

**ON KAWARA**  
**UNANSWERED QUESTIONS**

## Personal Structures Art Projects # 04

### ON KAWARA UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

This book is the documentation of *Personal Structures Art Projects #04*. It has been published as a limited edition. The edition comprises 250 copies of which 50 DeLuxe, numbered from 1 to 50, and 50 DeLuxe hors commerce, numbered from I to L. The 150 Standard copies are numbered from 51 to 200. Each item of this limited edition consists of a book and a CD in a case, housed together in a cassette. The DeLuxe edition additionally contains a postcard with a question for On Kawara, returned to sender.

This limited edition has been divided as follows:

# 1-50: DeLuxe edition: Luiscius Antiquarian Booksellers, Netherlands

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# ON KAWARA UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

KARLYN DE JONGH

## ON KAWARA: UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

Today is Saturday, 19 December 2009, and right now I am in my apartment in Venice, Italy. My name is Karlyn De Jongh. I am an independent curator and author from the Netherlands and I have spent two years working on the project *Unanswered Questions to On Kawara*.

*Unanswered Questions to On Kawara* consisted of collecting questions for the artist On Kawara. I gathered questions from all kinds of people who are somehow connected with On Kawara, people who either know the artist or his work very well, asking them to submit a question they themselves wanted to ask him. Their questions have all been formulated in the languages I was certain On Kawara would understand: Japanese and English. It resulted in a collection of questions posed by 79 people from different parts over the world—Africa, Asia, Europe, North and South America. As they are, the questions provide information about On Kawara's life and work. This special edition contains all questions asked.

### **On Kawara**

On Kawara (born in Japan in 1932) has been making work that addresses time, space and existence since the 1960s. To say something about On Kawara, to give a biography or to state something about the meaning of his work, is complicated. It seems that On Kawara has never published any personal written statements, that he doesn't give any public speeches, and that he doesn't give interviews.

Catalogue texts about On Kawara are often formal descriptions of his work. Biographies of On Kawara have been made without

detailed facts concerning his personal history. Often they only state the amount of days the artist has been alive at the time of writing. For example:

“Biography of On Kawara (August 16, 1974) 15 211 Tage”<sup>1</sup>

Taking the information from his *100 Years Calendar*, On Kawara seems to have been born on 24 December 1932. Today that means On Kawara would now have been alive for 28,119 days.

Because of all these elements, most people—who, like me, have never met On Kawara personally—only seem to be able to ‘know’ the artist through his work. But what if you think his work is so important that you want to include him in a publication with texts by, and interviews with, other living artists? How do you include someone who solely communicates through his work? Someone who never publishes any personal written statements? What do you do?

The only thing we can do to get information about On Kawara’s life is to rely on statements from people who have met the artist and said something about him. Having to rely on such statements, we can only guess about reasons why On Kawara does not speak publicly. Franck Gautherot and Jonathan Watkins, for example, state: “There is too much and therefore nothing for the artist to say.”<sup>2</sup> In a recent catalogue, curator Charles Wylie says: “Kawara, as an artist, does not, in fact, wish to be quoted nor to have his ideas and thoughts paraphrased: his project is not that of subjective autobiography but of steady, disciplined recording, in universally recognized and accepted objective terms, of experience and time that stretches from the year 1966 to today.”<sup>3</sup> Or: as Ulrich Wilmes clearly pointed out in an email to me: “I know Kawara and for quite a long time. And if you do some research you will find out that he never wrote a text or published a statement, nor did he ever give an inter-

view. This is not a caprice of an eccentric artist, but part of his artistic concept. The only way that he communicates is via his works!”<sup>4</sup>

On Kawara created several series of works that seem to manifest his existence. Most of these series he started in the 1960s. For example: Since 1966 On Kawara has been making the *Today Series*; the series *I met* and *I got up* both started in 1968 in Mexico City; his I am still alive telegrams have been sent at irregular intervals since 1970. Of these series, the *Today Series*—also called *Date Paintings*—is probably the most well known: a monochrome ground on which month, day and year are painted in letters and figures, the spelling being influenced by the country he was in. On Kawara continues to paint such works until the present time.

To me, On Kawara’s work seems to be a self-portrait. The series of facts that these works present, say something about On Kawara’s life. The series lend presence to the artist, while he himself remains physically or, depending on the viewer, even personally, absent. His works seem to state something similar to the number of days in his biography: at that specific point in time On Kawara existed.

The questions in this book are a way to learn more. They give additional information and add to the knowledge we have about the artist: the 79 questioners, the questions they ask, the statements they give, all these things provide information about On Kawara.

### **The beginning of my collection**

The project *Unanswered Questions to On Kawara* started in April 2007. It was the result of the wish to incorporate On Kawara in the publication *PERSONAL STRUCTURES: TIME SPACE EXISTENCE* which includes interviews, essays and symposium texts by 53 artists, communicating their thoughts verbally or in written word.<sup>5</sup> Given his artistic concept, including On Kawara was a challenge.

To ask an art historian to write about his work was not an option for us. Instead, Rene Rietmeyer suggested asking people who know On Kawara personally, or at least his work, to submit a question and then try to present these collected questions to On Kawara. And: in the expected case that he would not answer, we would publish these questions in *PERSONAL STRUCTURES: TIME SPACE EXISTENCE* as the *Unanswered Questions to On Kawara*.

I met Rene Rietmeyer for the first time on 14 May 2007. At that time I was a student, on the verge of finishing my M.Phil. in Art History at Leiden University, Netherlands. I was asked to work with the project *PERSONAL STRUCTURES* as a curator. Together with Sarah Gold, I organized the *PERSONAL STRUCTURES* symposium and exhibition *TIME* in Amsterdam, Netherlands. As part of the exhibition we showed twenty *I am still alive* telegrams, which On Kawara had sent to the German art critic and writer Klaus Honnef in 1971. I placed this installation in the exhibition: it was my first opportunity to work so directly with On Kawara, and I was deeply impressed.

After finishing my studies, in September 2007 I went to Venice, Italy, where I worked for the German Pavilion at the Biennale di Venezia. Rietmeyer was in Murano at that time where he was creating his *Venezia* glass-boxes. During a dinner on the island of Murano, he asked if I would be interested in taking on this On Kawara project. The artist and this project intrigued me and, without thinking, I said "yes." *Unanswered Questions to On Kawara* became my project.

Our initial idea was to collect approximately 50 questions. And at this point in time, when I first heard about the project, we had only collected one: Rietmeyer had asked Klaus Honnef for a question, because of his connection to On Kawara. It was 7 May 2007 and Honnef had spontaneously reacted with "Do you still remember me?"

After hearing about the project, I immediately started doing my homework. Sitting outside of the pavilion that October, in cold and rainy Venice, I searched the Internet for names that showed up in connection with On Kawara. I was looking for answers to my own questions: To whom did he send his telegrams? Who received postcards? Who did he meet? Who wrote about him? Which museums have his works in their collection? What galleries handle his work? At first, I was overwhelmed by the number of names that came up. I realized: this was not art in theory; this was art in reality and I was new to it.

### **Dublin, Ireland, Winter 2007**

After Venice, I moved to Dublin, where I would spend most of my time for the next 18 months. Full of naïve confidence, I started contacting the first people on my list. A few people reacted to my request, but without actually sending me a question to pass along to On Kawara. Amongst them was Jean-Marc Avrilla. He said that, to him, it seemed difficult NOT to accept my request and participate in my project. Avrilla added that he considers On Kawara's work as one of the most important in contemporary art, "dealing not only with concept but with poetry and corresponding precisely to changes of the time perception."<sup>6</sup> Xavier Douroux also reacted. Together with the Le Consortium co-director Franck Gautherot, he had done several books and exhibitions about On Kawara; Douroux was traveling at that moment and wanted me to call him the week after. I was naïve and did not foresee, that it would actually take a very long time to get the result: 7 months for Avrilla's question; 12 for that of Douroux. But at that time, that they hadn't sent me a question yet did not matter to me: the fact that they replied was enough. I was full of hope that the project would become a success. Until this: a message from someone at David Zwirner Gallery:

“Thank you for your email that you sent to the gallery regarding On Kawara. I have sent this on to On. However, On Kawara does not indeed do interviews, nor is quoted or have published dialogues. We thank you for considering him, but he is declining participation with this project. We wish you luck.”

I thought I would die. I kept thinking about their response for weeks afterwards: what happened there? What did I do wrong? For a while, I left the project as it was.

### **Tokyo, Japan, March & April 2008**

For the *PERSONAL STRUCTURES* project we went to Tokyo, where Sarah Gold and I organized the symposium *EXISTENCE* at the Setagaya Art Museum. Between meetings, I looked for anything related to On Kawara: I went to the National Museum of Modern Art where I was confronted with On Kawara’s early, figurative work. And I went to Gallery 360°, a gallery that shows several Japanese and Western artists and also handled work by On Kawara. I remember sitting at a small table with the gallery owner Toshiyuki Nemoto, his wife Miyuki Sugaya and the artist Yuko Sakurai. We were served tea and sweet, sticky rice balls. With Yuko’s help, I was able to communicate with Nemoto, who gave me a question—in Japanese—on the spot. I was thrilled! Nemoto’s question meant, for me, the real start of the project.

The *PERSONAL STRUCTURES* symposium was a success. I especially remember our lunch breaks under the blossoming sakura trees in the museum’s park: having sushi together with all the artists who spoke at the symposium. Choosing this specific time of year had been Joseph Kosuth’s idea, who had come especially to Tokyo to speak at our symposium.

One day after the symposium, it was 4 April 2008, we met Joseph Kosuth again. It was a Friday night and we went out for dinner in

a traditional Japanese restaurant. We were sitting on the floor, in a circle. In the middle were plates with carp. As I remember, at first Kosuth was as he always was, but his behavior changed when he heard about my project *Unanswered Questions to On Kawara*. He impulsively reacted with the question “When will you call me?” Seconds later, he considered having the question translated in Japanese. Later, he withdrew his question and didn’t want to contribute it at that point in time. He then explained to us why he came up with this question: Kosuth told us about how he and On Kawara used to play Risk together. That Kosuth always took the initiative for their meetings and that once he had said something like: “On, why don’t YOU call ME next time.” On Kawara apparently never did.

### **Dublin, Ireland, Spring 2008**

With Nemoto’s question in my pocket and a freshly developed love for Japan, my enthusiasm for the project was enormous and I had forgotten about the difficult start a few weeks earlier. Back in Dublin, I started searching for and contacting new people. Now it appeared that 50 questions might be obtainable.

### **Miami, USA, Spring 2008**

On 1 May 2008 I went to Miami, where Sarah Gold and I curated two exhibitions. Being in Miami, I started contacting new people. I focused on people in the USA. The Americans seemed easier to reach: I spoke with Christian Scheidemann who stated that he met On Kawara once, with Charles Wylie who had just curated the On Kawara exhibition in Dallas, and with several other people.

Even though Wylie declined my request for a question, because he was not sure about how it would fit in with On Kawara’s artistic concept, slowly more questions came. From Ute Meta Bauer, who came to her question because of a death in her family. From

Gregor Jansen, whose question I received the next day, with compliments to me on the project. From William Wells, who allowed me to choose one of the following:

1- 29th-05-08 "What is the identity of today's date." or

2- "If the validity of time is reduced to the man-made construct that is the date, is our existence annulled if a day is undocumented?"

And from Fumio Nanjo. Nanjo had contributed to several books on On Kawara and as the director of the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo, for me he was one of the key figures on my list. I felt I was getting closer to reaching my goal.

#### **Continental Europe, Summer 2008**

Back in Europe, I went on a tour together with Rene Rietmeyer and Sarah Gold. For the *PERSONAL STRUCTURES* project we had some meetings with artists. One of them was Roman Opalka, in Beaumont-sur-Sarthe, France. The meeting with Opalka impressed me tremendously: his house, his studio, the prepared canvasses leaning against the wall waiting to be painted, the white shirt on a hanger, the tape recorder, the man himself and the way he spoke... Opalka took us out for lunch to his favorite restaurant. I remember sitting next to him. He came up with a question for On Kawara straight away, as if it had been on his mind for years. It was a critical one, as might be expected from a person who has been working with the concept 'time' for over forty years.

After we visited Roman Opalka, we went on to Dillingen in Germany, to talk with the owner of our printing company about the *PERSONAL STRUCTURES* publication. While driving, we discussed the project *Unanswered Questions to On Kawara*: the questions that I had collected so far and the ones that were still to come. It was

at this point in time, right there in the car, that the concept of the project developed to its final state.

We were considering ways to exhibit the questions, possibilities for including On Kawara in our exhibitions and presenting the project in a visual or audible form. We decided to display the questions on a wall and fill the space with the sound of my voice presenting the questions to On Kawara in New York City. We also decided that we should not only publish the questions in the *PERSONAL STRUCTURES* book, but that we should print them as a separate publication too, a project standing on its own.

To make a more complete statement, 50 questions did not seem to be enough. As a new number, we set 80. I knew from the time and effort I had already put in the project, it would not be so simple. But I was crazy about this idea of the special edition and thought it was fantastic.

#### **Dublin, Ireland, August & September 2008**

After my return to Dublin, I continued collecting during the next few months. Now it became easier for me to collect questions: I would not be traveling so often and had more time to focus on the remaining 62 questions I somehow had to gather.

The next response I received on my 28<sup>th</sup> birthday: a statement from Kasper König. Kasper König and On Kawara are said to be good friends, going back to the 1970s at least. They have worked together on numerous projects and On Kawara sent him several telegrams and postcards. Although König did not submit a question for On Kawara, he had taken the time to write me his statement and that fact counted. His statement meant a lot to me.

A few days later, Sarah Gold and Rene Rietmeyer had a meeting with Joseph Kosuth in Rome, Italy. It was 2 September 2008. They spoke

about my project again. Kosuth repeated his question: "When will you call me?" Unfortunately, he gave the question without the permission to publish it. That did not count. And so, in the time that followed, I tried to contact Kosuth; I would hear from him only months later.

Because I did not have a telephone at my home in Dublin, I went to the Chinese Internet Café around the corner. It was a shabby place. From one of the telephone booths—my favorite was number 2, because it had a little bit of leg-space and what they called a 'table', a piece of wood big enough to put my On Kawara Address Book on—I phoned all over the world. Although there were days when I did not reach anyone, on some days I was luckier, receiving two questions the same day.

For me, one of those lucky days was 11 September: I reached Andreas Bee, Gunnar Kvaran, and Pétur Arason. The conversation with Arason was very strange. Through various channels, I had gotten hold of the number of his mobile phone. Normally, I prefer to call people using their home numbers, but in this case I had no other choice. Arason picked up. I explained to him my project and then straight away—in broken English—he said, "Will you come to Iceland?" I never had a question this quick before. I thought he was asking me: he had not said a word in the minutes before and suddenly came that question as a reply. Then he changed his question to, "Would you like to come to Iceland and fish salmon?" This wasn't meant for me. I thanked Arason for his question and he hung up the phone. When I got home, Andreas Bee had emailed me his question, in English and German.

#### **Croatia, September 2008**

I went on holiday to Croatia for a few days. While waiting for the bus to Dubrovnik, I checked my email in an Internet Café in the

harbor of Split. It was on 18 September. Michel Assenmaker, who had written about On Kawara and is a collector of his work, sent me a message, and also Linda Weintraub reacted with a question she would later revise. But there was also this: the first successful contact with Kikuko Toyama. She had been difficult to find: it appeared now that she had changed her name. Under the name Kikuko Amagasaki, she had written and contributed to several books about On Kawara. I had found her contact details on sites in English, but had been unsuccessful in reaching her. And so I had asked Yuko Sakurai to help me. It worked: via a mutual friend, she got her address. And Toyama had now sent me the promise that she would send me a question for On Kawara soon.

#### **Dublin, Ireland, Fall 2008**

Back in Dublin, I continued contacting people. By now it was going quite well, and there were quick replies: Pierre Huber gave me a question immediately over the telephone. Hans Ulrich Obrist answered within 75 minutes, sending me the one question he asks in every interview he conducts. And from Lawrence Weiner I received one—written in capital letters—the following morning.

I felt I needed at least one of the galleries working directly with On Kawara in the project, as a confirmation. For many people my project was still seen as a tricky thing: On Kawara himself had not yet been contacted—at least not by me—and had therefore never given an approval. So, after having sent several messages and without receiving any reply, I phoned Michèle Didier in Brussels, Belgium, the owner of a gallery that produced *One Million Years* and sells editions by On Kawara. A friendly voice explained to me that she liked the project and that she was sorry for not replying to me, knowing about my previous attempts to get in touch with her. Didier said she was happy I called, and explained

that she had promised On Kawara years ago never to publish any statements about him. For her, that included questions.

#### **The Netherlands, November 2008**

Relief came on 10 November: Thomas Rieger, of the Konrad Fischer Gallery in Düsseldorf, Germany, sent his question. On Kawara had his first solo exhibitions in Europe at *Ausstellungen bei Konrad Fischer*. Since 1971 at least, the Konrad Fischer Gallery has been working directly with On Kawara. Being the assistant director of this gallery, Rieger was one of the first to learn about my project. In summer 2008, he had promised to send me a question. But I had not heard from him in months, and I feared that I would never get the confirmation I was looking for. But it came. And: Rieger gave me the artist's address in New York, a possibility to actually get in touch with On Kawara.

#### **Dublin, Ireland, Winter 2009**

Thanks to my previous success with Kikuko Toyama, I had dared to contact more Japanese. It was interesting: the pachinko tunes or Viennese waltz music while waiting to get an English speaking person on the phone, the spelling of names: L or R, London or Red? But somehow it came to a result... At a time I did not expect to receive any questions at all anymore—all of December had been quiet and by now it was those days between Christmas and New Year's Eve—I got mail from Japan: a question from Fumihiko Tanifuji, curator of a collection that includes date paintings by 'On Kawahara'.

In the New Year, the flow of questions started again. At this time, Xavier Douroux responded to my request. A year had now passed since I had first contacted him; his name had already been on my very first list of people. More questions came in: from René Denizot, who has written several times about the artist since the early 1970s; Rüdiger Schöttle, On Kawara's gallerist

in Munich; and Sheena Wagstaff at Tate Modern in London, UK, who sent a question instantly.

#### **Paris, France, January 2009**

16 January 2009: together with Peter Loder Meyer, I met Lee Ufan for an interview in Lee Ufan's studio. Early in the morning I left Dublin, to arrive in Paris in time for the encounter. It was my first time in Paris. And it was my first personal encounter with Lee Ufan. I was nervous meeting Lee Ufan: I did not think I was well prepared; I felt I had no clue as to who he is.

Loder Meyer picked me up from my hotel and we walked around the neighborhood until we thought the time was right to go to Lee Ufan. We had a meeting at 3 o'clock. His studio was closer than we thought, and we were way too early. It was cold outside, but the weather was nice enough and as we did not have any money, we decided to continue walking. We passed Lee Ufan's studio three times. Finally, we decided to wait on the bench in front of his building. Then it was three minutes to three. We went into the courtyard and knocked on Lee Ufan's studio door. It was already becoming dark and there were no lights burning in his studio. We did not hear anything for 5 minutes. Then suddenly, Lee Ufan opened the door. He shook our hands.

The encounter was strange to me. We had asked Yuko Sakurai to join us as a translator, but still I could not really follow Lee Ufan. Around the end of the interview Yuko asked Lee Ufan who his favorite artist is. Lee Ufan named On Kawara. From the smile on her face, I knew good news was coming my way. When Yuko translated her conversation into English, I knew I had to get Lee Ufan into my project!

I tried to explain my project to Lee Ufan and asked him, begged him, for a question. He smiled. He did not give me a question,

not yet. Lee Ufan stated that On Kawara has a studio around the block, just a one-minute walk from his. We were all curious: Was On Kawara in Paris at the moment? Unfortunately not.

But Lee Ufan told us about how he often met On Kawara, that he really respects On Kawara, that they drink tea together and have discussions about art. I feared that Lee Ufan was avoiding my request... I tried to bring it to a point. Lee Ufan explained that he was sometimes also critical about On Kawara's art. Then came his question. I thanked Lee Ufan with a combination of bows and "thank yous" and we continued the conversation.

The next day I was having breakfast in the café across my hotel, still perfectly happy from my encounter with Lee Ufan. I had taken my laptop in order to check my email. Daniel Marzona sent me his question for On Kawara on the day I met Lee Ufan. It came with a message: "I wanted to wish you all the best with your project, which is one of the most exciting I have heard about in a while." This I considered to be a big compliment, coming from the director of the Konrad Fischer gallery in Berlin. I now had 58 questions in my pocket. I was getting closer to On Kawara.

### **Miami, USA, January & February 2009**

A few days later I went back to Miami. Wanting to search for new names, I learned that the number of names seriously related to that of On Kawara is limited: there might be an end to the project. I kept in mind that there must be many people who, for whatever reason, I had failed to contact up to now, people who might be very close to On Kawara. And also, there had been others I had actually tried to contact, but who—at least at that point in time—were 'unreachable'. It seemed there were only relatively few people left who could still be asked for a question

Be that as it may, there were still a few people left I really did want to ask. And so I contacted Harry Cooper from the National Gallery in Washington, USA, which has On Kawara's work *Title* from 1965 in its collection. And John Baldessari, who replied by sending me four questions. I could pick one of the following:

Has any of your work taken the form of a question?

Do you ever use spell check?

Are you still alive?

What's with the ionized air in the Kawara room at DIA Beacon?

I chose the last one. And had to deal with Baldessari's 'conditions of reproduction':

"John must receive five (5) copies of the final publication."<sup>7</sup>

The last day of my stay in Miami came; we would drive to New York. It was during this trip to New York that we came up with the idea to make more Art Projects, to create a series of special edition books: *PERSONAL STRUCTURES ART PROJECTS*.

### **New York, USA, February 2009**

Sarah Gold and I went to New York for a week to make arrangements for our *PERSONAL STRUCTURES* symposium *SPACE* at the New Museum that would take place in early April. I considered passing by On Kawara's building, to see if he would be there. But it did not feel right; it was not the right time. I had only 69 questions at this point and there were still a few people I wanted to approach; it was too early to go to On Kawara.

### **Vienna, Austria, March 2009**

At the beginning of March I left Dublin. I gave up my apartment and went to Vienna. I would stay there a few days until it was time to go back to New York again for the symposium in the New Mu-

seum. I did not have Internet access in my apartment, and was 'forced' to go to one of the Viennese coffee houses. Café Sperl, my favorite, was around the corner. I remember sitting in the middle of the over-crowded café and receiving a question from Olle Granath, director of the Moderne Museet during the time that On Kawara had his exhibition there in 1980 and got robbed on the streets of Stockholm, Sweden. By the time I left Vienna for New York, I had a total of 75 questions. I was close. But with the symposium coming up, I did not have the time to go to Greene Street.

#### **The Netherlands, April 2009**

Upon my arrival in the Netherlands after the symposium, Sarah Gold contacted me. She had asked Georg Kargl, who believed he had a photograph of On Kawara buying a hat, and Luca Beatrice whom she had met in Venice while I was in New York.

The collection was now reaching its 'ideal' number of 80 questions. At least to me, 77 was close enough to 80. And besides: I knew I could count on the one from Rene Rietmeyer, to whom I had promised that he could ask the last question. I knew he had his question ready and would send it whenever I needed it. And so, I booked a flight back to New York. This would be the moment; I would go to Greene Street and present my questions to On Kawara.

#### **New York, USA, May 2009**

Around the end of April, I arrived in New York: the time had come; it was the right moment to make an attempt to contact On Kawara. I knew from Thomas Rieger that On Kawara lives on Greene Street; it was the only information I had. To go to On Kawara's apartment was the only possibility for me to get in contact with him. It was 1 May 2009. It was almost exactly two years after the first question from Klaus Honnef, when I received Rietmeyer's question. I now had 78 questions for On Kawara.

In the meantime, I received phonetic 'translations' of the Japanese characters in a cross-over between an English and Dutch pronunciation, which—in the end—was—for me—sort of readable (someone did recognize it as Japanese when I was reading it out loud on the street). Lee Ufan: "Nasee soe-chie-o mochie-iroe-noodee sjookaa. Soe-chienie kodawaroe-nowa, Soe-chienie shinkogaa aroetoo waatashiwa kanga-eroe-no-dessga, On-sanwa doo omowaremasska."

I practiced the Japanese. I bought a nice, furry microphone. I printed out my questions. And off I went. To On Kawara.

During that week, I went to On Kawara's apartment several times. From 42<sup>nd</sup> Street to SoHo. The first time in particular I was very nervous, mainly about the possibility of standing face-to-face with On Kawara. It was after a meeting with Richard Tuttle in Café Café, at the corner of Greene and Broome Street that I went for the first time. It was Saturday morning. I was in the neighborhood and for me that meant I could not escape: I had to try.

After standing in front of his door reading my questions to him, I took my chance and rang On Kawara's doorbell: no one answered. Then, three days later, I tried another time. This time—what I assumed to be—On Kawara's wife was there and I spoke with her over the intercom. Again On Kawara was not at home. But at least he was in New York.

#### **Greene Street, 7 May 2009**

On my last day in New York, it was Thursday 7 May 2009, I had to do it; it was my last chance. I went to SoHo by subway. I walked across Greene Street, holding the questions in my one hand and my microphone in the other. As I approached his apartment

building, an older Japanese man and woman crossed the street. They were walking together with a younger man, who was carrying suitcases. They got into the car and drove away. I am sure it was On Kawara. I realized that when I saw the number of the apartment house; the car was standing almost in front of it. Impossible that it could have been someone else.

I waited in front of On Kawara's house for nearly two hours, reading over my questions to him and trying the doorbell several times. No one answered and no one returned. I had missed him.

After I returned from New York, I don't remember the date, I got a nice surprise: I may have missed On Kawara, but Joseph Kosuth suddenly gave approval for the publication of his question.

Venice, December 2009

## ADDITIONAL TEXT

In October 2009, we published the 79 Questions as the *Unanswered Questions* in our book *PERSONAL STRUCTURES: TIME SPACE EXISTENCE*. It was what I had been dreaming of since the start of the project in 2007. The pages in the book looked beautiful and I wanted to show them to On Kawara. Excited and with two freshly printed books under my arm, I took the plane to New York. Especially directly after the struggle to get the book printed before the deadline (the *Frankfurter Buchmesse* in Germany), it was wonderful to be in New York, the sunny weather, life... Walking in the streets of New York, I remembered the previous times I had been there and how I then had just missed On Kawara. I did not think I would ever see him again, but a few days later, I thought I had a chance. When visiting the Museum of Modern Art, I saw the same woman again who I had seen with him in May. Did this mean that also On Kawara would be in New York? I passed by his apartment the next day, there was no sign of life.

### London, UK, Fall 2009

I left the questions for what they were—unanswered—and in the weeks after, I worked on the text for this special edition. It was planned to be the first book in the series of *PERSONAL STRUCTURES ART PROJECTS* and I wanted to have it published before the opening of the exhibition we were organizing in Bregenz, Austria. We would exhibit the visual presentation I had made as part of this project (we had planned its creation earlier, summer 2008), and we had considered it to be a good idea to have the book ready then as well. It was a strange time for me,

having just finished the book *PERSONAL STRUCTURES* and also the 'On Kawara' project was reaching its end. It was time for new projects, a.o. *LEE UFAN: ENCOUNTERS*. I went to London, to Lisson Gallery, for an Encounter with his work.

On 4 December, a friendly young woman showed me two Lee Ufan paintings in a warehouse on Bell Street. It was an intense encounter and afterwards I went to a close by pub to make notes. Lee Ufan was on my mind, as well as Tatsuo Miyajima, who had an exhibition that I wanted to review. I went to Lisson's second exhibition space for the Miyajima presentation, works out of his series *Pile Up Life*. Before leaving the gallery, I noticed On Kawara's *Phaidon* book standing on a shelf behind the counter. I asked if I could have a look at it. I knew the book very well, but this time, it felt different to me. "He is a wonderful artist." I turned around. It was Nicholas Logsdail. I took the opportunity to tell him about the project and showed him the Unanswered Questions in the *PERSONAL STRUCTURES* book I had brought with me. He seemed to like them a lot and told me stories about some of the people that had asked a question. He asked whether I had ever met On Kawara and in return I told him about my "unlucky" encounter on Greene Street. Logsdail explained: if I wanted to meet On Kawara, I would have to do that soon. Apparently, On Kawara smokes several packs of cigarettes each day and is not in good health.

#### **Bregenz, Austria & Amsterdam, Netherlands, January 2010**

In the first week of January I made a test version of my On Kawara book. I was in Bregenz at that time for the setup of the exhibition I curated together with Sarah Gold. Two hours before the opening, the German printing company owner arrived. I was in the office space of the museum, when he came over

to me and pointed to a light grey box lying on the table. I was perplexed: the first proofs of the Unanswered Questions special edition! I did not know what to say; I was so happy! Eleven proofs were made of this first version.

After long consideration, we decided to print the edition Unanswered Questions after publishing first a few other titles in the series *PERSONAL STRUCTURES ART PROJECTS*. We used the proofs as examples for future publications. The first one was with Lawrence Weiner.

At the end of the month, when visiting Lawrence Weiner on his houseboat in the harbor of Amsterdam for our "MÉNAGE À QUATRE", On Kawara was one of the topics again—we had 24 hours, plenty of time. I later published a part of this conversation in PSAP #01.

*"Karlyn De Jongh: Do you know him well?"*

Lawrence Weiner: No, I know him. We've done things together. I had lunch with him once in Düsseldorf. He introduced himself once on the streets, but I was with another artist with whom he was not pleased. So, he just introduced himself and walked away.

*Sarah Gold: Who was the other artist?"*

LW: The one you have asked me about [Joseph Kosuth]. I was talking with him and he was just not happy with him. He didn't want to talk to him. But they had been friends, so I had no idea what had been going on. But I don't really know him. I know his wife. She is nice. He smokes too much, though.

*KDJ: Do you like his art?"*

LW: I think he is a very good artist. And I think he is a very responsible artist. The whole thing with the newspapers and the boxes is all putting it in a context, but in fact I think he is

a very good artist. I don't know how important it is. It is very existential, though. I don't know how important it is. I don't know what the point is. But, again, I am questioning the point more than anything else."<sup>8</sup>

#### **Venice, Italy, April 2010**

With *LAWRENCE WEINER: SKIMMING THE WATER [MÉNAGE À QUATRE]* soon to be printed and a participation in Hermann Nitsch's 130<sup>th</sup> *Aktion* in Naples, Italy, scheduled, we met with Roman Opalka in Café Florian in Venice, to discuss *TIME PASSING*—our third Art Project. We showed Opalka *On Kawara: Unanswered Questions*, and his printed question therein. His question about On Kawara painting two *Date Paintings* on one day, seduced him into a discussion about time: "Time moves continuously in a linear way without repetition," he said. As an example, Opalka explained us that he cannot even repeat the numbers on his tape recorder. For instance, remaking a lost tape in which he spoke the number 1,000,000 proved impossible because his voice had changed over time. After finishing the discussion, Opalka—just like Joseph Kosuth had done a few weeks prior in Rome, and without saying a word—took the book off the table and went home.

#### **Beaumont-sur-Sarthe, France, June 2010**

Sarah and I met Opalka again in his house on 9 June 2010 for our Art Project *TIME PASSING*. Although Opalka admitted to have only met On Kawara once, he seemed to be very much present in Opalka's thoughts and was mentioned several times during the 12-hour period. Opalka told us his opinion:

"[On Kawara] says: "if I am not finished between Berlin and New York, then I must destroy this Space-time, this period, this Date Painting." To me that is not logical, because time is

in everything and because that is the case, it should not be necessary for him to destroy his painting. This determination or fixation that he has, seems to be completely Japanese. It has nothing particular to do with time."<sup>9</sup>

Not being able to speak from my own experiences with On Kawara and having no knowledge of what he himself thinks about his work, I used these words by Opalka to explain about On Kawara's possible concept of Time in an article I wrote about Time in Contemporary Art, for the scientific magazine *KronoScope*.

#### **Venice, Italy, Fall 2010**

Time passed. Sarah and I published two of our Art Projects and had decided to organize the exhibition *PERSONAL STRUCTURES* at the Venice Biennale 2011. When we were in the process of finding artists to participate, On Kawara came to the foreground again. Of course, it was our big dream to include On Kawara in this exhibition, showing a sign of life. Konrad Fischer Gallery in Germany was contacted and we heard that one of its directors, Daniel Marzona, was planning a visit to New York in November to meet On Kawara. I asked, begged if it would be possible to join him, telling it was my great wish to meet the artist and talk with him—if only for 5 minutes. Marzona welcomed me on his trip, but told me that his 'appointment' had not yet been confirmed. Since we had so many things to do in Venice, I decided to wait until there was a confirmation from On Kawara's wife.

The day came that Daniel Marzona went to New York, but still no sign of On Kawara. Apparently it had become very difficult to meet him. Nicholas Logsdail confirmed this in a telephone conversation later that month: On Kawara's physical state is critical and he does not want to see anybody anymore. According

to Logsdail, Jonathan Watkins was one of the very few still in contact with the artist—and even this was uncertain, he added. On Tuesday 23 November 2011, Sarah and I sent On Kawara an email: “Dear Mr On Kawara, onegashimas...” Maybe it was a little farfetched, but at least we tried.

### Venice, Italy, January - April 2011

We did not hear from On Kawara, no sign of life. There seemed only one last possibility to reach On Kawara directly: postcards. I bought a whole bunch of them, 1 for each question plus another one for myself, my own question to On Kawara, and a few extra just in case some would get lost in the mail. On 5 January 2011, I posted all of them, at San Marco Square in Venice. In the months after, I received back the postcards I had sent to On Kawara. Stamped: Return to Sender.

In the meantime, also the Art Project with Roman Opalka had been published and it became time to print this special edition. In a last attempt to get a sign of life from On Kawara in this book, I contacted Jonathan Watkins. In a two-minute staccato telephone conversation, I explained him my dream and that he was my last hope to make this dream come true. He understood.

I had to send him my request to his email address and he replied some days later. On 22 March 2011 he wrote:

“Dear Karlyn,  
I’ll be in touch with On and get back to you as soon as possible.  
He will say no most probably, and of course that will signify he is still alive.  
With best wishes,  
Jonathan”

I appreciated his support very much and was full of hope. Would there still be a chance to hear from On Kawara? Two days later, on 24 March 2011, Watkins wrote again:

“Dear Karlyn,  
It’s a ‘no’ I’m afraid.  
With best wishes,  
Jonathan”

At first, I was thrilled about the email. But did this ‘no’ come directly from On Kawara himself? I asked Watkins kindly for a confirmation. Until today, I did not hear from him anymore.

No answer.

Venice, April 2011

1 *On Kawara. 1973–One Year’s Production*. Kunsthalle Bern, Bern, Switzerland, 1973, p 5.

2 *On Kawara. Consciousness. Meditation. Watcher on the Hills*. Les Presses du Réel & IKON, France, 2002, p 7.

3 Charles Wylie, Of Today. In: Charles Wylie, Ervin Laszlo and Takefumi Matsui, *On Kawara. 10 Tableaux and 16,952 Pages*. Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2008, p 34.

4 Ulrich Wilmes in an email to the author on 29 April 2008.

5 Peter Lodermeier, Karlyn De Jongh & Sarah Gold, *PERSONAL STRUCTURES: TIME SPACE EXISTENCE*, DuMont, Cologne, 2009

6 Jean-Marc Avrilla in an email to the author, on 11 December 2007.

7 See: John Baldessari’s Conditions of Reproduction as sent to the author on 30 January 2009.

8 De Jongh, Karlyn & Sarah Gold, *LAWRENCE WEINER: SKIMMING THE WATER [MÉNAGE À QUATRE]*, GlobalArtAffairs Foundation, Netherlands, 2010, p 125, 126.

9 De Jongh, Karlyn & Sarah Gold, *ROMAN OPALKA: TIME PASSING*. Netherlands, GlobalArtAffairs Foundation, 2010, p 17.

**ON KAWARA**  
**UNANSWERED QUESTIONS**

May 9, 2007

**Do you still remember me?**

**Klaus Honnef**

Author, Art critic and Curator, Bonn, Germany

March 15, 2008

あなたが続けている、アートワークの、デートペインティングについて、一つの質問があります。時々、青と赤のペインティングがありますが、これはどのような理由があるのでしょうか。

Toshiyuki Nemoto

Gallerist, Gallery 360°, Tokyo, Japan

April 23, 2008

デートペインティングは明確なコンセプトで、ビジュアル的にも美しいと感じます。描かれる日付、キャンバスの大きさと地色、文字の書体および色は、どのように決定されるのでしょうか。

Saburo Ota

Artist, Tsuyama, Japan

April 25, 2008

**You have spent several important periods of time during your life in Mexico, do you recognize any specific influences in your work taken from this context?**

Tobias Ostrander

Curator of Contemporary Art, Museo Tamayo, Mexico City, Mexico

April 30, 2008

**What time is it on the moon?**

**Jonathan Monk**

Artist, Berlin, Germany

May 8, 2008

**Q : Do you think it is possible for other artist to take over your ongoing continuous artwork after your death? Is it possible  
Is there any possibility that you let somebody to take over the Date Painting for continuing it after your death? What is the reason why it is yes and no?**

Heartbeat Sasaki

Artist, Tokyo, Japan

May 12, 2008

**How do you think that moving from an era of the postcard to one of the Internet is shaping interpersonal communication in contemporary society?**

Jeanne Marie Kusina

Associate Professor, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, USA

May 20, 2008

**Where do we go from here?**

Ute Meta Bauer

Associate Professor, MIT, Cambridge, USA

May 22, 2008

**Mr. On Kawara,**

**What day is today?**

Gregor Jansen

Director, ZKM | Museum für Neue Kunst, Karlsruhe, Germany

May 29, 2008

**If the validity of time is reduced to the man-made  
construct that is the date, is our existence annulled if  
a day is undocumented?**

**William Wells**

Director, Townhouse Gallery of Contemporary Art, Cairo, Egypt

June 2, 2008

**What is time for you?**

**Fumio Nanjo**

Director, Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan

June 6, 2008

**Do you wear a black suit?**

**Stefan Brüggemann**

Artist, Mexico City, Mexico

June 8, 2008

**Does time exist?**

**Klaus Ottmann**

Independent Curator, New York, USA

June 19, 2008

**Mr. On Kawara,**

**How do you prepare yourself for the end of life?**

David Neuman

Founding director, Magasin 3 & Professor, Stockholm University,  
Stockholm, Sweden

July 9, 2008

**What means exposing time?**

**Jean-Marc Avrilla**

Director, l'Espace de l'Art Concret, Mouans-Sartoux, France

July 10, 2008

**What and how was the transition from the early paintings to the Time Space Existence work?**

**Paula Cooper**

Director, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, USA

July 28, 2008

**Which day is today?**

**Bartomeu Marí**

Director, MACBA, Barcelona, Spain

July 30, 2008

**How is it possible that there are often two date  
paintings of one day?**

Roman Opalka

Artist, Beaumont-sur-Sarthe, France

August 29, 2008

**since On Kawara has never agreed to be interviewed  
I would not like to ask him, knowing that he would  
answer it privately most likely but not publicly.**

**Kasper König**

Director, Ludwig Museum, Cologne, Germany

September 2, 2008

**When will you call me?**

Joseph Kosuth

Artist, Rome, Italy

September 8, 2008

**dear karlijn**

**there won't be any questions to be asked to on kawara who is known (and respected) for not answering any questions or any interview. so by knowing that, why should ask i him a question (in a public space) by knowing he won't answer.**

**of course if you insist you can eventually publish this as a contribution (!!!) (this including too.)**

**regards franck gautherot**

Franck Gautherot

Co-Director, Le Consortium, Dijon, France

September 8, 2008

**Are we “still alive” after we cease to exist physically in this world?**

Paul H. Marks

Associate Professor of Surgery, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada

September 9, 2008

**How does a date refer to an event and how can a date exist beyond the designated event?**

Pedro Lapa

Director, Museu do Chiado, Lisbon, Portugal

September 11, 2008

**Would you like to come to Iceland again and fish  
salmon?**

**Pétur Arason**

Collector, Reykjavík, Iceland

September 11, 2008

**Is death simply a mistake?**

**Andreas Bee**

Curator, Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt, Germany

September 12, 2008

**On Kawara, are you still alive?**

**Gunnar Kvaran**

Director, AF MoMA, Oslo, Norway

September 16, 2008

**No, I have no question. For me, a question is only possible if there is an answer. The answers of On Kawara are in his work, not in his words. I have to work to ask a question. I do it by writing.**

Michel Assenmaker

Professor, Uccle, Belgium

September 18, 2008

**A Japanese student, born in the same region as you, once told me that On Kawara probably is not your real name. If that is right, what is your real name?**

Johan Pas

Art Historian, Antwerp, Belgium

September 19, 2008

Dear On Kawara,

You quietly insisted that I put my note pad away when we met for the first and only time. It was February 3, 1996 in the Lucky Strike Bar in lower Manhattan. The attention you demanded I gladly gave, until exhaustion overcame me. Reluctantly I asked you to halt the non-stop, multi-hour recitation of noteworthy insights I was shoving into the long term storage compartment of my brain. Although the expanse of your discourse exceeded my grasp, I remember many of your statements about numerology, geometry, cosmology, and this - you said that since babies come into the world crying, the elderly should go out of the world laughing. At age 76, are you preparing to laugh?

Linda Weintraub

Author & publisher, Rhinebeck, USA

September 30, 2008

I COLLECTED SEVERAL WORKS BY ON KAWARA SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE 50'S. HAVING SEEN IN JAPAN THE CULTURE OF THE ZEN, OF THE BUDDHISM, WHICH I LIKE VERY MUCH. I HAVE THE FEELING ABOUT THE EXISTENCE OF A STRONG, BUT HIDDEN RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WORK BY ON KAWARA. I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW IF MY INTERPRETATION IS CORRECT.

Giuseppe Panza

Collector, Massagno, Switzerland

October 7, 2008

**If the world was finally to flood, would you prefer to live on a boat or on a mountain top?**

David FitzGerald

Director, Kerlin Gallery, Dublin, Ireland

October 7, 2008

**Do you believe that individual numbers have idiosyncratic powers? Also, I wonder if you are interested in poems that allude obliquely to counting, or dates, or numbers? Here is one by Emily Dickinson:**

YOU'VE seen balloons set, haven't you?  
So stately they ascend  
It is as swans discarded you  
For duties diamond.

Their liquid feet go softly out  
Upon a sea of blond;  
They spurn the air as't were to mean  
For creatures so renowned.

Their ribbons just beyond the eye,  
They struggle some for breath,  
And yet the crowd applauds below;  
They would not encore death.

The gilded creature strains and spins,  
Trips frantic in a tree,  
Tears open her imperial veins  
And tumbles in the sea.

The crowd retire with an oath  
The dust in streets goes down,  
And clerks in counting-rooms observe,  
"T was only a balloon."

Jennifer Higgin

Editor, Frieze Magazine, London, UK

October 7, 2008

**What reason do you have for painting the same decade two or three times?**

Pierre Huber

Founding director, Art & Public, Geneva, Switzerland

October 9, 2008

**What has your work taught you about survival?**

**Kathryn Chiong**

Art Historian, Columbia University, New York, USA

October 9, 2008

**Voilà?**

**Thierry Davila**

Conservator, Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Geneva, Switzerland

October 10, 2008

**Do you see in your work any conscious or unconscious relation to the idea of time in Martin Heidegger's "Sein und Zeit"?**

**Jörg Johnen**

Director, Johnen Galerie, Berlin, Germany

October 13, 2008

自らルールを決めて、一生を通じてその自前のリチュアルを遂行するあなたの制作方法には、瞑想的な行に通じる側面があると考えます。その「心を調える」「魂を鎮める」効果を、たとえば写経や作務のような、手の仕事、身体的な作業を伴うタスクの遂行と類比的に考えることは的はずれでしょうか？また、あえてローマン・タイプに限定し、日本や香港での制作に漢字ではなくエスペラントを用いるのは、あくまで「沈黙者」としてその生身の存在をパブリックから隠してしまう徹底した方法意識と結びついていると解釈してよいのでしょうか？

Kikuko Toyama

Professor, Saitama University, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Saitama, Japan

October 14, 2008

**What is his most memorable date painting?**

**Lisa Reuben**

Specialist Contemporary Art, Sotheby's, London, UK

October 15, 2008

**How do you think the temporality in your One Million Years cds is transformed when it is being produced, repackaged and sold in the galleries?**

Teo Rofan

Curator, Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, Singapore

October 18, 2008

**Where is home and how do I get there?**

**Mattijs Visser**

Curator, Düsseldorf, Germany

October 20, 2008

**In more than one way your works are dated, beyond the evident fact that they bear dates. The materials of which they are made show the marks of age, or use now obsolete technologies. There is also the fact that the typography, the colors, the formats, betray, in all their pretended neutrality, a certain period style. How much of this did you envision when you made the works? How does time then affect their effect?**

**Natalia Majluf Brahim**

Director, Museo de Arte de Lima - MALI, Lima, Peru

October 28, 2008

**Dear On,**

**Can you tell me about your unrealised projects?**

**Hans Ulrich Obrist**

Co-Director, Serpentine Gallery, London, UK

October 28, 2008

**DEAR ON KAWARA**

**IS THIS DAY DIFFERENT THAN ALL OTHER DAYS?**

Lawrence Weiner

Artist, New York, USA

October 29, 2008

**If you would be On Kawara, 20 years old, and look at the body of work that you have done the last 50 years, and you would (naturally) be attracted to it, what would you see as a possible practice for you as a young artist in order to build onto this work, without repeating it?**

Nikola Dietrich

Curator, Kunstmuseum Basel, Basel, Switzerland

October 30, 2008

**Which role do time and place play in the presentation of your work? How must your work under no circumstances be presented?**

Edelbert Köb

Director, Museum of Modern Art Ludwig Foundation, Vienna, Austria

November 1, 2008

**Will there still be art in one million years?**

Peter Lodermeier

Art Historian, Bonn, Germany

November 3, 2008

**How do you choose colours?**

**Jochem Hendricks**

Artist, Frankfurt am Main, Germany

November 10, 2008

**KNOWING THAT THE ARTIST WILL NOT ANSWER  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS THERE'S STILL ONE DETAIL  
THAT OCCUPIES ME:**

**WHY STOPPED THE ARTIST INSERTING NEWSPAPER  
CUTTINGS IN THE CARDBOARD BOXES OF HIS DATE  
PAINTINGS?**

Thomas Rieger

Director, Konrad Fischer Gallery, Düsseldorf, Germany

November 12, 2008

**What's the time?**

**Kris Martin**

Artist, Ghent, Belgium

November 17, 2008

**HOW BIG IS INFINITY?**

**Fríða Björk Ingvarsdóttir**

Art Critic & Cultural Editor, Morgunblaðið, Reykjavík, Iceland

December 28, 2008

**I want to read a veiled On Kawara's Autobiography.  
Is there any possibility for writing and publishing  
the Autobiography?**

**Fumihiko Tanifuji**

Curator, Fukuyama Museum of Art, Fukuyama, Japan

January 2, 2009

**I'm not a religious person and I'm not obsessed with death, but since I saw your large exhibition at the Deichtorhallen in Hamburg I've had this question in my mind: What does an artist like this think about death?**

**José Miranda Justo**

Artist & Professor, University of Lisbon, Faculty of Humanities,  
Lisbon, Portugal

January 5, 2009

**Just what is it that makes your today's paintings so different, so appealing ? \***

**\* In memory of a conversation with On Kawara about "This is tomorrow" exhibition (and Richard Hamilton), continuing on Alberto Giacometti and coming to "Conscience" (Kawara/Giacometti) show-project, at Le Consortium, Dijon, 1990.**

Xavier Douroux

Co-Director, Le Consortium, Dijon, France

January 6, 2009

現代とはいかなる時代か？

**Takefumi Matsui**

Professor, University of Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan

January 8, 2009

**Is consciousness blinking, between painting and dating?**

René Denizot

Director, École nationale supérieure d'arts Paris-Cergy, Cergy, France

January 8, 2009

**I would like to ask On Kawara why he does not like  
being photographed.**

Rüdiger Schöttle

Director, Galerie Rüdiger Schöttle, Munich, Germany

January 12, 2009

**When exactly is now?**

**Sheena Wagstaff**

Chief Curator, Tate Modern, London, UK

January 16, 2009

Dear On Kawara,

**Do you think the meaning of your work will change essentially after your death?**

Daniel Marzona

Director, Konrad Fischer Gallery, Berlin, Germany

January 16, 2009

なぜ、数字を用いるのでしょうか。数字にこだわるのは、数字に信仰があると私は考えるのですが、温さんはどう思われますか。

Lee Ufan

Artist, Paris, France

January 18, 2009

**Of the present generation of young artists active in the international art scene, which one do you consider your "heir"?**

Isabel Soares Alves

Collection Coordinator, Berardo Collection, Lisbon, Portugal

January 23, 2009

**What is left to do?**

Gregory Burke

Director, The Power Plant, Toronto, Canada

January 27, 2009

**Do you find that the idea or possibility of making a date painting continues to nourish you every day, even if the idea often doesn't result in a material work?**

**Margot Heller**

Director, South London Gallery, London, UK

January 27, 2009

温さんの作品は、ミニマル的表現方法を使ってご自身の痕跡を残されていらっしゃると思いますが、私には、大変温かみ、親しみ、繊細さを感じます。どんなところから発生し作品へと結びついたのでしょうか？根源、思想を教えてくださいませんか？

Yuko Sakurai

Artist, Paris, France

January 30, 2009

**What's with the ionized air in the Kawara room at  
DIA Beacon?**

John Baldessari

Artist, Santa Monica, USA

January 31, 2009

**Is or was the painting Title (1965) in the collection of the National Gallery of Art a political statement about the Vietnam War, and if so, what?**

Harry Cooper

Curator of Modern & Contemporary Art, National Gallery of Art,  
Washington, USA

February 5, 2009

**Is there an answer?**

**Manuel J. Borja-Villel**

Director, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain

February 12, 2009

**Can the intimacy in scale and materials of the early works ever be refound?**

**Sean Rainbird**

Director, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Stuttgart, Germany

February 14, 2009

**On, I worked with you on a show at Yvon Lambert. On the walls, you displayed the pages: "I went", "I met", one postcard: "I got up at...", one date painting, one telegram "I am still alive". You placed catalogues from previous exhibitions in vitrines along the windows. Did you consider these groupings as a form of documentation or did the groupings open up something that you had not foreseen?**

Lucien Terras

Director, D'Amelio Terras, New York, USA

February 15, 2009

dear Karlijn,

thanks for contacting me about your project 'Questions to On Kawara'. I have been thinking about your request and found that I am actually very much in peace with having no question to On.

His work is so precise and conceptual, so open and true, honest and pure. No question, unless many questions.

best regards and good wishes for your project,

Christian

Christian Scheidemann

Director, Contemporary Conservation, New York, USA

February 16, 2009

- 1) What were your thoughts on Fluxus back in the 60s?
- 2) You don't show up to your openings. Does that signify that you are one of the audience?
- 3) What do you think is the difference between Ikon and Trace/ Document?

Yuko Hasegawa

Chief Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan

February 23, 2009

**Dear On Kawara,**

**it is stated that you do not wish to leave any personal trace of your existence.**

**I, however see your works as a proof of your existence and after your death your works proof that you once existed.**

**Do I see that wrong?**

**Sarah Gold**

Independent Curator, Miami, USA

February 24, 2009

**How are you today?**

**Candida Höfer**

Artist, Cologne, Germany

March 15, 2009

**I have always been fascinated by the date paintings, because I thought it was impossible to represent acceptably the temporal measurement of a day in art ,except with cinema. When On Kawara just painted a date, it was so simple & so great. And being able to translate chronology; passing time with a single image, in the most traditional medium, easel painting really blew my mind.**

**Does he think of himself as a painter? Is the colour of the monochrome background different in each painting?**

**Robert Vifian**

Chef, Paris, France

March 18, 2009

**Dear On,**

**What exactly was the content of the chapter of your life being erased when you were robbed in Stockholm in connection with your exhibition at Moderna Museet in the beginning of the 1980's.**

**Olle Granath**

Permanent secretary, Royal Swedish Academy of Fine Arts,  
Stockholm, Sweden

March 18, 2009

**Are you still alive?**

**Paul Schimmel**

Chief Curator, LA MoCA, Los Angeles, USA

March 25, 2009

For the last several weeks, I am trying to find time to think about the question I would like to ask you. I am constantly engaged in different kinds of meetings and conversations concerning the moving into and opening of the new Museum building. The Museum has been built for the last five years and now, finally, we are entering the last stage, but there are still so many unanswered questions and a lot of work to do. Therefore I am preoccupied with thoughts about problems concerning the new Museum, and my question to You is motivated by the telegrams you have been sending during the year 1973 to our Museum (City Gallery then). The date on one of the telegrams is May, 18. Did you know this was the International Museum Day? Rene Block wrote that your contemporaries „learn a lot about the time we live in from your work“, but that we “don’t learn anything about your attitude towards it“. Nevertheless, I am interested in your attitude towards museums. What do you think about a mission and a role of a contemporary art museum today? In your opinion, what should a museum be? Is there any point in getting up and going to work at one of the contemporary art museums? Why do we need them? Museums.

Snježana Pintarić

Director, Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb, Zagreb, Croatia

April 7, 2009

**When did you got up?**

**Georg Kargl**

Gallerist, Georg Kargl Galerie, Vienna, Austria

April 9, 2009

Dear On Kawara,

**Why do you not answer my question?**

Luca Beatrice

Art Critic & Curator, Venice, Italy

May 1, 2009

**Could you have done anything to get more satisfaction out of your own existence ?**

Rene Rietmeyer

Artist, Miami, USA





## **Karlyn De Jongh**

Karlyn De Jongh (\*1980, Netherlands), independent curator and author. Study of Fine Arts in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, Netherlands. Received M.A. in Philosophy and M.Phil. in Art History and Theory at the Universities of Leiden, Netherlands and Santa Barbara, CA, USA. Since 2007, working with the project *PERSONAL STRUCTURES*.

[Photo: Murano, Italy, 14 April 2011, 1:27 pm.]

## Personal Structures Art Projects # 04

### ON KAWARA UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

*Personal Structures Art Projects* are projects which are documented as special edition artists' books. Each project centralizes one artist and emphasises his work. All books in this series will be published by GlobalArtAffairs Foundation, the Netherlands. An excerpt of each project will additionally be published in the ongoing series *Personal Structures: Time • Space • Existence*.

Previously published in this series:

LAWRENCE WEINER: SKIMMING THE WATER [MÉNAGE À QUATRE]

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ROMAN OPALKA: TIME PASSING

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