



On Kawara (Contemporary Artists (Phaidon))

Jonathan Watkins

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Japanese-born, New-York-based On Kawara (b.1933) is one of the world's best-known Conceptual artists, a major international figure since the 1960s. Kawara's existence is documented solely through his daily art-making practice. Best known are his Date Paintings (1965-ongoing), in which he methodically creates a single painting a day, with simply the date written on it. This book is a rare chance for his followers to unravel more of the mystery of this cult figure, and for less familiar readers to be introduced to his fascinating life and work. A unique feature of this book is the Tribute section, which reflects the artist's lifelong commitment never to be personally documented in his own words. A collection of short statements by 30 individuals selected personally by Kawara - among them artists Lawrence Weiner and Dan Graham, and cultural theorist Homi Bhabha - create an indirect 'portrait of the artist'. In the Survey, Curator Jonathan examines the artist's long-standing career: from his early figurative painting in the 1950s, to his later, text-based Conceptual art. Curator Rene Denizot analyses in his Focus a two-person exhibition combining Kawara's work with Alberto Giacometti's, revealing both artists' shared concern for the essence of human existence. The artist's interest in the nature of consciousness is reflected in a scientific essay he has selected for his Artist's Choice from the academic Journal of Consciousness Studies. In the Artist's Writings, a series of handwritten love letters in an indecipherable code reflect the mix of the impersonal and the deeply humanistic threads that run through Kawara's art.

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