

Joseph Kosuth

(Toledo, Ohio, 1945)

“Create the truth that you wish to know; and I, in knowing the truth that you have proposed to me, will make it in such a way that there will be no possibility of my doubting it, since I am the very one who has made it. G.V.”

“Fa’ vero ciò che tu vuoi conoscere; ed io, in conoscere il vero che mi avete proposto il farò, talché non mi resta in conto alcuno da dubitarne, perché io stesso l’ho fatto. G.V.”

This phrase, which Joseph Kosuth quotes from Giambattista Vico, stands out, luminous, in the original Italian, on the exterior of the Castello di Rivoli Museum, and in English inside the museum’s rooms. The two parts of the work play with the concepts of equivalence and tautology, the latter Kosuthian by antonomasia.

The translation tends to create an equivalence of meaning between one language and the other. At least in principle, it aspires to have the qualities of a tautology, but the greater length of the English compared to Vico’s old Italian — as a rule, the opposite is true with these two languages – already presents a problem and declares an irremediable distance, perhaps the same one that pushes the artist to entrust to the viewer’s memory the rejoining of the two pieces of writing in a single installation.

Vico himself expresses an idea of truth that seems to bounce between two mirrors: on the one hand, that of the thought, of the idea, and that of knowledge on the other. The truth that derives from the dialogue of these two moments seems luminous but is as fleeting as a spark.

From his earliest artistic research Kosuth has worked with language. He seeks in it a degree zero where the work and its meaning are perfectly bonded, leaving no space for ambiguity, closed within the rarefied unity of the tautology. The artist makes this concept central to his interests and indicates it to the entire art world as the sole possible content of art, in spite of form and its accidents. The process of conquering the absolute equivalence of artistic language, compared to philosophical language, proceeds through the juxtaposition of word/object/image in works such as the famous *One and Three Chairs*. The scansion is that of the path outlined by Plato: from the purity of the idea, which presides over the linguistic conceptual expression, to its decline into the body of reality, to the basely apish nature of reproduction.

In order to eliminate the body of the work and reveal only its idea, Kosuth goes in search of disembodied expressive means, from the glass sheets in *No Number#8 (+216 after Augustine’s Confessions)*, 1989, to the neon light that conveys the words of Giambattista Vico in *Seeing Knowing*, 2004. (EV)