

## L'écriture avant la lettre

Exhibition: 09.10.2021 till 09.01.2021, Opening: 09.10.2021, 19:00 uur

Location: West Den Haag in the former American embassy, Lange Voorhout 102, The Hague

**With works by David Antin, Walter Benjamin, Joseph Beuys, Hildegard van Bingen, John Cage, Uta Eisenreich, Octavian Esanu, Ryan Gander, Kenneth Goldsmith, Gary Hill, Victorie Hanna, Nicoline van Harskamp, Toine Horvers, Tehching Hsieh, Hedwig Houben, Emily Kocken, Günter Gerhard Lange, Stephane Mallarmé, Shigeru Matsui, Tine Melzer, Yoko Ono, Annetta Pedretti, The Rodina, Hannah Weiner, Brigitte Willberg and Unica Zürn.**

In the 11th century, the German writer, composer and mystic Hildegard van Bingen (1098 – 1179), created the 'Lingua Ignota' (unknown language), consisting out of a 1000 word strong vocabulary, which is meanwhile regarded as the first personal constructed language ever. It also included its own writing system, the 'Litterae Igotae'.

800 years later, the French symbolist poet Stephane Mallarmé (1842 – 1898), created his immensely complex lifework 'Le Livre'. A collection of over 200 pages of notes, about a book, supposed to be distributed as loose sheets and which had to be performed in public. Twice.

80 years later, the American poet, critic and performance artist David Antin (1932 – 2016), started to perform extemporaneously, improvised performances at readings and exhibitions, which he called 'talk poems'. Meanwhile, those 'talk poems' are regarded as one of the most crucial contributions, to a new artistic genre known as 'Performance Lectures': public performances, where different media and representations are deployed, to create an engaging narrative.

With the exhibition L'écriture avant la lettre, the Alphabetum wants to investigate the underlying structure of language. What is written and spoken language truly referring to? Is it really pointing towards pure ideas, as explained by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure? Or is there a deeper invisible structure of traces, as outlined by the french philosopher Jacques Derrida in his infamous book 'De la grammatologie'.

L'écriture avant la lettre presents 26 forms of lecture performance, whereby the interplay of spoken, written and performed language is an important element. It presents different kind of works like LP's, photography, texts, publications, installations and videos from national and international participants. With L'écriture avant la lettre, the Alphabetum aspires a trans-disciplinary approach. It is presenting unknown works by well recognised makers like Walter Benjamin's lecture about Piet Mondrian, works by people which have never or hardly be presented in art context before, like the english artist and activist Annetta Pedretti and her concept of the cybernetics of language and autopoiesi. But also contemporary artists, working and living in the Netherlands and abroad, like Uta Eisenreich, Octavian Esanu, Ryan Gander, Kenneth Goldsmith, Gary Hill, Victorie Hanna, Nicoline van Harskamp, Toine Horvers, Tehching Hsieh, Hedwig Houben, Emily Kocken, Shigeru Matsui, Tine Melzer, Yoko Ono, and The Rodina.

If you have any questions, please contact MJ Sondejijker: [marie-jose@westdenhaag.nl](mailto:marie-jose@westdenhaag.nl) or (0)70.3925359

The former American embassy 'Onze Ambassade' is managed by ANNA Vastgoed & Cultuur and Art Institute West Den Haag. The program of West is supported by the municipality of The Hague and the Mondriaan Fund.