

Dream Idea Machine

ART CITIES: Paris-Joseph Kosuth

By Efi Michalarou, February, 2022.



Joseph Kosuth: Quoted Clocks #9, 2022, Horloge et vinyle, 40x4.5cm, 16x2in © Joseph Kosuth Studio
 Courtesy of the Artist and Almine Rech Gallery

Joseph Kosuth is a key figure in the redefinition of the art object that took place during the 1960s and 70s with the formulation of Conceptual art, which questions art's traditional forms and practices, as well as the assumptions surrounding them. To do this, Kosuth was among the first to employ appropriation strategies, texts, photography, installations and the use of public media, as well as to write the earliest theoretical texts supporting it.

Joseph Kosuth's interest is in the meaning of time as we experience it within the array of contexts life provides. In the sixteen individual works titled "Quoted Clocks", that are on show at Almine Rech in his solo exhibition "Existential Time" Kosuth's use of the analog clock referentially anchors the concept of time to its most literal and familiar visual representation, serving as a canny reminder that time is contained in a clock no more than the complex process of making meaning in art is contained in a single object. However precise the mechanism, a clock functions visually as little more than a punctuation mark in need of a sentence, allowing those who look at it, collectively, individually, only a glimpse of a moment that never simply passes. In "Quoted Clocks", each of these works is created from a standard analog clock, which represents the empirical passing of time, as its hands trace its face by the minutes and hours. At the same time, the clock is imbued with philosophical meaning through the figurative use of quotations taken from both familiar and obscure writings by authors and philosophers. Each clock also bears the inscription, "'Existential Time' Almine Rech Paris, 2022". By removing the clock as a fabricated object from its cultural context of functionality and then combining it with quoted language also taken from prior contexts "Quoted Clocks" further punctuates the insufficiencies, limits, and surpluses of meaning that characterize our perceptions of duration. As an ongoing series of reflections, Kosuth's "Existential Time" invites us to reflect on our own lived experience as it flashes by or hangs heavily,

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leading to questions of consciousness, to what we mean within time.

Joseph Kosuth was born in Toledo, Ohio, in 1945. He studied at the Toledo Museum School of Design starting at the very early age of ten and continued there until 1962, during which time he studied with the Belgian painter Line Bloom Draper. He enrolled at the Cleveland Institute of Art in 1963 and studied drawing and painting there for a year. After traveling abroad for a year, he moved to New York City in 1965 and enrolled at the School of Visual Arts, where he studied painting until 1967. By this time, he was already questioning the usefulness of imagery in conveying meanings and ideas and was exploring the uses of language. In 1965, at just 20 years old, Kosuth started to create a number of works that would effectively help start the Conceptual art movement and most fully realize his thinking about art as pure idea and meaning. These included his "One and Three" series of installations and his "First Investigations", which were subtitled "Art as Idea as Idea". The title for the series was inspired by Ad Reinhardt's comment in 1958 that "art is art as art and everything else is everything else". By the 1970s, as people were saving his "Photostats" (quick photographic copies of text) as souvenirs and thus "objectifying" and "fetishizing" them, Kosuth published these artworks as advertisements in magazines to further undermine their object-like value. In the late-1960s, he also started to make installations with words applied to various objects or surfaces, shaped with neon light tubes. These words usually created short, simple statements that were quite straightforward and self-evident.

Kosuth's early Conceptual works were quickly appreciated for their innovation, and they secured him a teaching position at the School of Visual Arts in 1967. In 1969, he published his seminal "Art after Philosophy," a three-part essay published in *Studio International*, in which he explained how Marcel Duchamp was crucial for altering the direction of modernist art from radical visual developments to radical ideas and meanings expressed with ordinary, non-artistic materials and asserted that visual art could be adapted for investigations of meaning in language. In 1969 he became the American editor for the Conceptual group *Art & Language*, which was based in Great Britain, and continued with this group until 1976, until differences among its contributors over what was to be published and how some of the artists, including Kosuth, were becoming well-known independently of the group led him to depart. This practice of inquiry and contemplation has led Kosuth to refer to many of his works since the mid-1960s as "investigations" and so he has loosely labeled many works as, for example, his "First," "Third," and "Sixth" Investigations, in addition to their other titles, which are often more widely used and better known. Beginning in 1971 Kosuth enrolled in classes at the New School for Social Research in New York, studying philosophy and anthropology. He found the writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein, particularly his philosophy of language, quite informative and applicable to his own work. This influence can be found in Kosuth's experiments with words, probing the nature of meaning, language cognition, and the relationship between language and art, all of which have been constant concerns in his oeuvre. Wittgenstein's tautological statements on reality and non-reality in words and images, as explicated in his 1921 *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, are particularly relevant to Kosuth's work. Kosuth has continued to write and edit for numerous alternative publications throughout his career, espousing a stringent philosophy of the separation of art and aesthetics, often citing Duchamp's "readymades" as the basis for his thinking. In recent years Kosuth has received a number of commissions for large-scale public installations at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, the Louvre in Paris, and the Norman Foster-renovated Bundestag building in Berlin. He was on the faculty of the School of Visual Arts in New York City from 1967 to 1985. Since then he has been a visiting professor at various institutions, including the Staatliche Akademie der Bildende Kunst in Stuttgart, Yale University, Pratt Institute, and Oxford University. Today Kosuth splits his time between New York and Rome.

Info: Almine Rech, 64 Rue de Turenne (front space), Paris, France, Duration: 12/5-26/3/2022, Days & Hours: Tue-Sat 11:00-19:00, www.alminerech.com