

## “Art & Language 1965–2025” Fondation CAB

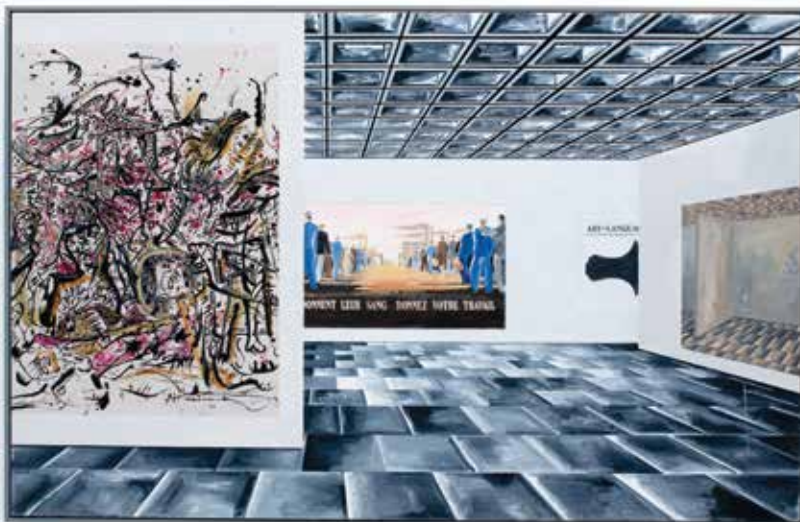
We see a picture of a museum interior. Its slate-tiled floor, coffered ceiling, and movable walls recall New York’s Whitney Museum of American Art in its former Marcel Breuer building. This painting was made in 1987 by Michael Baldwin and Mel Ramsden of Art & Language (A&L), and in it their own past work adorns the museum walls. One of the paintings within the painting, another view of the same gallery filled with A&L art, further enhances the vertigo of auto-historicization. Nearly forty-odd years on, this institutional dreamscape has materialized in A&L’s retrospective at Fondation CAB. *Mise en abyme* within *mise en abyme*, *Index: Incident in a Museum XXXII*, 1987, from the series “Indexes,” 1972–, is surrounded by the actual works it depicts (or their close siblings). Except that, rather than four works, there are fifty-one, spanning the group’s six-decade career.

A&L was founded in Coventry, England, around 1968 by four artists, among them Terry Atkinson and Baldwin. Membership fluctuated during the first half of the 1970s, partly owing to the establishment of a New York faction of the group by Ian Burn, Joseph Kosuth, and Ramsden. After 1976, the A&L moniker came to designate the work of Baldwin and Ramsden—a collaboration that ended only with Ramsden’s death in 2024. Since then, Baldwin has continued the project alone.

Absences are unavoidable in such surveys. The American side of A&L barely registers a mention. Except for *Bibliography on Aspects of Personality Theory*, 1973, a small card file, there is scant evidence of A&L’s analytic Conceptual art on either side of the Atlantic, including their pathbreaking *Indexes* of intragroup conversation from the early ’70s.

The earliest works in the show are a few proto-Conceptual experiments predating the official formation of the group, including Baldwin’s *Untitled (Mirror)*, 1965, a store-bought mirror clipped to a canvas, and Ramsden’s *Secret Painting*, 1967–68, a black square alongside a text panel that begins: “THE CONTENT OF THIS PAINTING INVISIBLE.” Such vexed relations between picture and text are evident throughout. But the show prioritizes Baldwin and Ramsden’s practice as painters. Their

Art & Language,  
*Index: Incident in a  
Museum XXXII*, 1987,  
oil and acrylic on  
canvas, 63 1/8 × 97 3/8".  
From the series  
“Indexes,” 1972–.



tentative late-’70s engagement with the medium is illustrated with a “bad painting” based on a Nazi propaganda poster from Vichy France. One of their subsequent efforts to render portraits of Lenin using Pollock’s drip technique is prominently positioned in the main gallery. Straddling the Cold War divide between modernism and realism, these clever canvases mark the beginning of the pair’s engagement with painting proper.

A sequence of pictures made between 1986 and 1990 is hung along one wall. Evoking an oversize paint palette, the seemingly accidental dabs, smears, and brushstrokes of *Hostage V*, 1988–89, are interrupted by a floor-plan-ish geometric configuration, its pieces alternating between spatial depictions of a museum interior (seemingly the same one, the former Whitney) and close-ups of faux wood-grain and other surfaces. The correspondence between the painting’s chromatic range and that of the neighboring *Incident in a Museum* implies a genetic connection between them, enhancing *Hostage V*’s contrived indexicality.

Nearby, two more *Hostages*, both 1989–90, offer views of a poplar-treed landscape, partially obfuscated by smears of paint between the canvas and a pane of glass screwed flush to its surface. A study for one of these paintings reveals that the distribution of smears was derived from graphic deformations of the letters *SURF*, code for *surface*. The final product is inscrutable: A modernist abstraction planted with taboo imagery—a botched genre painting—it isn’t quite either of these things.

In the group’s post-’90s work, series restatements yield interestingly finicky versions of past works (the meagerness of painted-Teslin badges and paper garlands is deliberate). A pair of 2013 Pollock-style paintings of Barack Obama and recent drawings of the A&L studio are less riveting. Other later pieces include *Portrait and a Dream XIII* (2002–2009), a meditation on art’s capture by corporate taste, and near the entrance *Study for Index: Landscape with St. George* (2000–2001), an amalgamation of abstraction, Conceptual art theory, and pornography.

Technically convoluted and hermeneutically complicated, Baldwin and Ramsden’s work is hard to write about. This quality is rare in the dumbed-down world of contemporary art, where legibility trumps complexity. In this scenario, the continuing relevance of A&L owes paradoxically to their espousal of hermetic forms of self-reference.

—David Homewood

### WARSAW

## “The Woman Question 1550– 2025”

### Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw

The exhibition “The Woman Question 1550–2025” feels timely, coming after the right-wing rule in Poland between 2015 and 2023 and at a moment when women are still fighting for access to abortion. Dispensing with chronology, curator Alison M. Gingeras brings together nearly 200 works by almost 150 artists, maintaining a balance between Polish and international practitioners. Focused primarily on modern and contemporary art, supplemented by Renaissance, Baroque, and nineteenth-century works, the exhibition is structured through nine thematic sections. Using iconography as the primary tool for exploring women artists’ agency allows Gingeras to make visible some of the codes through which women have been represented and have represented themselves.

The opening section juxtaposes, among others, Artemisia Gentileschi’s *Susanna and the Elders*, 1610, in which a young, unclothed woman attempts to shield herself from the leering gazes and gestures