

# Liam Gillick

Esther Schipper, Berlin, Germany

At a lecture he gave in Vancouver in 2009, Liam Gillick suggested that his career as an artist was catalyzed by an inability to trust his own activity in the field of politics - his first career choice. In this light, his ongoing deferral to a strange lexicon of ciphers and fictions seems appropriate. Gillick's perennial coupling of historical interest with an aversion to conclusive statements reappeared in his solo exhibition '1848!!!', which took as its subject the revolutionary events that unfolded in Europe between 1846 and 1849.

Gillick lays out the development of this period in *1848!!! A Paper Banner* (2010), a timeline presented on two large pieces of paper and hung vertically so as to recall unfurled scrolls or tapestries. In the early 1840s, Gillick tells us, unusually poor crops brought about rising food prices, which led in turn to mass starvation. These events quickly triggered a complex domino effect, from calls for universal manhood suffrage to the massacre of more than 1,000 working-class people by republican troops and Karl Marx's subsequent disillusion with democracy, eventually culminating with the fall of the Venetian Republic under 'cholera and starvation'.

Framing this abbreviated history lesson was 'Bar "Volvo"' (2010), a series of 16 medieval woodcuts enlarged as inkjet prints and captioned with dialogue from the eight-act play, *A "Volvo" Bar*, written - in German - as part of Gillick's four-part travelling retrospective 'Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario' (2008). These prints inflected his research with graphic flavour. The aforementioned timeline was thus nudged into a historically disjointed fictional realm, which reached a macabre conclusion as two men at the bar are under threat of having their craniums cored by medieval corkscrews.

Gillick's work frequently references the proto-functional structures of bus stops and office cubicles, which often serve as backdrops for banal forms of communication - from office chit-chat to advertising. *Constricted Production* (2010) - the latest in an ongoing series of sculptures - nods to these representations of 'applied Modernism' as well as to Minimalist sculpture. Comprising an enclosed aluminium structure and long horizontal sheets of translucent purple Perspex, the work obliges viewers to look both *at* and *through* it; as visitors followed a route dictated by its imposing presence, their perspectives onto other works were alternately clear and momentarily filtered by the construction's skin. In this way, Gillick physically implicated so-called high Modernism - defined by a categorical disinterest in narrative - into his own idiosyncratic storyline.

In the film *1848!!!* (2010), a woman by the name of Clementine Coupau is presented reciting the transcript of a separate film, recorded by curator Ajay Kurian, in which Coupau and Gillick expand upon the events of 1848. Here Coupau is rendered silent, however, by the sound of Steve Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians* (1974-6), which has been looped. Here, the soundtrack - a customarily supportive but powerful filmic mechanism - functions to muffle rather than to accent dialogue. Persistently short-circuiting lucid communication, Gillick operates in a space of constructive ambivalence, where routes of discourse are not taken as means to a coherent end, but as complex systems in and of themselves, always subject to creative manipulation.

**Mitch Speed**

Liam Gillick  
'1848!!!'  
2010  
Installation view

