Welcome to the first issue of the Martin Creed Plays Chicago newspaper, printed monthly on-site at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago for the duration of Martin Creed's 2012 residency. The paper aims not only to document Creed's activities in and outside the museum and across Chicago, but also to invite and present commentary by a diverse range of Chicagoans and MCA visitors. In 2011 we published a blog documenting LA artist Mark Bradford's residency (themarkbradfordproject.org), and we are publishing one for Creed, too (mca-chicago.org/creedplayschicago). With the dual channels of blog and paper, we want to play around with contemporary perceptions of media and distribution: the paper-based content, distributed only on-site at MCA, will often precede content published online, while the blog will supplement the paper with video, sound, and extended texts, accessible worldwide. To complete the circle, PDFs of each month's paper will be available to download from the blog.

Creed at MCA in 2012

In works that range from intimate poetic objects to large-scale neon signs, Martin Creed (British, b. 1968) revalues the status of art with a generous sense of humor. As part of a yearlong residency at MCA Chicago, Creed will bring his avant-garde sensibility to the building and the city. In each month of 2012, Creed will unveil an artwork in a different space of the MCA, progressing upward through four floors of the building and extending his work outward to the sculpture garden and plaza and into the city of Chicago.

Some works will live as sculptures in the museum's public spaces, and some projects will be site specific—for instance, murals in the atrium and café. Others still, such as a work that takes the form of crumpled balls of paper placed in each of the museum's public spaces, will play with the notion of the carefully curated object. Extending his project beyond the MCA, Creed—who fronts a rock band—will explore the city's vibrant music scene as well.

The artist's work and projects will enliven the museum and the city and involve visitors in unexpected ways. As objects are presented throughout the building and city over the course of the year, Creed will also give several performances, building toward the US premiere of his first ballet, which will be presented in the MCA's theater in fall 2012. Martin Creed Plays Chicago connects this renowned artist to the MCA and to Chicago in ways that are as multifaceted as his practice.

Work No. 845 (THINGS), 2007

Multicolored neon
6 in. (15.2 cm) high
Collection of Toby Webster, Glasgow, Scotland

Installation view from the street

Work No. 845 (THINGS)—the first artwork by Martin Creed to be installed at MCA Chicago this year—makes a simple statement using one ordinary word. THINGS sets the tone for Creed's subsequent interventions, which will appear throughout the building and the city each month of 2012 as part of the artist's residency. This installation is located in the Robert B. and Beatrice C. Mayer Education Center lobby.
Chicago artist Scott Reeder on Things

Every time I see a new Martin Creed piece I have a similar reaction:

Why didn’t I think of that? Creed’s work is so witty, direct, and borderline obvious that you almost do a double take. It’s like noticing that you are standing on the ground.

I think the first time I saw “Things” was at a big art fair, which seemed especially appropriate—one artwork succinctly commenting on everything else around it. But somehow it pulled this off without projecting any kind of preachy tone or air of judgment, almost like it was saying, “Hey guys, I’m one too.”

For me, part of the beauty of THINGS is that it seems like it would be at home no matter where you put it—a desert island, a museum, a mall, or a space station. It’s like a mirror—but it doesn’t reflect people, it reflects everything else.

Scott Reeder is Associate Professor of Painting and Sculpture at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. His work was recently featured at MCA Chicago in the exhibition Chicago Works: Scott Reeder.

MCA visitors on Work No. 405

"It raises questions about time. I wonder what the time frame is, you know? Were those shot the same day? Or did these take place years apart? I think it also speaks to the banality of the everyday. It seems to be the same motions day to day, there’s very little variance. I think something like this makes you reflect on how depressingly repetitive and boring our lives really are."

"It's interesting because the videos are exactly the same but completely different. No matter how similar things are, there's always something that makes each thing unique. There are small differences between the videos, but when you watch the videos together those things stand out because they're not exactly the same."
Extra! Extra!

The Martin Creed Plays Chicago newspaper is produced monthly at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago for the duration of Martin Creed's 2012 residency. With this project, featuring contributions from local artists and writers, responses from the MCA's Teen Creative Agency, and reactions from visitors in the galleries, we aim to document Creed's activities in and outside the museum and across Chicago while also presenting diverse and engaging commentary.

February 2012

Work No. 405: Ships Coming In, 2005

Synched Mini DV videos (color, sound)
8 minutes, 30 seconds
Courtesy Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York

In the double-stacked video installation Work No. 405: Ships Coming In, documentation of a ship leaving and returning to port offers visual manifestation of a cliché about waiting and anticipation. This work is located in the Marjorie and Louis B. Susman Lounge on the third floor.
MCA’s Teen Creative Agency on Work No. 916

We began trying to understand Martin Creed’s work by interrogating it and asking it questions. We also asked museum visitors for their interpretations. We had so many questions that we thought we would share the larger question “What Is Box?” with you to facilitate your own questions. Some of our questions were the following:

- Does the content inside the box matter?
- Does the text on a box matter more than the product inside?
- What does Creed want us to get from his work?
- Does he want us to try figuring it out, or is he playing a joke on art viewers who try to interpret artworks?
- Why are the boxes piled from large to small?

Teen Creative Agency members, aged 15–19, meet weekly at MCA Chicago to explore themes of critical interpretation, public speaking, and cultural participation through the lens of their own questions and passions. As regular contributors to the Martin Creed newspaper, they will offer their perspective on Creed’s works and residency.

March 2012

Work No. 916, 2008

Nine cardboard boxes
78.7 × 24 × 24 in.
(200 × 61 × 61 cm)
Courtesy of the artist
and Gavin Brown’s enterprise, New York

The nine cardboard boxes in Work No. 916 are stacked on top of each other from largest to smallest to form a tower. The brand markings on the boxes indicate their original contents—various purchases ranging from a television to bottled water. This installation is located in the fourth floor lobby.

Lead support for the Martin Creed Residency is provided by Helen and Sam Zell. Major support is provided by Margot and George Grie. Additional generous support is provided by Helén Goldenberg.

In the galleries

MCA visitors on Work No. 916

“I feel like I'm trying to understand something that doesn't have a point.”

“I don't know what he's trying to do. Or maybe he isn't trying to do anything at all.”

“It's a tower.”

“I just realized this was a piece.”

“It kind of looks like a robot.”

“I wonder if this means something with brands, like capitalism.”

“It looks like my house.”

Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago
mcachicago.org/creedplayschicago

Produced and printed on-site by the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago with soy-based ink on a Riso M2100 two-color digital duplicator on Pason Riverside heavyweight groundwood construction paper (acid free, 100% recycled fiber). This is a reprint edition of the issue formerly known as Feb/Mar 2012.
Martin Creed has said, "I don't want to be a worker." He's self-conscious about that, not being a worker. I'd say he's about 50/50. That's actually pretty common, close to the national average, which includes you and your family and friends—all workers, some of the time. Anyway, it's not all that bad. It's a pretty good indication that you're alive. You're alive! And there are so many things to experience, so many sensations to be felt, that you've got to get your fill. Desire is a Hydra head, rub one out and two grow back.

Sometimes you buy yourself something real special, a special treat. You bring it home and take it out of its box. You put it on your entertainment center or your hutch or whatever, plug it in and turn it on, and it's seamlessly integrated into your home and a real reflection of who you are right now. Step back to admire it, yeah. When you go to throw away the cardboard box it came in, you notice that the box is immediately occupied again—by your cat, who'll defend his new castle to the death. That's what Martin Creed's art is about: having a play-date with yourself despite the other people in the room. Desire is a needy pet. Sometimes it's that thing you have to feed.

Often there are folks standing around Martin Creed's stacked-box sculpture (Work No. 916, 2008), pointing and laughing and waving over to their wives and Sisters to laugh at it, too. Your comments would make the artist cringe except the artist would be the first to say, "I don't know what art is." (He has said that exactly.) Here's an art history lesson: People often ask how much art costs. If it is made from gold, it will be more expensive. Empty cardboard boxes, perhaps less so. Old art means you encounter beauty. New art means you encounter thoughts. All the beautiful things you want to have. All the ugly things are important. All the stupid things are true.
Abraham Ritchie on Creed’s rhythm

Ships slowly arrive at a harbor, dock, and unload. The sequence repeats. A zigzag of boxes (perhaps unloaded from the ship), mode of large to progressively smaller boxes, rises from the floor. Handmade squares checker a wall across from another wall, where stripes regularly divide the space. In the works by Martin Creed on view in the museum, the artist alludes to the way our lives are reliably regulated by day-to-day activity: transportation (Work No. 405), commerce (Work No. 816), and labor (Work No. 798 and Work No. 1349). The sum total of these actions, the titular work, allows things (a favorite word of Creed’s; see Work No. 845) to be brought from here to there, to be exchanged, to be made. It is this kind of stability and structure that the recent NATO protests in Chicago called into question. At whose expense does this stability come? Creed describes the world as a "big mess," and his work reminds us of the importance of reliability.

Abraham Ritchie works at the MCA and is an art critic and historian.

Interview

Martin Creed on repetition

"That’s the thing about a rhythm; it’s reliable because it happens at predictable intervals, you know. But exactly the fact that it’s reliable helps you then to be in this big mess. You know, so these works that use repeated motifs or with intervals between them fulfill the function of giving me basically something like a handrail to hold onto in a constantly ever-changing world."

—Martin Creed

To hear more of the interview and watch the installation of Work No. 798 and Work No. 1349, go to mcacontemporary.org/Channel/ videos/all#42.

In the galleries

MCA visitors on Work No. 798 and Work No. 1349

"I like how it feels like each square should be perfect, but each one has small imperfections."

"I like the patterns I see within the whole piece itself."

"I think it’s very geometric, but there’s also character in each square."

"It’s like an outdoor space, inside."

"It’s quite arresting and bold. I like the way that you can tell it is all hand-done. It’s also tough on the eyes."

"It’s kind of funny; he avoided the electric sockets. He should have just painted over them."

"The red wall is really nauseating, the way it vibrates. But that’s not necessarily bad."

April 2012

Work No. 798, 2007
Work No. 1349, 2012

Emulsion on wall

Courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown’s enterprise, New York

Creed’s paintings, whether they fill a small canvas or, as with Work No. 798 and Work No. 1349, a monumental wall, are often the result of predetermined logic or a few simple rules. The two large-scale paintings that cover the walls in the MCA’s Kovler Atrium lobby—one of them conceived specifically for this site—each comprise a repeating pattern in a single bold color.

Lead support for the Martin Creed Residency is provided by Helen and Sam Zell. Major support is provided by Margot and George Getty. Additional generous support is provided by Heln Goldberg.

Museum of Contemporary Art
Chicago

mcachicago.org/creedplayschicago

Produced and printed on-site by the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago with soy-based ink on a Riso HZ1090 two-color digital duplicator on Pacon Riverside heavyweight groundwood construction paper (acid free, 100% recycled fiber). Students participating in the MCA’s Teen Creative Agency selected the paper and ink color for each issue.
Play by Martin Creed 

Work No. 798, 2007
Work No. 1349, 2012

Emulsion on wall 
Courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York

Creed's paintings, whether they fill a small canvas or, as with Work No. 798 and Work No. 1349, a monumental wall, can often reflect the result of the application of predetermined logic or a few simple rules. The two large-scale paintings that cover the walls in the MCA's Kevler Atrium lobby—one of them conceived specifically for this site—each comprise a repeating pattern in a single bold color.

Dan Gunn is an artist, writer, and educator working in Chicago.
Drawings of Martin

Teen Creative Agency members met with Martin Creed during his recent visit to the MCA. Together they engaged in an open dialogue as he prepared paintings for his upcoming record release. As the teens reflected on their interaction later, they clearly remembered the content of their conversation (mostly, they talked about parties) but had trouble coming to a consensus about what Creed looked like. So, from memory, they each drew pictures of Creed—does he have a mustache? Is he tall or short? Everyone agreed that his hair was memorable.

In the galleries

MCA visitors on Work No. 1355

"I don't know. Is that a trick? Has it been made by one of the museum employees or is it a real installation?"

"It's in a perfect place next to the elevator. And it's also a play on symmetry."

"It's art. I see that. I just can't explain it."

"I think it's the path to infinity."

"I think if the artist did more, it would be cooler. It's just like, really? What?"

"Reminds me of a caterpillar. That's what I see."

"I like it from the side best. It's a ladder to heaven from here."

"Are these nails? And what are nails, anyway? That's the question."

May 2012

Work No. 1355, 2012

Nails

Twelve parts; dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist

and Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York

In Work No. 1355, twelve nails of varying sizes extrude from the wall, evenly spaced in a line. Basic building materials like these nails are not usually visible, in keeping with their purpose, but in this work the nails appear half-exposed, progressing from largest to smallest.

Lea support for the Martin Creed Residency is provided by Helen and Sam Zeil. Major support is provided by Margot and George Greg. Additional generous support is provided by Helan Goldenberg.

Museum of Contemporary Art

Chicago

mcachicago.org/creedplayschicago
Martin Creed Plays No. 5

Get online
Visit our blog at mcachicago.org/creedplayschicago to read longer versions of articles you see in our newspaper, extended visitor comments, full-color photographs of Creed’s installations, and additional audio and video content. What do you think of Creed’s MCA residency thus far? Interact and share with us on Twitter and Instagram @mcachicago and in the comments sections of our blog posts.

July 2012
Work No. 1351, 2012
Emulsion on wall
Courtesy of the artist
and Gavin Brown’s
enterprise, New York

Café mural colors
While eating my lunch last week, I sat admiring Martin Creed’s recently installed Work No. 1351 (2012). Thick, interesting stripes of color cover the wall in Puck’s café, adding a playful dimension to what was previously a very white and clean-feeling space. This piece feels spontaneous and light. As is often the case with Creed’s simple-looking installations, a tremendous amount of planning and carefully choreographed installation took place behind the scenes to make this piece possible. The following is the surprisingly long list of colors that were used by MCA preparators to paint this mural:


Molly Zimmerman-Pealey works at the MCA.
Eliza Myrie on Work No. 792

Work No. 792 (2007) begins from a small green Lego baseplate. Attached to the foundation is a red rectangular brick. Above this brick is a smaller brick, still rectangular, but white. The structure rises with alternating colors for twenty-two bricks. From this point, the size of the bricks shrinks once again and rises another eighty-eight square bricks. Just any of the final 11th brick is a single yellow block with two small white eyes.

Cread's choice of two works to flank the entrance to Skyscraper materially and structurally reflects a relative simplicity. Work No. 792 and Work No. 919 (a stack of nine empty cardboard boxes descending in size from smallest to largest) are a sort of sequential to the exhibition. They remind us of one of the most generative stages of a structure's development. Marked by the playful nature of childhood, these stacks are also the eager moments of the architect's first rendering: a space of imagination; a gesture that suggests a drive to heights that complement the extreme engines one is willing to crane one's neck in order to see to the top.

The stacks reflect the skeletal nature of our tall buildings—of their ability to wear and shed various skins. The alternating colors of the Lego bricks are no matter; they can be marble or glass, steel or concrete. The height, the direct rise of Work No. 792, is a hanger for our vertical desires. As an advertisement for the fast of ascension it is also a bit of a weary warning. These stacks are only models. They can be only childhood imaginations. In the same moment of possibility we find the projects that languish, those that must remain unbuilt, left as visionary (or just childish) dreams.

Eliza Myrie was born in Albany, New York, in 1981. She currently lives and works in Chicago. Myrie experiments with multiple forms of popular media, focusing on class, ethnicity, politics, and race. Her work is on view in the MCA exhibition Skyscraper: Art and Architecture Against Gravity.

In the galleries

MCA visitors on Work No. 792

"What do I think? Clever, nostalgic, simple. A lot of people don't like to see simple things in a museum, but I appreciate art that gets back to the basics."

"I like the whimsy factor here. Proportions: beautifully small and impossible thin at the same time. Playfulness is my general vibe."

"I noticed the eyeballs immediately, and first thought I saw painted bands, not Legos, probably because I'm in a museum."

"Wow, Creed wasn't shy about doing the phallic thing here. I mean, it's not so subtle."

"It's a tower, a monument. Small, but I like it anyway."

"Well, I work at a preschool, so this makes me think of my job...sincerely."

"My wife was all about building blocks. They used to call her Princess Lego. So I enjoy this on her behalf."

Work No. 792, 2007

Lego 40 1/2 x 3 3/4 x 1 1/4 in. (103 x 9.5 x 3.2 cm) Collection of Honus Tandijono

Work No. 792 is built from everyday materials—a set of the widely available toy Lego blocks—and is strongly in keeping with Creed's interest in formal structure. Here at the MCA, the sculpture acts as a homage to the skyscraper, a symbol of modern development and a notable presence in Chicago's skyline.

Lead support for the Martin Creed Residency is provided by Helen and Sam Zell. Major support is provided by Margot and George Greig. Additional generous support is provided by Heln Goldenberg.

Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago
mcachicago.org/creedplayschicago
All about MOTHERS

For issue no. 6 of the Martin Creed newspaper we have decided to feature the 2012 MCA Chicago Plaza Project, Work No. 1357, MOTHERS. Visitors have shared photos and responses to MOTHERS with us via Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Join the conversation by following us on Twitter (@mocachicago) and reading and commenting on our blog (mocachicago.org/creedplayschicago).

2012 MCA Chicago Plaza Project

Work No. 1357, MOTHERS, 2012
White neon and steel
268 $\frac{1}{16}$ x 571 $\frac{3}{16}$ in.
Courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown’s enterprise, New York

The term envelopes an arche-type of a life-giving nurturer and elicits the psychological complexity of a relationship that begins even before the umbilical cord is severed. Even when they do not fit this ideal, the concept of a mother is something we return to—like soldiers dying on a battlefield, we cry out for them.

Creed acknowledges the sentimental strength of the word but recognizes looming maternal power as frequently being the most confounding and overpowering of familial relations. "Words are work," he says. "Words are things, shapes." Visiellar associations and anecdotes must strike poignantly when they catch sight of Creed's big word. They must tear it apart: Mother ship, Motherland, Motherliner, Motherhood, MOTH, OTHERS, HERB. Something women are built to be. Something women shouldn't have to be. Something I don't want to be. A familiar word outlined and hollow, its letters forming the sky, with no easy answers despite the artist's seeming straightforwardness. Like motherhood itself, art is a thing that is hard work.

Mia DiMeo is a Chicago-based writer.

The sculpture has to be large, Creed says, "because mothers always have to be bigger than you are" and because "it feels like mothers are the most important people in the world."
Art students on Martin Creed

In April, three Painting and Drawing MFA students from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago enjoyed the unique opportunity to meet with Creed and serve as studio assistants in the creation of several painted works for the residency project. The students assisted in painting the album artwork for a special edition vinyl album Creed recorded while in Chicago as well as several canvases going on display at the MCA this year. Two of the students, Seth Hunter and Ceyda Aykan, share their experiences with Creed below.

Two students, Martin, and Martin’s assistant Rob, went for tea. Siting for three and a half hours, we discussed portraits not landscapes, string not frowning, sick film not well film, balloon work not race work, certified not anonymous art. The children were smart and sneaky and how children are stupid and obvious, drinking too much not drinking too little, vomiting not eating, psychomotor not psychouflage, therapy not illness, TV not books, parents and children, being a little bad not being a little good. Two students, Martin, and Martin’s assistant Rob got up and went home. —Seth Hunter

I think the charm of Martin’s work is its communication with and directness to the viewer. It has playfulness and ambiguity in just the perfect amount to create some space for the viewer to breathe in and play with the work. Martin’s works possess a certain attitude, as if they just happened by themselves, as if they are just natural. When you look at them you don’t necessarily imagine them being made, but rather just plants growing by themselves just with enough water and light.

This is not an easy feeling to capture or an easy task to accomplish. Whether it is a neon sign, a huge installation, or the entire surface of a wall covered with patterns, Martin’s work is never under-or overdone. It is always just enough. The work becomes almost transcendental because the key is able to experience the story and the playfulness of the process of creation itself. —Ceyda Aykan

Visitor Comments

MCA visitors on MOTHERS

For this issue’s installment of visitor comments, we asked vendors and patrons at our Tuesday Farmers’ Market to react to MOTHERS.

“What’s next? It generates a lot ideas and questions, which is what art is supposed to do.”

“I think of plants and food because I’m growing things, and everything comes from the mother.”

“I do like it, but I have no idea what it might mean or imply. But aesthetically, I like it.”

“Can’t go wrong with a theme like mothers.”

“I think it’s kind of cool, especially when it’s moving, but what does it mean?”

“Why only mothers? Why not women in general?”

“I like it because I’m pregnant. It’s on the mind.”

“My first thought was, ‘Hey! I’m one!’”

“It’s a very strong statement.”

“I see it as a plateau.”

“The piece is very applicable to us. We’re on a mothers getaway weekend.”

“I appreciate the kinetic aspect of the piece.”

“Honor your mother!”

“Where’d they get the beams to make sure it’s structurally sound?”

“I didn’t understand it at first, but it’s doesn’t. You know, like, why do it rest on that pedestal? Things like that?”

“Mothers make the world go around.”

Lucy Wang on MOTHERS

As a teenager, I have ambivalent feelings about MOTHERS. On one hand, the work is reminiscent of my mother hovering over me, constantly watching and never missing a thing. On the other hand, I’m glad to have someone who’s always here to take care of me. Either way this work pays a well-deserved tribute to our mothers and the all-encompassing role they played in our lives as children. On second thought, what if Martin is questioning our undying devotion to our mothers? What if he’s asking us if we can over-praise (if that’s even a word) or over-value our mums? What if he’s making a statement on how we all focus on the mother and not the father? (Compare Mother’s Day festivities to Father’s Day ones.) Maybe I’m overthinking it now. Maybe he just wanted to make a nice sculpture.

Teen Creative Agency members meet weekly at MCA Chicago to explore themes of critical interpretation, public speaking, and cultural participation.

Lead support for the Martin Creed Residency is provided by Helen and Sam Zeil. Major support is provided by Margot and George Greig. Additional generous support is provided by Helyn Goldberg.

AA Official Airline of MCA Chicago

Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago

mcachicago.org

creedplayschicago