

Jochen Gerz, The Berkeley Oracle
MATRIX/Berkeley 174

University of California
Berkeley Art Museum
Pacific Film Archive
early August 1997- late May, 1998

Is it time to stop caring?

Jochen Gerz
The Berkeley Oracle:
Questions Unanswered

<http://www.bampfa.berkeley.edu/exhibits/oracle>

The Berkeley Oracle
(detail), 1997-98

The Berkeley Oracle is the second internet-based artwork—after the *Plural Sculpture*, 1995—by the renowned German conceptual artist Jochen Gerz. The internet is well-suited for Gerz's ephemeral, public, and interactive mode of art-making. Gerz began making art in the 1960s, pioneering methods of combining photography and text as well as utilizing text as a critical, site-specific public intervention. His very first public work, *Caution—Art Corrupts*, 1968, consisted of stickers with this same message placed on public monuments around Florence, Italy. In *The Berkeley Oracle*, Gerz updates this guerilla-style approach in which the artist's identity is effaced in favor of a simple, yet provocative, ideological challenge to the viewer. Since 1968, Gerz has gone on to work in numerous media, including video, installation, performance, and public works, including billboards and outdoor sculpture.

The Berkeley Oracle was launched, as an interactive, internet-based artwork on August 1, 1997 on the museum's web-site (<http://www.bampfa.berkeley.edu/exhibits/oracle>). The internet component, designed by Gerz with the assistance of Richard Rinehart, includes texts and images concerning the fundamental value of the spirit of questioning in our society. In the following excerpt from the internet text, Gerz alludes to the recent resurgence of this spirit:

Thirty years ago, the campus of Berkeley became a worldwide symbol for questions igniting fires of thought, passion, anger and innovation. Whatever your opinion or even knowledge today about the days of the flower children and nonviolent revolution, you may agree that the events linked to Berkeley as much as to Paris, Berlin or Milan, instead of being part of a

dead and venerable past, have since continued to fuel vital doubts and discussions.

To put it in one sentence: sometimes it is not so much the answer that makes the question but rather the lack of an answer. Asking questions seems to be part of our nature, whatever the answers, whatever the chances of finding or giving them.

Visitors to the web site are asked to submit their question to the Oracle and may then view the questions that others throughout the world have submitted. The Oracle is available in English, French, German, and Spanish versions. Recalling the paradoxically responsive Greek Oracle at Delphi, which gave answers in the form of riddles, Gerz's Oracle gives no answers at all.

The critic Bojana Pejic has written of Gerz:

In Gerz's life and work he opposes [the] omnipresent humanist subject. To do so, he restrains himself from imposing any kind of conviction, message, solution, ready-made meaning or "truth." His works are 'dispositions' in which the viewer finds only the solutions that people can work out for themselves—prominent among these, of course, being the practice of doubt.

For the gallery component of *The Berkeley Oracle* Gerz has selected forty of the submitted questions, producing them as text panels, and installing them throughout the museum's galleries and public areas. Both the internet and the gallery components will run through May 31, 1998.

Gerz was born in Berlin in 1940. He has lived in Paris since 1966 and stays frequently in British Columbia, Canada.

Exhibitions

Selected solo exhibitions:
Galleria Rinascita, Modena, Italy, 1968; Museum Wiesbaden, Wiesbaden, West Germany, 1974; German Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 1976; Kestner-Gesellschaft, Hanover, West Germany; Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, Great Britain, 1979; Walter Phillips Gallery, The Banff Center, Banff, Canada, 1984; Musee des Beaux-Arts de Calais, Calais, France, 1986 (catalog); Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Dusseldorf, Germany, 1988 (traveled); Richard L. Nelson Gallery, Davis, California, 1992; Centre Saidye Bronfman, Montreal, 1993 (traveled, catalog); Cornerhouse Gallery, Manchester, Great Britain, 1993; Galerie Lohrl, Monchengladbach, Germany, 1994; Neuberger Art Museum, Purchase, NY, 1994 (traveled, catalog); Newport Harbour Museum, Newport Beach, CA, 1994; C.R.G., New York, 1996

Selected group exhibitions:
Studio 2B, Florence, Italy, *Mostra internazionale della poesia concreta*, 1967; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, *Concrete Poetry*, 1970; The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, *Words*, 1977; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, *Behind the Eyes*, 1986; *Documenta VIII*, Kassel, West Germany, 1987; The Jewish Museum, New York, *The Art of Memory*, 1994; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, *Hors Limites*, 1994.

The Berkeley Oracle is a collaboration among the UC Berkeley Art Museum; the Staatliche Hochschule für Gestaltung, Karlsruhe; the Museum für Neue Kunst, Karlsruhe; and Ada Web, New York

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