

## ART & LANGUAGE

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### SIGHS TRAPPED BY LIARS

PARIS MARAIS

02 Mar 2018 - 19 May 2018

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Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac is pleased to present *Sighs Trapped by Liars*, an exhibition of works by Art & Language.

Art & Language is a pioneering English conceptual art group founded in 1968 that questions the critical assumptions of mainstream modern art practice and criticism. One of the first objectives of the collective was to develop alternative forms of art production and art mediation by pursuing a radical practice across institutions, genres and categories. Their entire history is marked by a wide range of artistic and theoretical formats but also by an exceptionally humorous opposition to the exclusive purity of some conceptual artists. Characterized by a collaborative approach and a rhizomatic structure, each project takes the form of a Gesamtkunstwerk with multiple entryways, often associating texts, sculpture, music etc... About *Sighs Trapped by Liars*, Art & Language says: "The term was first used by us in 1996, as the title of various works whose basic modular constituents are small canvasses that depict the pages of open books. The title was applied subsequently to particular works that took the form of 'furniture', constructed out of small canvasses depicting pages that show text by Art & Language. The first work to bear the title was shown at Documenta X in 1997."

In a mise en abyme gesture, the photographs presented in the exhibition feature such furniture displayed in a domestic environment where overpainted isolated figures seem to grieve or contemplate an absence. In another group of photographs, the sense of absence and distance is enhanced by overpainted white dots that blur the original image.

In 2007, Art & Language collaborated for the fourth time with Red Crayola, a psychedelic experimental rock band from Houston to release an album. Titled *Sighs Trapped by Liars* the album contains 13 songs written by Art & Language. The visual display of the lyrics exemplifies Art & Language's interest in concrete poetry.

The lyrics of the song from which the album gets its name has its origin in a sado-masochistic text that has been revisited by Art & Language in the guise of Mrs Malaprop, a satirical character in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's 1775 comedy-of-manners *The Rivals*.

One of the funniest aspects of Mrs Malaprop's character is that she often uses an incorrect word to express herself. The popularity of the play led to the creation of the literary term "malapropism", meaning the practice (whether by intent or by accident) of using an incorrect word that sounds similar to the appropriate word.

Art & Language writes: "Indeed, Mrs. Malaprop has visited more than once. As it is her big night out, she gets to Malaprop her own text. Unlike French and Spanish, for example, English is poor in rhyme, and the vocabulary of low-grade pornography is restricted. Mrs. Malaprop is partly a rhymer. Her homophonic solecisms are thus applied and reapplied to a set of terms whose auditory shadows remain even as they recede. The original terms are ghosts whose meanings have been redirected by the new terms that have colonised them. They make a sort of sense."