



**JOSEPH KOSUTH**  
*'The Language of Equilibrium'*  
Monastic Headquarters of the Mekhitarian Order  
Island of San Lazzaro degli Armeni, Venice

Curated by Adelina von Fürstenberg



**52. Esposizione  
Internazionale  
d'Arte**  
Eventi collaterali

*A project by* ART for The World, Geneva – Milan, NGO associated with the United Nations Department of Public Information  
*In collaboration with* Hangar Bicocca Spazio d'Arte Contemporanea, Milan  
*Courtesy* Galerie Gmurzynska, Zug and Zürich

**Opening:** June 6, from 6:30 pm to 9:30 pm  
Vaporetto n. 20 from San Zaccaria, departure at 6:30, 7:50 and 8:30 pm  
*On June 7-8-9 a boat service will be available from Giardini to the Island of San Lazzaro.*

**Dates:** June 10 – November 21, 2007  
**Public opening hours of the Monastic Headquarters of the Mekhitarian Order:** every day from 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm

**How to reach the Island of San Lazzaro:** Vaporetto n. 20  
**Vaporetto timetable:**  
from San Zaccaria to San Lazzaro h. 3:10 pm  
from San Lazzaro to San Zaccaria h. 4:45 pm or 5:25 pm

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The Island of San Lazzaro degli Armeni is the location for a project by Joseph Kosuth, entitled *The Language of Equilibrium*, collateral event of the 52nd International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia. At the invitation of Adelina von Fürstenberg, the founder of ART for The World, Joseph Kosuth has intervened on different parts of the island, along the external perimeter wall to the observatory, from the promontory to the bell tower. *The Language of Equilibrium* is a project by ART for The World, a Non-governmental Organization (NGO) associated with the United Nations Department of Public Information (UNDPI), based in Geneva and Milan, in collaboration with Hangar Bicocca, Spazio d'Arte Contemporanea, Milan, which will host a large solo show by Joseph Kosuth in 2008. Joseph Kosuth has described the project as follows: *'This project, in yellow neon, has as its basis language itself. It is a work which is both a reflection on its own construction as well as on the history and culture of its location. This work is comprised of words from the Armenian, Italian and English language. Language here is used as a signifier of the history of the project of the Mekhitarian Order. Yellow neon is chosen for this work because of the symbolic understanding of yellow at the time of the founding of the monastery as meaning 'virtue, intellect, esteem and majesty' (Böckler, 1688). The two supportive components of the work, based on the word 'water', are comprised of words arrived at through a view of their history and use. One aspect of this installation shows this relationship. The other part reflects the role of these words in the Haygazian Pararan, or Armenian Dictionary (1749) compiled by Abbot Mekhitar, founder of the Order. The structure of this installation has two elements, which are integrated on four diverse architectural locations: the bell tower, the northwest wall, the promontory, the observatory. These four locations reflect both the diversity of the island's architecture as well as articulating its history and culture. The work engages the cultural and social history of the evolution of language itself, how the history of a word shows its ties to cultures and social realities quite distinct and disconnected. It is only in the present when a word is used, as it is with a work of art being experienced, that all that which comprises the present finds its location in the process of making meaning. Here, in this work, language becomes both an allegory and an actual result of all of which it should want to speak.'*

The island of San Lazzaro is the headquarters of the Mekhitarian Order, founded in Constantinople in the first years of the 18th Century by the Abbot Mekhitar of Sebaste, who settled together with his monks on the island in 1717 after escaping persecution. Mekhitar understood the implicit potential of the written word for the preservation of Armenian culture threatened by the vicissitudes of history. The monastery therefore not only has a rich library, consisting of over 140,000 volumes, but until 1993 it also contained an active printing office capable of publishing texts in thirty-six languages, making San Lazzaro a global reference point for Eastern and in particular Armenian culture. It is thanks to this printing office that the first translation of the Bible into Armenian was made, including a guide to grammar and a dictionary of classical Armenian. These books are archived in the library along with 4,500 precious manuscripts, including many illuminated works by Armenian miniaturists and by the Greek and Syrian holy fathers.

### *Biography Joseph Kosuth*

Joseph Kosuth is one of the pioneers of Conceptual art and installation art, initiating language based works and appropriation strategies in the 1960s. His work has consistently explored the production and role of language and meaning within art. His more than forty year inquiry into the relation of language to art has taken the form of installations, museum exhibitions, public commissions and publications throughout Europe, the Americas and Asia, including five Documenta(s) and four Venice Biennale(s), one of which was presented in the Hungarian Pavilion (1993). Awards include the *Brandeis Award*, 1990, *Frederick Weisman Award*, 1991, the *Menzione d'Onore* at the Venice Biennale, 1993, and the *Chevalier de l'ordre des Arts et des Lettres* from the French government in 1993. He received a Cassandra Foundation Grant in 1968. In June 1999, a 3.00 franc postage stamp was issued by the French government in honor of his work in Figeac. In February 2001, he received the *Laura Honoris Causa*, doctorate in Philosophy and Letters from the University of Bologna. In 2001 his novel 'Purloined' was published by Salon Verlag. In October 2003, he received the Austrian Republic's highest honor for accomplishments in science and culture, the *Decoration of Honor in Gold for Services to the Republic of Austria*.

Born in Toledo, Ohio, January 31, 1945. Educated at the Cleveland Institute of Art, 1963-64; The School of Visual Arts, New York City, 1965-67; The New School for Social Research, New York City (anthropology and philosophy), 1971-72. Faculty, Department of Fine Art, The School of Visual Arts, New York City, 1967-1985; Professor at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Hamburg, 1988-90; Staatliche Akademie der Bildende Künste, Stuttgart, 1991-1997; and the Kunstakademie Munich, 2001-2006. Currently Professor at Istituto Universitario di Architettura, Venice, Italy. Has functioned as visiting professor and guest lecturer at various universities and institutions for nearly thirty years, some of which include: Yale University, Cornell University, New York University, Duke University, UCLA, Cal Arts, Cooper Union, Pratt Institute, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Art Institute of Chicago, Royal Academy, Copenhagen, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford University, University of Rome, Berlin Kunstakademie, Royal College of Art, London, Glasgow School of Art, The Hayward Gallery, London, The Sorbonne, Paris, The Sigmund Freud Museum, Vienna. He lives in Rome and New York City.