upon comes, Stenfied's wish to have them function as status symbols contributes an air of rigid rhetoric which can make them resemble Gregory Gorman's comic, Bozo on the Loose. Stenfied attempts to evade this by using a sign, mining an exploration between documentary and symbolic modes by having his symbolic statements appear to emerge from them concealed out of consistency, and

The method's novelty is that of the film director waiting for life to start behaving like a good movie so he can capture it.

The question continues to Stenfield's 2002 work, is a sense of absence which is symptomatic, or at least descriptive, of its implied context being elsewhere; in the story the images themselves, which is often appended as wall text, the absence of the individual is a metaphor for the photograph's dependence upon contextual narrative, as the main of the 'Puzzles' series, 1993-1995, immnates the silent stупid cultures of which they are both evidence and signifier. Stenfield's achievement, however, is to interpret a conceptual trope in emotional terms. The absence of the relevant implies the evaporation of self-referentiality. A reliance on implication rather than directness reigns as laudable. The remuneration of the events commemorated by Stenfield's 'On This Site' series, 1993-95, suggests a dependence upon the text which explicates the pictures by describing murders which have taken place decades ago on the spot they record. In their heavier, these photographs might be critiques of our own idiosyncratic culture, that the learning is that Stenfield's early photographs have since abandoned. The 'Unseen Archive' photographs, 2003-05, most scathingly critique Stenfield's conceptualism and pictorialism. These disused Massachusetts landscapes engender human effects upon the natural environment, as exemplified by allowing the author to relate the images to the remains of inhabited landscape, in which these effects are resonant indications only, by how far the photographer has had to journey to find images which combine rather than juxtapose them, losing the images uninvited by a need to illustrate the idea they represent, February 8, 2005. The West Macon, Northampton, Massachusetts shows a stretch of snow with a lonely piling visible through, if the picture's emptiness equals environmental contamination, it also represents its resistance to being commodified as a vehicle for such metaphors, a function which, in the context of the series to which it belongs, it performs not infrequently. If

Lawrence Weiner is an artist and writer based in Berlin.

Lawrence Weiner: Be That As It May
Lisson Gallery London 28 November to 12 January

A Lawrence Weiner exhibition is not easy to write about. Unlike the works of many contemporary artists, Weiner's are not overtly about something. They do not immediately address contemporary social, economic or political issues, nor do they seem to be particularly about the making of the art. The artist has followed the same practice for many years of sending vector files to the gallery as a sign writer then making them on the walls of the space. Usually the same typeface is used, sans-serif, black letters, in a single colour or with a black outline and filled with another colour. The artist's visual studio of Spade/Spades Gothic Condensed is illustrative and not elegant. It speaks to the open and democratic nature of his work, in that they do not assume any prior knowledge about the subject represented; nor do they speak to the viewer from a particular social back but simply require engagement with what the artist has placed in the world. The works are combined with lines, circles and proofreaders' squiggles, some with a machine-made aesthetic while some appear as if hand-drawn.

Weiner first exhibits his Conceptual Art work, making works that seem to be no more than what they are. And yet, they are fresh and inspiring, not least because they are always new, made specifically for the space in which they are used. At the Lisson show, the works are presented in a range of sizes and spaces. The huge SWATTERED IN SHINING METAL TO CONCEAL CORROSION & APPEAR TO ELUDE ENTROPY ON THE WHOLE cover most of two walls in the main ground-floor gallery, while four smaller, framed works in ink, pencil and pasted on paper are hung in the side gallery, their sketchlike, handmade-quality contrasting with the visual finish of the larger piece. The works in the first-floor gallery also address both material and spatial concerns. PUSHER AS IF & LEFT AS IS and STARS AS TO VECTOR ALL IN DUE COURSE. The ground-floor front gallery is devoted to THIS AS THAT BE THAT AS IF, which is installed on the window of the space. The words appear twice, readable from the street as well as inside the gallery. In recent years the artist has emphasised the social nature of his practice in collaborations with state schools in the US and in other public projects that aim to enrich daily life. The window piece in the current show also offers this possibility.

Together with his recognisable typographical style, the works appear to have a very particular focus. The words Weiner chooses have security and precision, however they are not common and simple. In contrast to the emphasis in Conceptual Art on the countable and the complete, his works remain strangely open, setting out spatial possibilities rather than making definitions. Acting on both physical and metaphorical levels, they are not about something specific but are potentially about everything. This is their particular quality and in doing so they raise a rich scene, investigating the very nature of sculpture. Weiner uses 'sculpture' rather than another term for his works; although they may look flat they are sensuously spatial and explore the physical interaction between materials, thereby prompting the viewer to consider his or her place in relation to other people or objects in the world around them. The works thereby examine the fundamental and contingent relationship between the viewer and the object in a given space. In this case the objects take the form of words, their demonstration aiding in their universality. In the questions they are asked to these works are set with the materials from which the wall-based works have been made rather than the paint that has
been used.

Given the open condition of Weiner’s works, the title of the Lisscon show is particularly intriguing: BE THAT AS IT MAY seems to suggest a lack of openness, a polite dismissal of another viewpoint. In this context, however, the phrase may be broken down into its discrete units with THAT alliteratively referring to THIS that of the window piece and AS IT MAY offering a range of possibilities. In their relationship with the other words, the phrase ON THE WHOLE and IN DUE COURSE operate on similar terms: freed from their usual limited meanings they become object-like and now again, Weiner’s works continue to raise questions not only about the material and spatial qualities of sculpture but also about the nature of language and how it shapes human interaction. II

DEBORAH SCHOF is an art historian.

Prophetic Diagrams

George and Jorgen London 14 December to 16 February

It is unusual for a drawing show comprising 1960s London and New York-based contemporary artists to be derived directly from an attempt to summon Lucifer, but Berenson’s is an old part of London and strange things have happened. To be fair, it isn’t just the Dark Lord himself, fastenish and Aramis are also summoned in curator William Burrow’s essay, a beautifully written and engaging text to which each artist was invited to respond with a work. The central knot of the text, which was inspired by the discovery in an East Village shop of a book on the occult, is the revelation that it is good drawing technique, apparently, that is the key to successfully summoning a demon: the unique manner in which each spirit responds to must be accurately inscribed. This exhibition, then, is a multi-voiced disputation that points into a wider thesis defining the activity of drawing – drawing as a tool enabling activity, drawing as diagramming, and drawing as incantation and summoning.

Some of the works are clearly summonings of sorts, calling up uncertain forms before our eyes, perhaps to the surprise of the artist. Noel Landfield’s murder-machen sick of untied paper features an unfinished black slab levitating over an ill-defined brown ground, its sudden appearance as inexplicable as Stanley Kubrick’s monolith, while the hastily hatched brushwork of Joyce Pensato’s Micky, 2010, is just mouse-like enough to edge into the figurative and become a run for a lurid, demonic version of Disney’s mascot – this monstrous spirit now possessing our visual memory in order to rear up shadow-like, whenever we encounter The Mouse.

The amorphous depths of shadow are the subject of Chris Baker’s unified monoprint, an incised monochrome lenticular print that becomes a window piece with an underground form. The sheer force of the work is one of the most compelling in the show, an amalgam of different kinds of light – the sun’s rays, the back-lit glass, and the shadow cast by the window itself – that interact in a complex way to create a feeling of depth and space. Baker’s work is a testament to the power of drawing, and his use of light and shadow in particular is truly remarkable.

A similar blurriness pervades the pitiless scene in James Pimperton’s pencil drawing Finder, 2012. Its soldiers and primitive plants illuminated by a white sun emitting perfect graphite lines in the same way that the sun sconce, the radial lines pack tighter as they meet the circumference of the black disk and so form a dark halo. The drawing is a study in the shadowy light of an absent black sun, the sun’s rays, the back-lit glass, and the shadow cast by the window itself – that interact in a complex way to create a feeling of depth and space. Pimperton’s work is a testament to the power of drawing, and his use of light and shadow in particular is truly remarkable.

The light literally returns as the black-throated bird, white-throat and yellow-black, animate their experience of the nature and time of the day. Architecture and light, movement and the changing of the light, all of these things are part of the nature and time of the day. Architecture and light, movement and the changing of the light, all of these things are part of the nature of the day.
Lawrence Weiner: man of his word

The veteran Conceptualist, showing in London this month, uses text as just another material. And he doesn’t like being called a Conceptualist, either.

By Louisa Buck. Features, Issue 240, November 2012
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For nearly half a century, the texts of Lawrence Weiner have been painted on the walls of cities and public buildings from Halifax to Hong Kong and galleries from Beijing to Mexico City. They have been spelled out in cobblestones, printed on beer mats, cast into iron manhole covers, floated inside souvenir Biros and sung as lyrics by a country and western band. Rendered in a utilitarian yet elegant typeface that is instantly recognisable, his cryptic but suggestive phrases operate simultaneously on several levels, whether spatial, poetic or political. They often conjure up processes and physical situations while at the same time leaving much to the imagination: “MANY COLOURED OBJECTS PLACED SIDE BY SIDE TO FORM A ROW OF MANY COLOURED OBJECTS” gives no indication of the actual colour, size, number or nature of these objects, just as “A TURBULENCE INDUCED WITHIN A BODY OF WATER” could be the swirling of water in a glass or the waves caused by an ocean liner.
These constructions of what Weiner calls “Language + materials referred to” have led to the 70-year-old New York artist being lauded as a pioneer of Conceptual art. His twice-reprinted Phaidon monograph hails him as “one of the canonical Conceptual artists of the 1960s”, and this view is echoed by London’s Lisson Gallery, where Weiner has a show of past and new work opening this month (21 November–12 January 2013). The gallery describes him as “a seminal American Conceptual artist”—but the man himself takes a different view. Speaking with characteristic forthrightness on the telephone from Vienna, Weiner dismisses such labels. “The Conceptual artist moniker makes absolutely no sense to me. I don’t like the term,” he says. “I think it was created by some people who wanted to make sure their work was differentiated from other artists. Why not just say sculptor?”

Or, more specifically, a sculptor who works with words. “I never quite understand why the shit hits the fan when sculpture is presented within the form of language,” he says. “The use of language is the same as the change to being able to use acrylic or light to make things—it’s not exotic.” Weiner may not make objects per se, but he is adamant that the stuff of the world is always at the centre of everything he does. He defines his art as “the relationship of human beings to objects and objects to objects in relation to human beings”, and insists that “art is essentially a sensual relationship between materials and objects”.

It is this relationship with the physical qualities of materials that continues to lie at the core of Weiner’s texts. He describes the genesis of his written words as “very mundane”, saying: “I become interested in a material and I bring the stuff into the studio. If the studio isn’t large enough for the material I’m interested in, then I go out into the landscape for it. I’ll go to a quarry or I’ll go to a steel mill, but most of the time I bring material in and I work with it—I don’t like the word ‘play’ because I’m not playing, I’m working. When I come to a configuration that I see, I translate it in terms of language. Then, after I’ve worked it through, I clean it up and I present it.”

Although Weiner’s texts are often poetic and open-ended, their creator is adamant that they carry no metaphorical meanings. “The work has no metaphor: it is what it is,” he insists. “Art that has no metaphor is what attracted me as a young person. I was attracted to Mondrian because you didn’t have to know anything; I was attracted to Caspar David Friedrich because again there was no metaphor. Each person coming to a Pollock or coming—hopefully—to a work of mine has a need and they have a desire and they have to place themselves in the material world and they make their own metaphor.” Weiner’s texts have been translated into many languages, and he believes their lack of specific metaphor enables them to have a wider application. “The work can go from culture to culture without having to take account of what your grandfather or your father says it is about. It is about what you get from what you are doing.”
Despite the fact that in certain locations Weiner’s texts can seem to chime almost uncannily with their direct surroundings, he is equally insistent that they are never tied in to a specific location. Even though he concedes that Zerschmettert in Stücke (im Frieden der Nacht) / Smashed to pieces (in the still of the night), 1991, which was installed on a Nazi-era Flakturm Tower in Vienna, has an "unfortunate reference" to Kristallnacht, Weiner says this was unintentional and makes the point that, installed in the South Pacific, the piece could just as easily refer to coconuts falling off trees. "My work is never site-specific. Art work has to find its place in very much the same way that you and I do. People move from place to place until they find somewhere they can function. Brancusi became a French artist, Picasso became a French artist: how many artists do we think of as American but they come from somewhere else where they weren’t appreciated as they were?"

Weiner was born in the South Bronx in 1942, the son of a candy-store owner, into what he has described as "a lower-working-class background”. Although he was working on the docks at the age of 12, he graduated from Stuyvesant High School at 16, and then studied literature and philosophy at Hunter College for less than a year before hitchhiking across the country, doing odd jobs and “making the strangest kind of paintings”. These included his multimedia “Propeller Paintings”, made in the mid-1960s, which are represented in the Lisson show. In 1960, Weiner got into trouble when, with a group of friends, he made his now legendary Cratering Piece, for which he blew up parts of a state park north of San Francisco and dubbed the resulting voids sculptures. "There were artists performing all over the place, doing happenings, performances, other things," he remembers. "In the light of my history, it was a big deal; in the light of what the hell was going on, it was just another artist out there, doing another sculpture-park thing using performances, explosives, tons of steel. This was all normal."

Working and showing alongside fellow artists Sol LeWitt, Carl Andre and Robert Barry, Weiner’s investigations into the forms and processes of art led him to view art as a simple physical interaction, which could be expressed as effectively in words. Why, he asked, was it necessary to make a piece when it could be described? "I didn’t have the advantage of a middle-class perspective. Art was something else; art was the notations on the wall, or the messages left by other people. I grew up in a city where I had read the walls; I still read the walls. I love to put work of mine out on the walls and let people read it."
THERE IS ONLY ONE PERSON whose photograph I’ve ever had in my studio: Simon Rodia, the man who built the Watts Towers. I don’t know how I found out about the Watts Towers, living in New York in a world of abstract expressionists, but sometime in the late 1950s I decided to hitchhike to California to see them. I thought: go to San Francisco, you can find work on the docks and then you can hitch to Los Angeles. I had seen a photograph of a small part of it and I had envisioned that it would be enormous, like everything in California. Of course they were not yet finished, but I was just knocked for a loop — here was this... thing! When I was hitching I had a vision that art was something that you placed within the world and it didn’t matter if anyone knew who did it. The Towers fit in with my idea of Johnny Applesed — where you went, you left things on the side of the road. Upon completion, Rodia did what artists can never do: he just walked away.

If anyone informed my relationship to putting work in the public sphere and doing things outside the gallery, it was this man. I don’t just build things any more; I incorporate them into existing structures. But Rodia felt that the fabric of Los Angeles and the fabric of Watts was an existing structure. I have nothing but enormous admiration for public artists; it seems that what they do is much closer to what made us all artists than anything else. And it is a means of placing art within the city, taking that funny unspoken right you have that says you can do graffiti anywhere as long as it says something that’s not just about existential drama. Not ‘Jose, 42nd Street’, because that’s an existential plea, and everybody has an existential plea. But you could say, ‘Your children are hungry’ or ‘The sky is blue’. In fact Rodia was perhaps the first artist I’d ever come across who was saying ‘The sky is blue’, and that was something.

I do a lot of public sculptures that once they enter into the firmament become site-specific. Nothing is ever initially site-specific — it becomes so when it finds the right place to be. And people adopt it into their lifestyles and they bring it together. I think the question of public art is an interesting one, because I don’t see a difference between artists and what is called ‘public’. Artists — they pay their taxes and take their kids to the dentist; I don’t see where the dividing line is. Art is made by people, for people, end of conversation. It’s all comprehensible: none of us are geniuses.