

AUDIO DESCRIPTION

Pavel Büchler, *Still Life with Dust* 2017

Letterpress with dust

Private collection



Photo: Rob Harris

TRANSCRIPT

This is an audio description of the artwork *Still Life with Dust* created by Pavel Büchler in 2017. This piece is one of seven artworks situated in the second gallery in *The Weight of Words* exhibition at the Henry Moore Institute. It will take about 4 minutes to listen to.

Still Life with Dust is a framed block print hung on a white wall, spelling out the word 'Still Life'. There is no space between the two words. The single word 'Stilllife' is printed on yellow-white cartridge paper in precise block print with equal spacing. The word is around 15 centimetres wide by 7 centimetres high. The word 'Stilllife' sits in the centre of the 40 by 60cm landscape page.

Pavel Büchler was born in Prague, Czechoslovakia in 1952. He is a UK-based artist, writer and Research Professor at the Manchester School of Art, who works conceptually with words, sound, images and objects. He describes his practice as “making nothing happen” revealing the strange within the obvious through his exploration of language and its materiality.

In 2017, Büchler returned to the Institute of Applied Arts in Prague, where he studied typography in the 1970s. He opened the drawers in the print workshop to find a thick, unbroken layer of dust across the letterpress type blocks, accumulated over decades of inaction. The print that he took of this layer of dust was the only one that could be made, with no possibility of repeating the process.

Although the words might seem to be printed using ink in the conventional way, they are in fact formed of this unbroken layer of dust. Pressing these letters literally lifts history, as contained in the print room, the dust particles, and the still life picture genre they name. Each letter depicts different tones of grey, unique in their form and density. The particles of thick, grey-toned dust are not easily discerned, but they break up the surface of the print to give a delicate finish whilst still being readable. The letters have the quality of being faded or fading. They suggest ephemerality, in common with historical still life paintings. The words Still Life could also refer to the idea that there was still life to be found in the abandoned print room, and that Buchler himself was still alive and working decades after being exiled from Prague. The print is mounted on a white wall, in a white frame which measures at 60cm long and 40cm wide, made specifically for this work. The depth between the picture frame and the surface of the work is approximately half a centimetre.

Büchler’s print is perhaps the ‘quietest’ work in the large white cube gallery space, lit from above by both spotlights and natural light. Throughout the galleries you can hear sounds from two other artworks. Male and female voices read out a series of various, perhaps unfamiliar words in English and Irish for Caroline Bergvall’s sound and video installation *Say Parsley*, which is located in the third gallery but is audible throughout all three gallery spaces. You can also hear the constant ticking of letters on Shilpa Gupta’s sculpture *Words Come From Ears*, which is in the second gallery space. Gupta’s sound can be heard from the moving letters on the kind of flapboard sign that might be found in an airport or train station.

Buchler’s Still Life is what it says, and as such is fundamentally sculptural: rather than simply being words printed on a page, the dust it is made from gives it a singular and present materiality.