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SIMON LEE GALLERY IS PROUD TO PRESENT A SOLO BOOTH OF NEW WORKS BY MEL BOCHNER AT TAIPEI DANGDAI, TAIWAN, 2019



**BOOTH C02
18 – 20 JANUARY 2019**

On the occasion of the first edition of Taipei Dangdai in Taiwan in January 2019, Simon Lee Gallery is pleased to present a solo booth of works by Mel Bochner from his iconic *Ha Ha Ha* series.

Mel Bochner's intellectual and material analysis of photography, painting and sculpture has produced ground-breaking works that have established his reputation as one of the leading American conceptualists. Throughout his career, the artist has explored the intersection of linguistic and visual representation. His early works dissected the art object and formed the 'analytical' groundwork so crucial to informing the basis for the more 'synthetic' works of recent years. The overriding question at the heart of his project has always been the same - how do we receive and interpret different types of information? In the wake of abstract expressionism artists felt there was little to add to painting and this triggered in Bochner a response that was more about thinking than making. He started to find clear ways of looking at art and to question how we experience depth, perspective and space. He went on to explore language and colour in the same way.

His thesaurus paintings are an important part of this particular enquiry. With their focus on text and its interpretation, these works re-imagine language as a form of pictorial expression. His use of colour sometimes affirms the language it is painting and at other times ignores it, intentionally avoiding system and pattern. These paintings make us think about the acts of reading and looking, of representation and abstraction, and how they intersect. The thesaurus paintings are just one of many rationalising systems that Bochner uses to question and explore our irrational trust in language and the world around us.

Out of the thesaurus paintings, Bochner developed a new, powerfully graphic body of work that continued to track the artist's ongoing fascination with language and colour. Beginning with the phrase 'blah blah blah' – a linguistic shorthand in the English language that acts as a substitute for words in contexts where the content is felt to be too tedious or lengthy to recapitulate – he gravitated towards another metonym: 'ha ha ha'. Performing a similar function to 'blah', 'ha' is an onomatopoeia that indicates laughter and has gained currency in today's digitally-advanced society, as methods of communication become ever more succinct. In Bochner's 'Ha Ha Ha' series, block capitals ooze with vibrant pigment on velvet surfaces, each graphic capital abstracted by the formal qualities of artistic practice. Yet by using this term Bochner also plays with the sincerity of his endeavour, directing a humour-filled nod at a legacy he has so positively shaped.

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'There is an enormous literature on the subject of humour that only demonstrates the futility of trying to explain a joke', Bochner notes, 'For me humour is, first of all, a sceptical way of looking at the world. For the sceptic everything is perpetually in doubt. Every answer merely leads to another question. From this point of view the goal of humour is the subversion of certainty. In order to critique unquestioned beliefs and assumptions, jokes use misdirection, surprising shifts in perspective, and the upending of expectations. The various forms that comedy takes – irony, sarcasm, satire, parody, ridicule, pun, double entendre – are all strategies to undermine the domination of reason and logic. There is, however, a dark side to humour. It often leads to the realisation that everything may only add up to nothing. But the fact that humour exists, and that nothing is immune to it, makes that realisation (slightly) less unbearable'.¹

NOTES TO EDITORS

About Simon Lee Gallery

Founded in Mayfair, London in 2002, Simon Lee Gallery represents artists of diverse generations whose practices range from sculpture and painting to video and photography and who share a broad interest in an exploration of the conceptual. Aiming to provide a significant international audience for its artists, the gallery also regularly punctuates its programme with historical exhibitions and curated group shows, which present shifts in contemporary art practice and thought, whilst broadening the dialogue with artists outside of the gallery's core programme. In addition to its UK activity, in 2012 the gallery opened a space in Hong Kong, helping to introduce its artists to a wider public in Asia, with a fully independent programme. In 2014, Simon Lee Gallery opened an office and private viewing space. In 2017, the New York space was re-launched with an independent year-round programme of exhibitions and events, showcasing the work of emerging and established artists in dynamic group and solo exhibitions.

Facebook, Instagram, Twitter: @SimonLeeGallery
www.simonleegallery.com

About Mel Bochner

Mel Bochner was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1940 and lives and works in New York. He received a BFA degree with a major in painting and a minor in philosophy from the Carnegie Institute of Technology, Pittsburgh in 1962. He taught aesthetics, art history and sculpture at the School of Visual Arts, New York, NY from 1965-1972 and in 2001 he was the Adjunct Professor at Yale University, New Haven, CT. His first one-man exhibition was held at the School of Visual Arts Gallery, New York, NY in 1966. In 2018 he participated in the 57th Edition of the Carnegie International, Pittsburgh, PA. His work has been the subject of many solo museum exhibitions, most recently, *Amazing! Mel Bochner Prints from the Collection of Jordan D. Schnitzer and his Family Foundation*, Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa, OH (2018); *Mel Bochner: Illustrating Philosophy*, Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, South Hadley, MA (2015); *Mel Bochner: Strong Language*, Jewish Museum, New York, NY (2014); *Mel Bochner: If the Colour Changes*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK (2012) (travelled to Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany and Fundação de Serralves, Porto, Portugal in 2013) and *In the Tower: Mel Bochner*, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. (2011). His work is included in major public and private collections internationally, including Tate, London, UK; Centre Georges Pompidou - Musée National d' Art Moderne, Paris, France; Städel Museum, Frankfurt, Germany; Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, Montreal, Canada; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, NY; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA; Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), Los Angeles, CA and Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Los Angeles, CA. Bochner is taking part in the 57th Edition of the Carnegie International in 2018.

Image: *Ha Ha Ha*, 2018, Oil on velvet, 118.1 x 118.1 cm (46 1/2 x 46 1/2 in.) Courtesy the artist and Simon Lee Gallery London, Hong Kong.

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¹ Mel Bochner, quoted in 'Thoughts on Color, Language, Painting, and *Blah Blah Blah*' in Norman L. Kleeblatt, *Mel Bochner: Strong Language*, exh. cat., New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014, p. 124.