What are words worth?
June 16 – September 2, 2023

Ed Ruscha, Idea, 1976

McEvoy Foundation for the Arts Final Exhibition

June 13, 2023, San Francisco, CA — McEvoy Foundation for the Arts announces What are words worth? (June 16 – September 2, 2023), an exhibition of the expansive holdings of artworks in the McEvoy Family Collection that engage language, literature, and typography. The exhibition is joined by THESE ARE THE RULES, a program of film/video shorts on power and voice. Public events include a special 35 mm screening of Memento at the Roxie Theater in July and conversations in the gallery in August with writers Dodie Bellamy and Connie Zheng. What are words worth? is McEvoy Arts’ closing program and the last of over a dozen innovative exhibitions presented since its founding in 2017.
The exhibition’s title, *What are words worth?*, is borrowed from the Tom Tom Club's 1981 song “Wordy Rappinghood” that references the poet William Wordsworth (1770-1850). Susan Miller, Executive Director at McEvoy Arts, states “The play on words of this lyric, and the song’s study of words as both form and subject, are reflective of the multi-layered way in which language is represented in this exhibition. The playful nod to Wordsworth sets up a dialogue across the artworks about poetry and its ability to stimulate imagination and creative thinking.”

Wordsworth, an iconic English Romantic, said poetry “takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility.” Centuries later, *LET IT COME LET IT GO* (2017), by poet and visual artist John Giorno, channels a connection between Buddhism and poetry, both of which Giorno describes as best practiced “by developing the ability to see what arises in one’s mind.”

“Words exist as tangible sensory experiences,” notes Amanda Nudelman, Exhibitions and Public Programs Curator at McEvoy Arts, “but their meaning lives in our minds. Many of the works in the exhibition play in the blurry space between where words are seen as visual symbols and understood by the concepts they represent.”

Displaying a rich survey of the text-based work within the McEvoy Family Collection, *What are words worth?* includes modern and contemporary photographs, paintings, and prints. Featured within the exhibition is an expanded presentation of works by one of the collection’s quintessential artists Natalie Czech (b. 1976), a German photographer known for her visual and textual images that cleverly locate poems in everyday objects such as shopping bags, newspapers, and vinyl album covers. Among the works on view by Czech, *A poet’s question by Allen Ginsberg 2* (2019) samples a passage from the Beat poet’s 1963 “I Beg of You to Come Back & Be Cheerful” and then recontextualizes the text using an Op Art print and graphite pencils into a new image that transposes the triangular form of the Ginsberg poem.

Mitchell Anderson’s 2017 oversized Kennedy campaign button is a painting that calls forth the evocative power of an iconic graphic. Ilse Bing’s *Scandale* (1947) and Lee Friedlander’s *New Orleans* (1975) are examples of a tradition in street photography that targets the advertising, signs, and text in the world around us.
Ed Ruscha’s pastel drawing, *Idea* (1976), muses on the word, its meaning, the letters it comprises, and the object the word itself represents. *Speechless* (2017), by Lorna Simpson, shows an image of a model’s face crowned with a hairstyle made of a collage of text in a curious statement about voice and femininity.

Screening Room

**THESE ARE THE RULES**

Guest curated by film and video curator and scholar Steve Seid, *THESE ARE THE RULES* includes works by ten Bay Area video artists on language and voice as both agents of control and resistance. Screened daily on the hour in McEvoy Arts’ Screening Room, artists include Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Jeanne C. Finley, Doug Hall, Tony Labat, and Valerie Soe, among others.

The exhibition and Screening Room program are free to the public. Visit mcevoyarts.org for details and gallery hours.

Events

**Film Screening**

*Memento* (2000)

In 35 mm

Wednesday, July 12, 2023, 6:40 pm

Roxie Theater – 3117 16th Street, San Francisco

Tickets: $14 general, $9 under 12 and 65+

Christopher Nolan’s *Memento* (2000) is a neo-noir feature film about a man with memory loss seeking vengeance upon the person who murdered his wife. Adapted by Nolan from his brother Jonathan’s short story “Memento Mori”, the film unfolds along two reverse-engineered narrative tracks: one shot in black-and-white and proceeding in chronological order, the other shot in color and moving backwards in time. In each, the widower, Leonard Shelby, obsessively
searches for clues about the wanted man, a certain “John G.,” defying his amnesia by writing new pieces of information on polaroid photos and even tattooing his own body.

Starring Guy Pearce, Carrie-Anne Moss, and Joe Pantoliano, *Memento* was nominated in 2002 for an Oscar for Best Original Screenplay and Best Editing. Revisit the Nolan classic before his new epic *Oppenheimer* is released on July 21!

*Memento* is a co-presentation of McEvoy Arts and the Roxie Theater on the occasion of *What are words worth?* (June 16 - September 2, 2023) at McEvoy Foundation for the Arts.

**Gallery Sessions**

Dodie Bellamy  
Saturday, August 12, 3pm

Connie Zheng  
Saturday, August 26, 3pm

No reservations required. Admission is free.

Writers **Dodie Bellamy** and **Connie Zheng** join McEvoy Arts’ curator **Amanda Nudelman** for two Gallery Sessions that will address language and image in the exhibition *What are words worth?*. Gallery Sessions bring artists, curators, writers, and thinkers into brief and informal conversations with McEvoy Arts’ staff on topics and ideas in the current exhibition. Admission is free.

Later this fall, **The Back Room at Small Press Traffic** will publish texts by Bellamy and Zheng, commissioned in partnership with McEvoy Arts and in conversation with the exhibition. The Gallery Sessions and commissioned essays are a co-production of McEvoy Arts and The Back Room at Small Press Traffic on the occasion of *What are words worth?*.

**Dodie Bellamy** is a novelist, poet, and essayist based in San Francisco. Her books and chapbooks specialize in genre-bending work that focuses on feminism, sexuality, cultural artifacts both high and low, and all things queer. In October 2021, Semiotext(e) published a new collection of Bellamy’s essays, *Bee Reaved*, and a new edition of her 1998 vampire novel, *The Letters of Mina Harker*. Bellamy currently teaches at California College of the Arts.
Connie Zheng is a Chinese-born artist, writer, and experimental filmmaker based out of Oakland. Her works investigate relationships between human and more-than-human worlds. Zheng’s projects have been exhibited and screened at the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, California; the Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco; Framer Framed, Netherlands; and Salt Beyoğlu, Turkey. SFMOMA’s Open Space, Errant Journal, and the Routledge Companion to Contemporary Art, Visual Culture, and Climate Change have published her writing. She is a PhD student in Visual Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

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McEvoy Foundation for the Arts presents exhibitions and events that engage, expand, and challenge themes present in the McEvoy Family Collection. Established in 2017, McEvoy Arts creates an open, intimate, and welcoming place for private contemplation and public discussion about art and culture. Rooted in the creative legacies of the San Francisco Bay Area, McEvoy Arts embodies a far-reaching potential of the McEvoy Family Collection’s to facilitate and engage conversations on the practice of contemporary art. McEvoy Arts invites artists, curators, and thinkers with varied perspectives to respond to the Collection. These collaborations produce exhibitions in the McEvoy Arts gallery, film and video programs in the Screening Room, as well as many film, music, literary, and performing arts events each year. Exhibitions are free and open to the public. For more information, visit mcevoyarts.org.

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High-resolution images and additional materials are available by request

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