

# SEANKELLY

Pfahlert, Matt. "Making Conceptual Art in Asheville, NC with Joseph Kosuth During a Pandemic." *The Silent P*. July 14 - 23, 2020.



Like many others out there, COVID-19 has completely changed a lot in our life, some good, some bad. This particular change was good. Back when NYC was the epicenter of the outbreak, we drove to pick up my at-risk uncle who has a studio in Manhattan and bring him back to our home in the beautiful mountains of Asheville, NC. Due to the spread of the disease, he ended up living with us for just over three months, and thankfully at the end of the stay went home healthy and testing negative for COVID-19. It felt great to know we kept him safe and healthy!

During his extended stay with us, we got to know each other better than we ever had before, the prior visits being short as they tend to be when everybody has lives and work to get back to after a weekend stay. Prior to this unique situation, we hadn't seen each other for over a year and a half or so. My uncle is the conceptual artist [Joseph Kosuth](#). You can read about his impressive influence on the world of art on any number of websites out there covering the topic. His work from 1965 "[One and Three Chairs](#)" is part of the permanent collection at MoMA. Suffice to say, he's a pioneer of conceptual and installation art from it's beginning in the New York art scene of the mid to late 1960's. He's hung out and eaten with the likes of Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, Robert ("Bobby") DeNiro, Sol Lewitt, Richard Gere, John Cale & Lou Reed (The Velvet Underground), David Byrne (Talking Heads) and many others in the art and music world. He spent several late nights at [The Odeon](#) in NYC with John Belushi and Robin Williams in the hey day of the early Saturday Night Live years. He's dated numerous actresses (several famous) and of course...models. Keith Haring was a former student of his. The French government made a postage stamp commemorating his national monument in Figeac to honor his work, and as well as awarding him a Chevalier of Arts & Letters, part of the Legion of Honor. He was also presented with the Austrian Republic's highest honor for accomplishments in science and culture, the [Decoration of Honour in Gold](#).

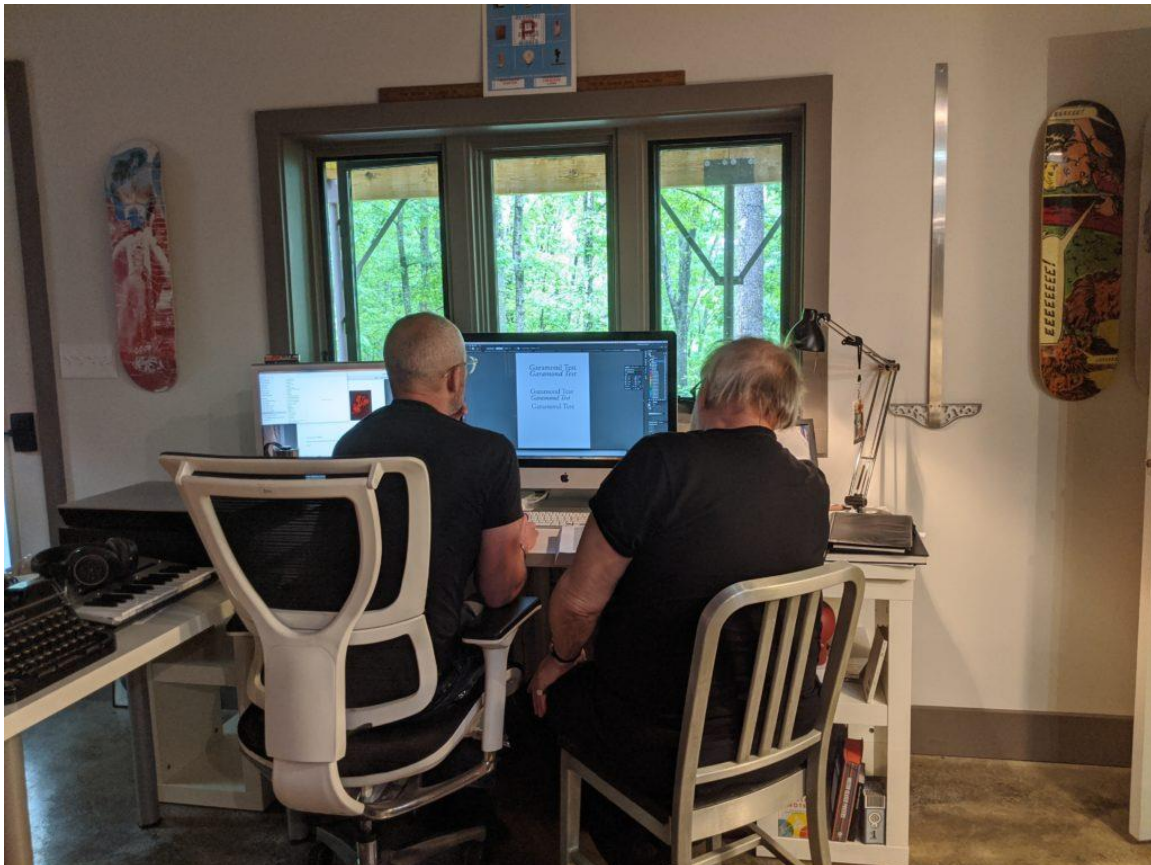
As you might imagine, there are so many colorful, hilarious and amazing stories Joseph tells that it could (and should) fill a book one day. He's always been a larger than life figure to me when I was growing up. My mom's only sibling, his visits when I was just a lad were always rather brief (I imagine once he escaped it, suburban Toledo, Ohio was tough to come back to from New York City). Due in part to living different lives, he's always felt a bit out of reach to me, a somewhat mythical figure. "The Famous New York Artist". Highly intellectual. Super smart wit, world traveler and a great joke teller.' "The man in black from the famous city" – The man always dressed in black, ever since the Vietnam War – and of course ever since I can remember. Back in the day, *nobody* I knew did that. As a kid I recall thinking even his cologne smelled expensive. A hundred

*Last updated: 15 October 2020*

# SEANKELLY

and fifty dollar bottle of wine at dinner with the family? No problem. He's got the bill for dinner folks. "Wow!" – 12 year old me would say.

So fast forward to Spring of 2020 and a pandemic. He's in the country from his present home in London for a planned show by his gallerist in NYC, Sean Kelly. Of course along with every fun and cool event for 2020, it gets cancelled. So, now he's living with us in the room downstairs we had been renting through Airbnb, but we basically all spend time together upstairs, eating and watching movies together for 3 months (HUGE shout out here to my wife for cooking some truly amazing meals, at times under Mr. Kosuth's direction :). He's got good taste!



Working on the 1st of two art projects for Joseph Kosuth Studio with my uncle, Joseph Kosuth.

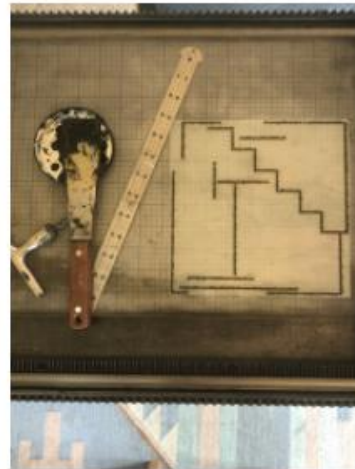
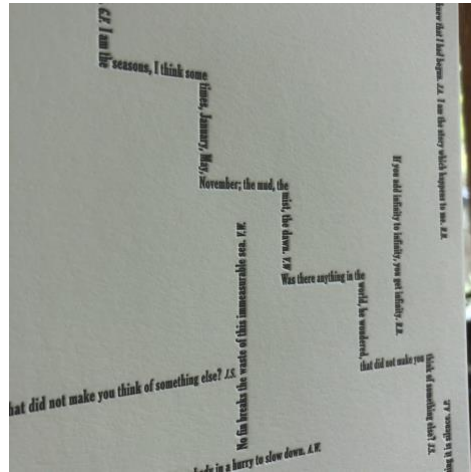
The Stay At Home order then hits North Carolina. So now we are definitely not going anywhere at all, really. But, as chance would have it, my uncle has two active art projects in the works that he'd like my help on, both of which need letterpress printing to create. It just so happens, Asheville is home to some of the most talented letterpress artists around! What are the odds? So, there I am working along side-by-side with my uncle the famous artist, in my home studio. Amazing, life is a trip. He directs, I move type; he edits, I change the typeface kerning & leading. He asks my input, I give it to him, he applies the suggestion (!). He creates this piece with me entitled "Existential Time (a plan, a diagram, a play) #1'. You can see and purchase it here and on Printed Matter's site

*Last updated: 15 October 2020*

# SEANKELLY

or [Instagram](#). Printed Matter has an excellent description of the content and meaning that I think you will find very interesting.

We ended up printing it with Sally over at [Ratbee Press](#). She was great to work with and really helped walk us through the process and what can and cannot be done within the world of letterpress. Here are some process photos she was cool enough to send over. We ran a black ink on white stock version, as well as a really sharp silver ink on black stock paper edition.



Last updated: 15 October 2020



# SEANKELLY



Enjoying a post art project beer at nearby [Highland Brewery](#) after they designed the space for social distancing and mask wearing. Felt *amazing* to have our first outing, even better that it lead us to beer, thank you Leah, Oscar and the whole HB crew!

Next up on the blog will be the story of the second piece of art created and printed in Asheville, NC with Joseph Kosuth during a pandemic. Stay tuned...

Last updated: 15 October 2020

# SEANKELLY

In part two of this story, I'll focus a bit more on the work and less on the personal aspect, but suffice to say, this project was very meaningful to me. For those that have not read [Part 1](#) yet, here's the short version: Due to COVID taking over NYC, my uncle lived with us in North Carolina for 3 months. My uncle is the conceptual artist [Joseph Kosuth](#). Among many accomplishments in the art world, his work from 1965 "[One and Three Chairs](#)" is part of the permanent collection at MoMA in New York City. There are a lot of articles online about him, but [Yahoo News](#) had a interesting write up in 2016. A pretty hilarious Q&A here as well over on [Frieze](#).

Only getting to see each other maybe once a year (many times longer in between), to then be *living* with my uncle for just over three months after getting him out of New York City due to COVID-19 was quite a switch. Typically he splits his time between London and NYC. But it led to both of us getting to know the other better than we ever had before this unique situation.



*Portrait of my uncle, Joseph Kosuth, David Vintiner, London.*

We were now living together in the house my wife and I finished building a year and a half ago in the beautiful mountains of Asheville, NC. Only for this visit "[The Paris of the South](#)" didn't get to show herself off like normal. My uncle saw plenty of the inside of our house though...and boy, outside the bears put on *one heck* of a show for the New Yorker.

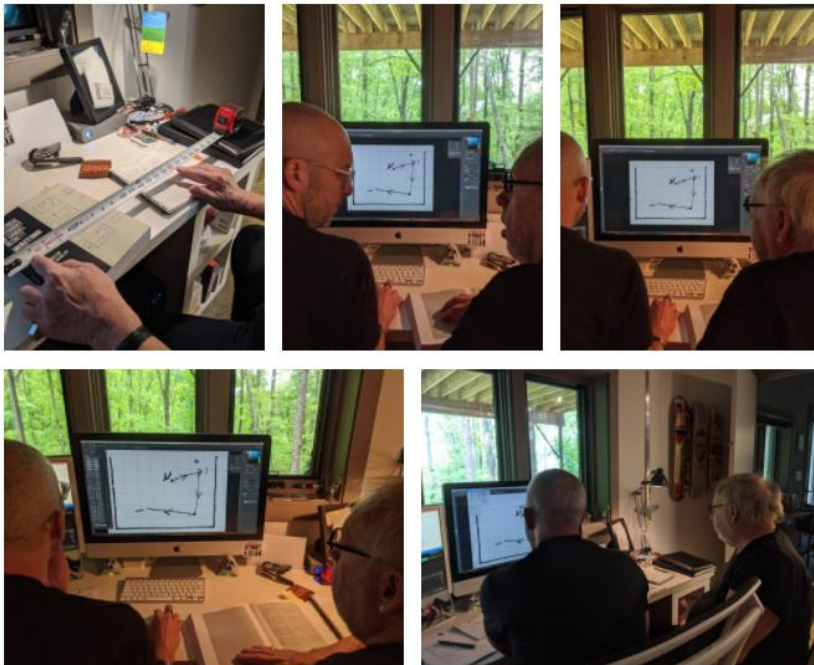
*Last updated: 15 October 2020*

# SEANKELLY



These cute fuzzies were part of the fantastic bear show my uncle got to experience just about on a weekly basis. Big mamma always nearby. Shot through our side door, about 8 feet away.

For the second art project I got to help him create, Joseph started with books by Samuel Beckett that he'd either had with him already from the city or ones we got from local fave Malaprops Book Store (support local, more than ever!). These were the basis for the concept. In fact, Beckett's drawings played an important part.



*Uncle & nephew working together on the Beckett art project.*

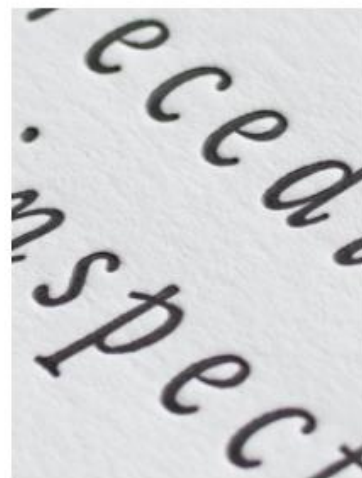
*Last updated: 15 October 2020*

# SEANKELLY

As the gallery Vistamare Studio in Milan explains:

*“Joseph Kosuth consistently explores the production and role of language and meaning within art. In his new work on show the source reference is from Samuel Beckett’s notes on stage directions for the production of ‘Waiting for Godot’.”*

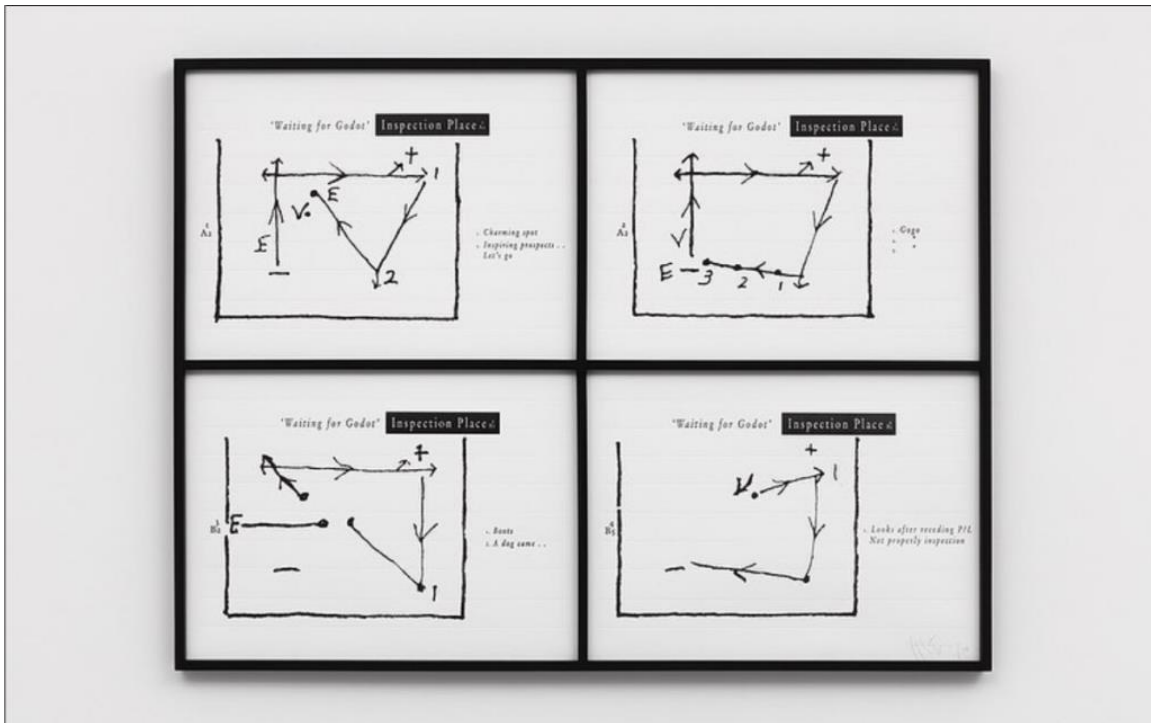
‘The Practice of Drawing’: group exhibition at [@vistamarestudio](#) Milano, Italy. The exhibition takes its title from Pino Pascali’s work “Omaggio a Ceroli”, 1966, that acts as a fil rouge for an exhibition dedicated to drawing, intended as a project and as the origin of an artwork. The participating artists explore the subject by providing numerous unconventional grounds for experimentation, demonstrating the medium’s versatility through its many forms: sculpture, wall text, drawing tools, chemical processed film, chalk, projections and prints. The works presented, either new or unpublished, are illustrative of each artist’s creative process and practices, outlining the unlimited possibilities of expanding it.”



Last updated: 15 October 2020



# SEANKELLY



*From plates to paper: The process of the letterpress work on this one was impressive.*

*Last updated: 15 October 2020*

# SEANKELLY

The title for this piece is “Beckett Inspection (Waiting for Godot)”, 2020, printed in letterpress. Framed as one/no glass. For this large scale letterpress print we turned to the experienced hands of Eleanor Annand who’s doing her residency as Era Press at Penland School of Craft in North Carolina. Ele was excellent in her expertise for this larger scale letterpress piece – quite a challenge given the size of each poster (24” x 18”, total of 4). The blind emboss grid was a big question mark, but she absolutely nailed it. Again, Asheville artists come to the rescue – this project was really perfect to produce here given Asheville’s love of all things letterpress and hand done crafts. Thank you again Ele!

And with that, we’ll close this one out. Thanks so much for reading and I hope you enjoyed checking out the story and some of the creative process of a most meaningful collaboration for me with my uncle, Joseph Kosuth.

*Last updated: 15 October 2020*