is embodied and utilised. What are contemporary examples of language within the visual arts that sit outside of the art historical canon? How and what languages will anchor our future(s)? What are alternative uses of language? What happens when language reaches its carrying capacity? Can artworks protect endangered languages? How do hierarchies of language impose themselves in the (art) world? Taking works that move beyond text and writing, into utterances and expression, what other structures and rules form a basis for communication?

Submission Guidelines

We invite scholars, writers, artists, and creative or cultural practitioners to submit contributions in the form of academic articles, reviews, interviews, visual works, hybrid essays, poems, and any other form that is fitting for the theme and the A5-format journal. We encourage contributors from all stages of their (research) practice to respond to the call for papers. We look forward to receiving your submissions, together with your CV or portfolio, by no later than May 14, 2026. For academic articles and written pieces, we invite you to submit an abstract of not more than 300 words. For visual or other experimental formats, we invite you to submit a proposal that does not exceed 1 A4 page. You can send your proposed contribution to redactie@tijdschriftkunstlicht.nl using "The Grammar of Art" as the subject line.

All writers and contributors will be notified about the selection process before the end of the month. The issue will be published between October and November 2026.

[1] "Art & Language, 1965-2025," Fondation CAB, accessed March 31, 2026, <https://fondationcab.com/exhibitions/art-language>.

[2] Eve Kalyva, *Image and Text in Conceptual Art*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 2.

[3] Ruth Blacksell, "From Looking to Reading: Text-Based Conceptual Art and Typographic Discourse," *Design Issues* 29, no. 2 (2013): 73.

[4] *Ibidem*.

[5] *Ibidem*.

[6] Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (Milkweed Editions, 2015).

Reference:

CFP: *Kunstlicht* Vol. 47, No. 3/4: The Grammar of Art. In: ArtHist.net, Apr 5, 2026 (accessed May 28, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/52157>>.