

Background Information for Teachers on Liam Gillick

Liam Gillick aspires to great ideas. He is a rare sort of artist who believes that art can change the world - for the better! Gillick creates positive utopias and invites us to participate in new ways of thinking about the possible social and political implications of his conceptual models. He indirectly points out which areas of our post-industrial age we should best engage in by disrupting hierarchies and then questioning core interactions of our society.

Born in Aylesbury, Great Britain in 1964, Liam Gillick grew up in the last decades of the Cold War. The policies of Margaret Thatcher and her privatisation policies and those of Ronald Reagan defined the global stage and shaped Gillick's mindset as an activist and artist. He attended the art academy Goldsmith's College (1984 - 1987) but did not join the ranks of the popular Young British Artist (YBA) crowd. Instead, he began experimentation in a wide range of media - from writing theatre pieces, essays, texts to composing music, making videos, to designing décor, furniture, buildings and art objects. Gillick's art is holistic; he designs his exhibitions as a coherent unit, from the show's announcements, to the placement of the art objects and the rebuilding and lighting of the museum space. He considers the exhibition catalogue and texts as constituent to his artistic position and as another parallel form of his art production.

Gillick lives in London and New York with his wife, the video artist Sarah Morris, and child. He is an internationally recognised artist showing challenging and successful exhibitions worldwide. In 2009, he represented Germany at the Venice Art Biennale - quite an honor! - with a controversial sculptural kitchen installation. It was the first time that Germany's art pavilion had been designed by a non-German. The critical art reviews were quite mixed. This retrospective exhibition in Bonn is the first of its kind and might be viewed as an opportunity for Liam Gillick to introduce his multi-faceted art work to a broader audience.

Of the many influences evident in Gillick's art, Concept Art is the strongest. Artists of the 1960's concerned themselves with the question of what the nature of art was, what was necessary to call something art and how can it be exhibited, curated and critiqued. They examined the interplay between reality, idea and representation. For some artists, this ideological examination and critical reflection constituted the act of making their art. The material art object linked to the world of commodities and distribution was no longer a given in an original art work but rather the idea or concept concerning the art-making. The object and its authorship became secondary. A number of artists in the 1960's and 1970's began using language itself as a material. They saw that images can be recognised as being language-like and can be read and the reverse is also true - words can work like pictures. Art became insubstantial and dematerialized. It was about presentation, placement and interaction. Champions of conceptual art claimed that it is a democratic, egalitarian art form. Recipients should consider how, if and in what ways, the information from the art work could be meaningful. Interactive discourse and documentation became key concepts in artistic practice.

Liam Gillick would like individuals to discover meaning in his art. He is fascinated by potential future scenarios and the discovery of new social models regarding work and leisure. Gillick takes a step beyond commerce to make art that is not compliant. He would like us to probe, "What if" thoughts concerning society in this post-modern, global age in which so many political and economic models have failed (communism) and others seem inherently flawed (capitalism). How? Gillick uses streamlined architectural forms - minimalistic in shape, brilliant in color and executed with high-tech perfection - and sets up environmental spaces where discourse can occur. The artist sees these platforms for interaction as linked to historical events and ideological models as places for encounters where meaning can be uncovered, addressed and negotiated.

"What is Art - Is this Art" Arttalk welcomes the opportunity to introduce teens to broader notions of what art is and how it is relevant for their lives today. Liam Gillick himself insists on the "freedom of interpretation" and we would put his maxim to the test!!

Here a selection of the task-based activities that the classes would carry out in small groups at the Gillick ArtTalk:

1. Theater work(s)
2. Utopia calling
3. History rocks!
4. Chill at the Volvo Bar
5. Kitchen Stories
6. Dock on