

PRESSBOOK

Claude RUTAULT

Purple

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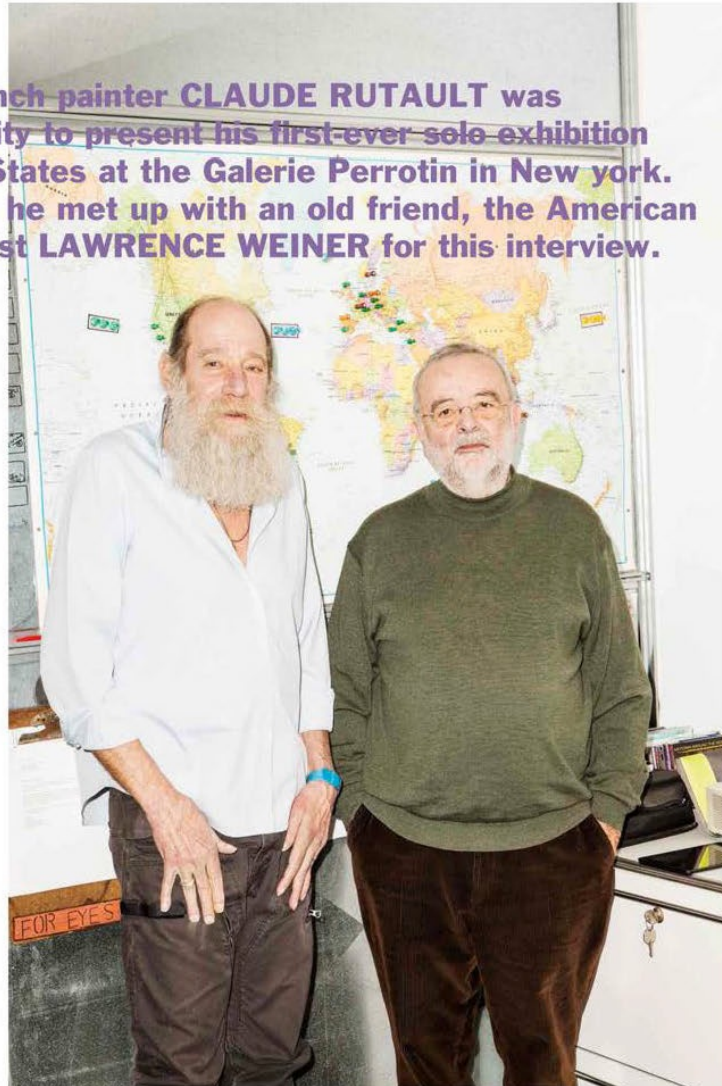
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Legendary french painter **CLAUDE RUTAULT** was in New York City to present his first ever solo exhibition in the United States at the Galerie Perrotin in New York. While in town, he met up with an old friend, the American conceptual artist **LAWRENCE WEINER** for this interview.



interview by **ALEXIS DAHAN**
portrait by **JEREMY LIEBMAN**

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP: A 36 x 36 inches removal to the lathing or support wall of plaster or wallboard from a wall, *Lawrence Weiner* constructing the work for the exhibition "When Attitudes Become Form: Works-Concepts-Processes-Situations-Information," Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland, 1969, photo courtesy of Lawrence Weiner, AARS/VAGA

OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM: *Claude Ruitault*, charity begins with others, 2014, paint on canvas, dimensions variable according to the actualization (actualization at Galerie Perrotin: 181 1/2 x 47 1/4 inches)



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FIFTY YEARS AGO European and American artists came up with the idea that simply thinking about art could lead to new ways of making it. They took art deeper into the mind than the eyes could perceive, straight into the realm of thought. French artist Claude Rutault and American artist Lawrence Weiner began as abstract painters, then started to make art delimited by descriptive analogy. Weiner stenciled statements, such as "To See and Be Seen," directly onto walls and spaces, using Helvetica typefaces. Each conveyed physical relations in mental images about space, time, and materials. Rutault stayed with painting, but followed his "de-finition/method," using store-bought canvases on stretchers — circular, oval, and rectangular, and in various sizes — painted the same color as the wall, and optionally but traditionally arranged. Strict as their methods might seem, both artists are stunningly aesthetic in their use of space and material. Their approach to art is conceived for the complexities of the Information Age to which we all belong, where minds are already full of images and memories.

ALEXIS DAHAN — *Claude, could you tell us when you first heard about Lawrence Weiner?*

CLAUDE RUTAULT — It was toward the end of the '60s or the early '70s, through the curator René Denizot, at a time when conceptual art was shown at Yvon Lambert, on the Rue de l'Échaudé in Paris. It was then I became interested in his work, especially in his well-known *Declaration of Intent* (1968):

1. The artist may construct the piece.
2. The piece may be fabricated.
3. The piece need not be built.

Later we would run into each other, but it was because of his *Declaration* that I was more interested in Lawrence's work than that of other conceptual artists.

ALEXIS DAHAN — *And Lawrence, when did you first see Claude's work?*

LAWRENCE WEINER — It must have been in '72 or '73, in a conversation with other Parisian artists like Michel Parmentier and Daniel Buren. I remember having seen his work in a little gallery in the sixth arrondissement. It was a time when Paris was quite open. Normally it's rather closed; each artist hangs out with his or her clique. But in the early '70s, perhaps because of the political confusion of that time, Paris was artistically wide open, and I learned a lot about French art. Claude talks about conceptual art, but for me, at that time, conceptual art did not exist. I was just beginning to create my sculptures, with their possibility of being read and written.

ALEXIS DAHAN — *How would you compare the art scene in Paris with the New York scene of that time?*

LAWRENCE WEINER — New York was stratified. It's different. There were many different kinds of artists, the Abstract Expressionists, etc. There were different groups, but they were not closed off to other practices. Some Abstract Expressionists supported my work.

ALEXIS DAHAN — *Claude, you came to New York in the late '70s; what did you think of the scene here?*

CLAUDE RUTAULT — I had a painting studio at PS1, but the art being made there did not interest me in the least — except for some artists from the previous generation, like Carl Andre or Donald Judd. And younger artists such as Allan McCollum. There was a lot of "pattern painting." It took over the scene and reminded me of the French scene and the groups like Support/Surface.

LAWRENCE WEINER — Absolutely, and of course Support/Surface was showing at Leo Castelli. At that time in New York in the '70s, it was possible to communicate with other artists. It was a more multilingual situation, while today I would say it's monolingual, entirely limited to English.

CLAUDE RUTAULT — That openness in Paris you mentioned before — I experienced it more as a European openness. In Holland, Belgium, Italy — you could be in touch with a whole circuit of artists that were leaving painting while still remaining true artists. The peak being in '72, '74 — we actually had a lot of hope.

LAWRENCE WEINER — But it didn't last, and now everything's changed.

ALEXIS DAHAN — *Lawrence, did you have a similar experience?*

LAWRENCE WEINER — I began in '64 with a first show using painting on 56th Street, in New York. I was friends with John Chamberlain and Donald Judd, from the generation before us. Claude, are we the same age? I was born in 1942.

CLAUDE RUTAULT — And I was born in 1941.

LAWRENCE WEINER — So we're the same age. Daniel Buren was four years older, but we started out at the same time.

ALEXIS DAHAN — *What were your influences, Claude?*

CLAUDE RUTAULT — I was very influenced by the events of May '68 in France, and it was only after that that I gave up on images, and then my approach changed radically in '73. But during this period, Daniel Buren...

LAWRENCE WEINER — And Robert Barry...

CLAUDE RUTAULT — had gotten started way before that. As if two completely different trajectories came together at a certain moment.

ALEXIS DAHAN — *Let's talk more about the particularities of both of your practices. Lawrence, could you tell us what interests you the most in Claude's work?*

LAWRENCE WEINER — Don't misunderstand me, but there is an arrogance in it that I find interesting. It means that people have to take the trouble to enter Claude's world.

CLAUDE RUTAULT — Yes, there are formal elements, but if you're really looking to develop an interest in my work, you have to make an effort. It's not a type of painting that opens itself up directly. Beginning with the object, you have to also consider the consequences of that object. And this requires attention and reflection.

ALEXIS DAHAN — *A little like when you want to read philosophy, you have to pay a sort of intellectual tax to get into it.*

CLAUDE RUTAULT — Absolutely. Even I had to wait while I figured out what I was doing.

LAWRENCE WEINER — It's the difference between American existentialism and completely French existentialism. When a Frenchman gets up in the morning, he knows his own context, his history, his world. When an American wakes up, all that matters is what he makes. It's what I make, that's it, that's all I am. The other existentialist — and this is why I used the word "arrogance" earlier — he takes for granted that there is a world out there that understands Flaubert or Diderot. I don't take that for granted in my life. I'm aware of it, but I don't take it for granted. And the work I make is placed in such a context that you don't have to know anything. You don't have to agree to anything.

ALEXIS DAHAN — *Does this have something to do with your three rules?*

LAWRENCE WEINER — When I said "You may construct the piece," and such and such, it really was all about opening it up to the fact that anyway you get it is fine with me. And if I'm careful, I make something that cannot be used for sexist or racist purposes. For Claude, it's important how the work is used, which is fine. For Robert Barry, too, this is important. I personally would prefer that these things be just in the world, so that I can see what is done to it.

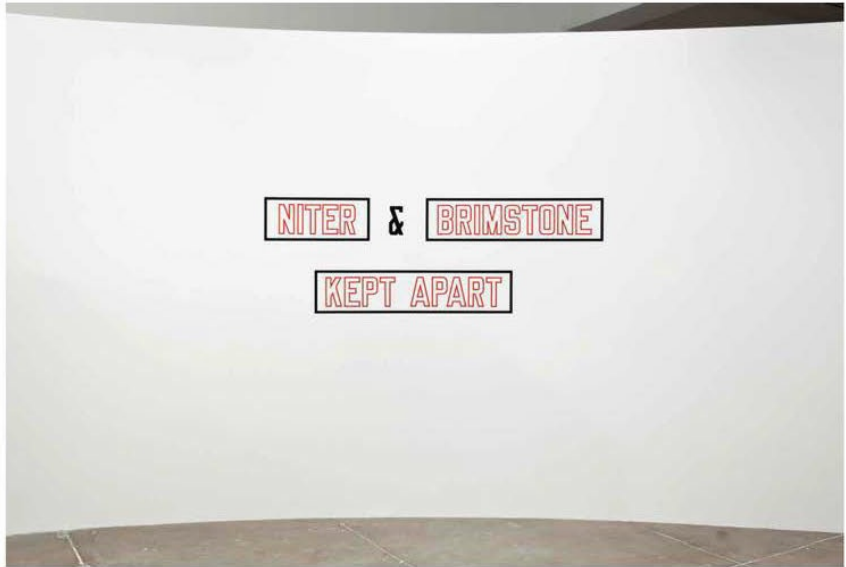
ALEXIS DAHAN — *I cannot help but notice this apparent similarity in your work: the artwork exists before it is produced.*

LAWRENCE WEINER — But it's like that for all artists!

CLAUDE RUTAULT — Well, it depends on what "production" means.



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more an “inside” painter than an “outside” painter. We may summarize his approach as being the first and the last gesture of painting, at the same time.

ALEXIS DAHAN — *I have to ask this, as you are both now part of art history: any thoughts on today's art world?*

LAWRENCE WEINER — We have a fairly healthy art world right now, but the majority of the art is academic. And the academy exists by giving answers. At the very least it gives solutions. Art is not about having answers; it has to be about asking questions.

CLAUDE RUTAULT — It is difficult to contradict yourself. You can explain Malevich's return to the figurative by examining the precise context in which it happened. In any case, I have no intention of putting flowers on my canvases!

END



TOP: Lawrence Weiner, *Scattered Matter Brought to a Known Density, With the Weight of the World, Cusped*, 2007, language + the materials referred to, photo courtesy of Lawrence Weiner and Marian Goodman Gallery

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP: Lawrence Weiner, *Niter & Brimstone Kept Apart*, 1993, language + the materials referred to, photo courtesy of Lawrence Weiner and Marian Goodman Gallery

OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM: Claude Rutault, *a saturday morning on the grande jatte or at port-en-bessin*, 2010, paint on canvas, dimensions variable according to the actualization (actualization at Galerie Perrotin: 104 1/8 x 144 inches around an invisible rectangle of 81 x 122 1/16 inches) unique. View of the exhibition Claude Rutault, Galerie Perrotin, New York, November 20, 2014 – January 3, 2015

de-finition/method:
keeping seurat's painting "a sunday afternoon on the island of the grande jatte" (1884-1886) in mind, a frame is created around its absence, a frame that could frame it, should it happen to stop by. this frame is actually composed of small rectangular, square, round, or oval canvases of varied sizes. the arrangement of these canvases can change from actualization to actualization. all the canvases will be painted the same color as the wall on which they're hung. the frame contains a few gaps that allow the gaze to circulate from the inside to the outside.

All Claude Rutault photos by Yachin Parbam and courtesy of Galerie Perrotin