

ON KAWARA: DATE PAINTINGS VIDEO

Jeffrey Weiss: One of the things that distinguishes Kawara from his friends and acquaintances who we associate with Conceptualism is that he was deeply devoted to painting as a practice. And this is very unusual during the '60s, when painting was undergoing a kind of crisis. What he did was take the practice of painting to a new place. He produced an idea about painting that he would subscribe to for the rest of his life—beginning in 1966. That painting would consist for him solely of the recording of a given date on which the painting was made.

Kasper König: With On, he has this self-determined kind of beginning and an end. Within 24 hours, or within a month, or within a year.

Jeffrey Weiss: We refer to the Date Paintings collectively as the *Today* series. The *Today* series extends from January 4, 1966, until his death, this past summer, in 2014. The Date Paintings are produced according to a very strict set of rules—a kind of protocol. Each painting, which is produced in the course of a single day... And if it's not finished, it is destroyed. It takes the form of a list of eight possible dimensions and three possible colors: gray, red, and blue. The colors are hand-mixed, so red is never the same exact red from one red painting to the next. And the same is true for gray and blue. So his paintings take the form of monochromes in the sense that they have a single field of color on which are inscribed, in white paint, the letters and numbers that represent the date of that day. And the language that he used for the date would change from place to place based on what city or town he was in at the time—because Kawara traveled extensively. I like to think of the letters and numbers as forms, in that sense—as shapes that Kawara expands and contracts in order to get them to arrange themselves in a particular way that will fit the composition as he kind of conceived it according to this set of rules.

Kasper König: I think it's a very smart way to do something, which is completely self-contained. And it's non-aggressive. It's very contemplative. But it's, at the same time, also craftsmanship.

Jeffrey Weiss: When Kawara produced a Date Painting, it was when he was able to focus and reflect on the act of painting over the space of a number of hours. A Date Painting takes—depending on the size—four, five, six, seven hours to produce.

Kasper König: The paintings, which are made in a very traditional manner of Japanese lacquer technique, they have fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen surfaces. So this is interesting as a kind of activity which creates its own contextual existence. For me, it's a huge difference which Date Paintings. They are not alike at all. Some of them are very emotional, very beautiful. A day is very different for each person.

Jeffrey Weiss: After a certain date, Kawara began producing boxes for his Date Paintings and lining those boxes with newspaper clippings which were derived from the daily press.

Kasper König: So this is very Japanese. You know, you have a scroll painting, and you unroll it, and you roll it back, and you store it.

Jeffrey Weiss: The boxes originate with Kawara's need for storage. He was living in a constrained loft studio, and he was producing an enormous amount of work in the mid-'60s. Each painting has its own box. And, of course, they contain the newspaper cutting. So each cutting from the newspaper represents a different news story of a given day. And when you line them all up, it creates some kind of a... almost the impression of a narrative.