

ON KAWARA — SILENCE ©

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Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Teacher Resource Unit

A NOTE TO TEACHERS

Organized with the cooperation of the artist, *On Kawara—Silence* is the first full representation of On Kawara's oeuvre, including every category of work he created between 1963 and 2013. Much of it produced during his travels across the globe, Kawara's work explores a personal and historical understanding of place and time. Kawara made his daily life and routines the focus of his work, including Date Paintings (the *Today* series); postcards (the *I Got Up* series); telegrams (the *I Am Still Alive* series); maps (the *I Went* series); lists of names (the *I Met* series); newspaper cuttings (the *I Read* series); the inventory of paintings (Journals); and calendars (*One Hundred Years Calendars* and *One Million Years*). Throughout the course of the exhibition, a live reading of *One Million Years* will be performed three days per week on the ground floor of the Guggenheim rotunda.

On Kawara's paintings were first shown at the Guggenheim Museum in the 1971 *Guggenheim International Exhibition*. More than forty years later, this exhibition transforms the Frank Lloyd Wright–designed rotunda—itsself a form that signifies movement through time and space—into a site where audiences can reflect on the cumulative power and depth of Kawara's artistic practice.

This Resource Unit focuses on various aspects of Kawara's work and provides techniques for exploring both the visual arts and other areas of the curriculum. This guide is also available online at guggenheim.org/artscurriculum with images that can be downloaded or projected for classroom use. These images may be used for educational purposes only and are not licensed for commercial applications of any kind. Before bringing your class to the Guggenheim, we invite you to visit the exhibition, read this guide, browse our website, and decide which aspects of the exhibition are most relevant to your students. For more information on scheduling a visit for your students, please call 212 423 3637.

The Leadership Committee for *On Kawara—Silence* is gratefully acknowledged for its support, with special thanks to David Zwirner, New York/London; Glenstone; Leonard and Louise Riggio; and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Düsseldorf and Berlin.

This exhibition is also supported by the National Endowment for the Arts.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

On Kawara (1932–2014) devoted his life to exploring ideas of time and space with language- and number-based art. Most of his artworks are parts of series that catalogue his daily activities in existential and meditative ways. Kawara was part of a generation of Conceptual artists that emerged in the mid-1960s and focused on ideas over traditional aesthetic standards. He did not believe that knowing an artist's personal biography was valuable for understanding their work.

Born in Kariya, Japan, in December 1932, Kawara was raised in an intellectual home where he was exposed to a variety of cultural and religious ideas, including Shinto, Buddhist, and Christian teachings. He was only 13 years old when World War II ended with the atom-bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. After graduating from high school in 1951, Kawara moved to Tokyo and began to teach himself European philosophy as well as political and psychoanalytic theory. His education took place in bookshops, where he also formed friendships with other artists. Kawara became a prominent figure in the Tokyo avant-garde, but he also became frustrated with Tokyo and moved to Mexico City, thereby beginning a new life in which travel would play a prominent role.¹

On Kawara credited this roughly four-year sojourn in Mexico with heightening his awareness of the variability in people's perceptions of and relationships to time. In Japan, trains had arrived within seconds of their schedule, but in Mexico they were often late, sometimes by days. Kawara contemplated abandoning art during the early 1960s. However, a 1963 visit to the prehistoric caves of Altamira, Spain, moved him to resume making art, though in a drastically altered form.²

Kawara settled in New York in 1964, where he produced artworks featuring language and information systems. On January 4, 1966, he created the first of his Date Paintings—monochromatic canvases of red, blue, or gray upon which only the date is painted in white—which together constitute the *Today* series. Over the course of 48 years, Kawara produced several thousand of these paintings in more than 130 places around the world.

Today was the first of several series by Kawara to chronicle the passage of time. Three others were produced between 1968 and 1979, each recording an aspect of the artist's everyday activities. For *I Got Up*, Kawara mailed postcards to friends and colleagues rubber-stamped with the time he had gotten out of bed that day and the address where he was staying. For *I Met*, he typed lists of all the people he had met each day. For *I Went*, he traced his movements in red ballpoint pen onto photocopied maps. The daily postcards, maps, and lists comprise an impersonal system of information being applied to personal ends. Like another series of this period, *I Am Still Alive* (1970–2000), in which Kawara sent telegrams with the message “I am still alive” to friends and colleagues, they evoke mortality through dark humor and repetition.

On Kawara died in the summer of 2014 in New York City, his home base for about fifty years. His official biography consists solely of the sum total of days he had been alive. At his death, that number was 29,771.

On Kawara, *MAY 20, 1981* ("Wednesday."). New York. From *Today*, 1966–2013. Acrylic on canvas, 18 x 24 inches (45.7 x 61 cm). Pictured with artist-made cardboard storage box, 18 5/8 x 25 x 2 inches (47.3 x 62.5 x 5 cm). Private collection. © On Kawara. Photo: Courtesy David Zwirner, New York/London

< PAINTINGS: TODAY SERIES/DATE PAINTINGS >

On January 4, 1966, On Kawara began his *Today* series, or Date Paintings. He worked on the series for nearly five decades. A Date Painting is a monochromatic canvas of red, blue, or gray with the date on which it was made inscribed in white. Date Paintings range in size from 8 x 10 inches to 61 x 89 inches. The date is composed in the language and convention of the place where Kawara made the painting. When he was in a country with a non-Roman alphabet, he used Esperanto. He did not create a painting every day, but some days he made two, even three. The paintings were produced meticulously over the course of many hours according to a series of steps that never varied. If a painting was not finished by midnight, he destroyed it. The quasi-mechanical element of his routine makes the production of each painting an exercise in meditation.³ Kawara fabricated a cardboard storage box for each Date Painting. Many boxes are lined with a cutting from a local newspaper. Works were often given subtitles, many of which he drew from the daily press.

Kawara's choice of dates appears to follow no overall principle. Some dates may have been personally or historically significant. Above all, however, the *Today* series addresses



each day as its own entity within the larger context of the regularized passage of time. The series speaks to the idea that the calendar is a human construct, and that quantifications of time are shaped by cultural contexts and personal experiences.

For the project *Pure Consciousness* (1998–), a selection of Date Paintings are installed in kindergarten classrooms around the world. No explanation is given for the appearance of the paintings, nor are the students engaged in an organized discussion about the art. The paintings simply function as a backdrop for work and play. Kawara believed that an unmediated experience of his work is paramount, and that children of this age possess access to a purity of awareness, or consciousness, that is lost to adults.

VIEW + DISCUSS

On Kawara's work suggests that people do not experience time in the same way. Our experience is affected by culture, point of view, and other contexts. Ask students to consider this idea. Have they ever perceived time differently than someone else?

Can students identify experiences where time seemed to move more quickly or slowly? What were the circumstances?

Show: *May 20, 1981.*

- ▶ This painting is part of the *Today* series, or Date Paintings. Ask students what they notice about this work. What do students think the challenges would be in making a painting like this?
- ▶ The date corresponds to the day Kawara painted it. He made nearly three thousand paintings over almost fifty years. Some curators have used words like automatic, meditative, routine, and protocol to describe Kawara's practice. What do students think about these words as applied to his work? What other words would they add and why?
- ▶ Many Date Paintings are accompanied by a newspaper cutting from that day. Look at this one. Does it shed light on this date in history?
- ▶ Ask students which dates they would choose to paint and why. Do they think others would experience these dates in the same way as them?

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Despite their mechanical appearance, Kawara's Date Paintings are meticulously handmade in multiple layers. Kawara's tools included tapered brushes, a ruler, a set square, an X-acto knife, and a brush for dusting. Kawara rotated the canvas throughout the painting process in order to paint from all sides and thereby achieve exacting results.

For this activity, have students try painting in a precise way. Challenge them to paint a piece of text on thick paper or canvas board with tools such as a pencil, tapered brushes, a ruler, and a set square. They could paint just one word, a date, or another type of text. Ask them to reflect on the difficulties they faced while making such a precise painting. How did it feel to make? Were they in a "state of absorption" while making it?

- Many of the Date Paintings have subtitles. Some of these titles record personal anecdotes, such as "I played 'Monopoly' with Joseph, Christine and Hiroko this afternoon. We ate a lot of spaghetti" (January 1, 1968). Others record current events, some of them momentous, such as the Apollo 11 moon landing in 1969. Still other subtitles refer to the Date Paintings themselves; one reads, "I am afraid of my 'Today' paintings" (May 29, 1966). For this activity, challenge students to record a subtitle for each day of the week for two weeks. These subtitles can be personal, historical, or even arbitrary. What is it like to capture a day with a subtitle?

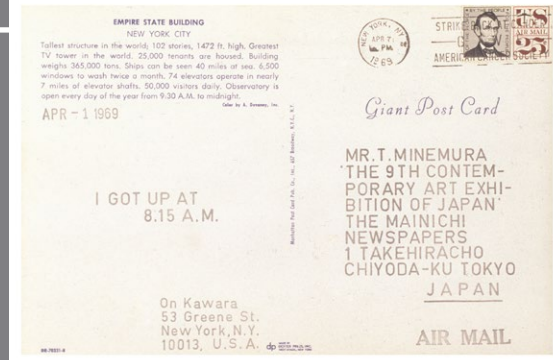
On Kawara, *APR - 1 1969*. From *I Got Up*, 1968–79.
Stamped ink on postcard, 6 x 9 inches (15.2 x 23 cm).
MTM Collection, Japan. © On Kawara. Photo:
Courtesy Michèle Didier

< POSTCARDS: I GOT UP >

For the series *I Got Up* (1968–79), Kawara sent two postcards every day to friends, family members, collectors, and colleagues. On each postcard, he stamped the date, his name, his current address, the name and address of the recipient, and the phrase I GOT UP AT (always in English and capital letters) followed by the time he rose from bed. Tourist picture postcards were always used, and the text was aligned in a similar way each time. Only the language and format of the date, the address, and the postage stamp changed, according to where he was at the time.

Some recipients received postcards for a month or more; others received only one card. When mailing consecutive cards to one person, he might create a play of combinations, sending multiple views of a single site, for example, or even repeatedly sending cards with the same image. Kawara often bought many postcards at once, but he always made the postcard on the day it was sent.

Like his other serial works, *I Got Up* combines a rote, impersonal system with the communication of personal information. The mass production of postcards and mechanical stamps contrasts with the



handmade nature of the work—the physical gesture of stamping—and the intimate moment it records.⁴ The series also contrasts a regular, repeated act with the act of doing something each day at changing times.

Despite all the protocols, constraints, systems, and regularity, this series and others ended with an arbitrary event: the theft of the briefcase containing his stamp kits. Eventually the briefcase was returned, but Kawara never resumed the series.⁵

VIEW + DISCUSS

Ask students if they do anything the same way every day. Why? How does it feel to keep up this routine? How would it feel to break the routine?

Show: *APR – 1 1969*.

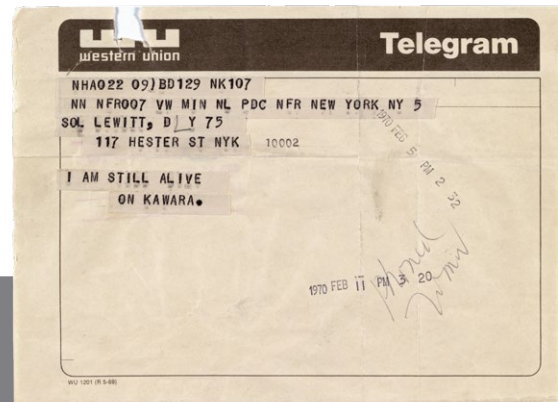
- ▶ What do students notice about it? Ask them to imagine how it was made.
- ▶ On Kawara sent postcards to friends or colleagues every day for nearly 12 years. He always followed the same format, down to the placement of the text. Ask students to imagine creating the same type of object every day for such a long time. How do they think it would feel to do so?
- ▶ Some people have said this series, like other Kawara series, encompasses opposites, such as the personal and the impersonal and the random and the regular. What do students think? Can they think of any other opposites apparent in his work?
- ▶ Kawara's first-person statements declare his existence. Ask students if they do anything to declare their existence. If they could choose a first-person statement to declare their existence, what would it be?

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Ask students to come up with something they can record about themselves each day. Then challenge them to record it in the same way each day for a week. At the end of the week, ask students to bring in the product of their efforts and display them for a small group. Have the groups discuss what it was like to repeat this process every day. What were the challenges? What were the discoveries? Did they find the experience meditative like Kawara did?
- Kawara's series are often based around the repetition of first-person statements. What if he continued these statements rather than repeating them? Ask students to imagine they are writing the rest of the postcard. How would it continue? Challenge them to address the themes Kawara liked to explore in their fictional first-person continuation of the statement "I got up." These themes could include the subjectivity of time, converting everyday life into art, developing routines and systems, recording movements in space and time, and declaring one's existence. What did they write to the postcard recipient? How did the first three words inform the rest of their writing?
- Kawara's series are often constrained by self-imposed protocols and systems. Many artists find rules and systems to be a source of creativity rather than limitation. Assign students to research an artist who imposed rules or systems on his or her process and have them attempt to recreate these systems. Examples of artists students can research include John Cage (1912–1992), Sol LeWitt (1928–2007), Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), and Ad Reinhardt (1913–1967). What did their systems help them produce? Why do students think they stuck with these systems? How did their systems reflect their philosophies about art?
- Mail art is a populist artistic movement that emerged in the early 1960s and continues to the present day. It centers on sending small-scale works through the mail to be included in group shows. Many Mail artists value the process of exchanging ideas and the sense of belonging to a community. While Kawara's work is not technically considered Mail art, it does share many qualities.

As a class, research approaches to Mail art and work to create a school-wide exhibition that embraces some of the hallmarks of the Mail art movement.

On Kawara, telegram to Sol LeWitt, February 5, 1970.
From *I Am Still Alive*, 1970–2000. 5 3/4 x 8 inches
(14.6 x 20.3 cm). LeWitt Collection, Chester,
Connecticut. © On Kawara. Photo: Kris McKay
© The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York



< TELEGRAMS: I AM STILL ALIVE >

The series *I Am Still Alive* began with three telegrams that On Kawara sent in 1969. They read, in succession: I AM NOT GOING TO COMMIT SUICIDE DON'T WORRY; I AM NOT GOING TO COMMIT SUICIDE WORRY; and I AM GOING TO SLEEP FORGET IT. These telegrams, each sent three days apart, get as close to “an expression of interiority—and a narrative arc—as Kawara will ever get.”⁶ Just over a month later, Kawara sent another telegram to someone else, which reads, I AM STILL ALIVE. He sent nearly nine hundred telegrams of this kind to dozens of friends and acquaintances for more than three decades.

These telegrams differ from the artist's earlier series in several ways. Most importantly, Kawara did not make—or even touch—these objects. Sending a telegram was a largely impersonal act involving clerks at telegraph offices. For this reason, Kawara had to relinquish strict aesthetic control. Other differences concern the format of the telegram, which was determined by the place it was received (not the place from which it was sent), and its time stamp, which reflects

the time of delivery (not when it was sent). Also, unlike series such as *I Went* and *I Got Up*, Kawara did not send a telegram each day.”⁷

This series reflects Kawara's “increasing distrust of language.”⁸ By the late 1960s, he abandoned writing and avoided explaining his work. In response to art-world inquiries, Kawara often sent telegrams with the simple statement, I AM STILL ALIVE.

The dark humor of the series derives from its message and its medium. The message “is like the answer to a question that hasn't been asked. And it is perfectly deadpan.”⁹ Indeed, it conceivably could have been inaccurate. By the time the telegram was received, Kawara may no longer have been “still alive.”

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: Telegram to Sol LeWitt,
February 5, 1970.

- ▶ What do students notice about this artwork?
- ▶ Like other On Kawara series, this was made with a common commercial medium—a kind of readymade. In this case, the object is a telegram Kawara sent to a friend, the artist Sol LeWitt. Telegrams translated words into a code of long and short signals sent as charges over electric wires. Messages were short because charges were incurred based on the number of words. Ask students to imagine the time before email, text messages, and cell phones. How would it feel to receive or send a telegram?
- ▶ The *I Am Still Alive* series consists of nearly nine hundred telegrams sent to friends and colleagues, all featuring this one statement. What would students think if they received a telegram like this?
- ▶ Telegrams were often reserved for delivering important news. Though some of this news was positive (i.e., births, weddings), the telegram was often associated with bad news, including the announcement of a death. Compare this history to Kawara's message.

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- On Kawara used an old medium of communication for this series. By the time he stopped sending *I Am Still Alive* telegrams, this technology was nearly obsolete. For this activity, ask students to imagine that Kawara created a new series with modern communication technology, such as texts, emails, tweets, or Facebook or Instagram posts. What do they think he would have done with these technologies? How would it be different than his telegrams and postcards? Challenge students to plan their own series using a modern communication technology. How does the choice of medium affect the message?
- The phrase Kawara repeated in this series, “I am still alive,” suggests the glimmer of a story but no narrative arc. For this activity, challenge students to write the opening paragraph of a short story or novel using this sentence. What comes next? Compare the different directions students took in their stories.
- Kawara is part of a tradition of artists who challenged long-held ideas about making art, including the convention of using fine-art materials. For this series, Kawara did not make or touch the objects; he simply communicated the statement to the telegram office.

Divide the class in half. Ask them to debate the definition of art and whether Kawara's series should be considered art. What do they think the criteria should be for art and “good” art?

- Technology has changed so rapidly in recent decades that many students might not realize how it has affected everyday life. For this activity, ask students to interview someone over the age of sixty about the communication methods they used growing up. What do they remember about telegrams, if anything at all? How were telephones different when they were younger? What was it like to correspond with someone who was far away? How have new technologies improved people's lives? What new challenges have they brought?

< MAPS: I WENT >

In the *I Went* series (1968–79), Kawara traced his movements over the course of a day in red ballpoint pen on a photocopy of a local map that he stamped with the date. He eventually preserved the maps in plastic sleeves and assembled them in three-ring binders. Kawara created at least one map per day for the length of the series. If he left the area represented by the map, he used arrows and notes to describe where he had gone and

his return route. Kawara marked the location where he began the day with a red dot. On days when he didn't leave the house, the map solely bears that mark. If the artist was out after midnight, then the next day's map begins at that location. Kawara achieved a consistency in size and appearance in this series by cropping and altering the maps through photocopying.



On Kawara, *APR 4 1969*.
New York. From *I Went*,
1968–79. Ink on
photocopy, 11 x 8 inches
(27.9 x 20.3 cm).
Collection of the artist.
© On Kawara. Photo:
Courtesy Michèle Didier

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: APR 4 1969.

- ▶ What do students notice about it? Ask them to imagine how it was made.
- ▶ To create this series, Kawara bought and photocopied maps and recorded his movements on them with red pen. He made at least one map a day for the length of the series. Ask students to imagine keeping track of their movements like this every day for such a long time. What do they think that experience would be like?
- ▶ Kawara was very devoted to recording his movements accurately. A friend of his recounted a night when he didn't go out because he had already completed his map for the day. Ask students to think about their own lives. What would be the challenges of recording information like this?
- ▶ The curator of this exhibition has compared aspects of these works to detective fiction in which certain information is kept from readers, with two stories being revealed side by side: that of the crime and that of the investigation.¹⁰ What do students think of this comparison? What is Kawara not revealing? What are the two stories being recorded here?

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- In 1964, On Kawara, who was not a native English speaker, made lists of English phrases for himself, and he included some of them in early drawings. The phrases may have come from basic language instruction books that Kawara used to improve his English.¹¹ Such simple phrases also appear in his series titles. Challenge students to list two-word, past-tense, first-person phrases like the ones Kawara used to title his series. Then ask them to pick one and plan a series with that phrase as its title.
- Kawara used many everyday objects in his work, including newspapers, maps, postcards, and telegrams. Like Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) with his readymades, Kawara often barely altered the objects he used.

For this activity, assign students to brainstorm everyday objects that they could use to record or represent their daily activities. Then, challenge them to choose one and collect one of that type of object every day for a week. Students may alter it however they want or not at all. What does their choice of object reveal about their life? What does it not reveal?

- Try to recreate Kawara's methodology for this series. Procure a map of your community. Record your movements for one week either on different maps or on one map in different colors. Share the results with your classmates. What was difficult about this process for students? What surprised them? Did anything about this process make them uncomfortable? Did they record anything that they wouldn't have wanted to be made public?

< LISTS: I MET >

In his *I Met* series, Kawara recorded the names of the people—friends, acquaintances, and strangers—with whom he conversed on each day between 1968 and 1979. These names appear in single-column typed lists in the order the individuals were “met,” and the lists are compiled in binders. Each binder page contains a single day’s list and is stamped with the date. If Kawara was with someone at midnight, the name of that person is both the last name on that day’s list and the first name on the next day’s list.

On Kawara, *I Met*, 1968–79. Clothbound loose-leaf binders with plastic sleeves and inserted printed matter, twenty-four volumes, 11 1/2 × 11 3/4 × 3 inches (29.2 × 29.8 × 7.6 cm) each. Collection of the artist. © On Kawara. Photo: Kris McKay © The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York.

The series explores two central themes of his work: language and travel. During his travels, Kawara had difficulty remembering the Western names of people he met. He would often ask them for their business cards or to write their names down so that he could record them later. One day, when he received the business card of a man with a name of Hispanic origin in Mexico City, Kawara remembered a challenge issued by his friend Kasper König (b. 1943): write a poem that can be understood anywhere in the world. The man’s name struck him as a “readymade poem” that could be understood by anyone, anywhere.¹² He realized then that a universal language could be found in names.



VIEW + DISCUSS

Ask students if they ever make lists of things in their lives. Why? What purpose do these inventories serve?

Show: *I Met*.

- ▶ What do students notice about it? Ask them to imagine how it was made.
- ▶ Tell students that these binders contain a list for every day of more than 11 years. Each chronological list contains the names of the people with whom Kawara conversed on that day. What do they think the challenges would be in making this series? What do they think would inspire someone to make this kind of list?
- ▶ What do students think these lists could reveal about Kawara's life and the lives of the listed people? Imagine creating a list like this for your life every day. What would be revealed?

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- *I Met* was inspired in part by the challenge Kasper König issued to Kawara: write a poem that can be understood anywhere in the world. Kawara wondered if names could be used as a universal language. This idea of a universal language appears elsewhere in Kawara's oeuvre. For Date Paintings made in countries with non-Roman alphabets, he used Esperanto, an artificial international language based on European languages that was invented in the late nineteenth century.

For this activity, give students the same challenge that König gave Kawara: write a poem that can be understood anywhere in the world. What can students use as an international, universal language? Sound effects? Emoticons? Share the results as a class. What were the challenges and surprises?

- A friend of Kawara's recalled that the artist once said to him: "There is no such thing as domestic life."¹³ In other words, Kawara's daily routines and meetings become part of an aesthetic practice. Art is life, and life is art.

Ask students to list their own daily routines (i.e., flossing, attending class). They should then select one daily routine and transform it into art. As examples, they could record it, perform it, or borrow its tools for art-making. What would a life be like in which aspects of everyday, private life become art?

< CALENDARS: ONE HUNDRED YEARS AND ONE MILLION YEARS >

The format of the calendar provided On Kawara with another way of representing time and recording daily life. In both *One Hundred Years Calendars* (1984–2012) and *One Million Years* (1970–98), Kawara compresses time into small grids. For *One Hundred Years Calendars*, the calendars are ten rows high, with each row representing a decade and columns representing the months. Black dots indicate Sundays. Every day in the artist's life is marked over the numeral with a yellow dot. Every day a Date Painting was completed is marked with a green dot, and red dots note when more than one painting was made. The calendars teach us some things about Kawara's life. They indicate that he was born on December 24, 1932, not January 2, 1933, as officially recorded and publicized prior to his passing. They also reveal months of high and low artistic productivity.¹⁴

One Million Years includes *One Million Years: Past* (subtitled "For all those who have lived and died") and *One Million Years: Future* (subtitled "For the last one"). The former represents one million years stretching backward from the year Kawara made the set. The latter stretches forward one million years. These pages fill ten leather binders; each binder holds two hundred pages, and each page contains five hundred years. To make the calendars, Kawara developed a cut-and-paste technique, gluing columns of single digits to typed and photocopied grids of numbers so that, for instance, 500 to 1 BC easily became 1500 to 1001 BC. He then photocopied the whole page to conceal the glued areas and placed the pages in transparent plastic sleeves.

On Kawara, *One Million Years: Past*, 1970–71 (page detail).
Photocopied and typewritten page, 11 × 8 inches (27.9 × 20.3 cm).
Private collection. © On Kawara. Photo: Kris McKay
© The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York

598500 BC	598499 BC	598498 BC	598497 BC	598496 BC	598495 BC	598494 BC	598493 BC	598492 BC	598491 BC
598490 BC	598489 BC	598488 BC	598487 BC	598486 BC	598485 BC	598484 BC	598483 BC	598482 BC	598481 BC
598480 BC	598479 BC	598478 BC	598477 BC	598476 BC	598475 BC	598474 BC	598473 BC	598472 BC	598471 BC
598470 BC	598469 BC	598468 BC	598467 BC	598466 BC	598465 BC	598464 BC	598463 BC	598462 BC	598461 BC
598460 BC	598459 BC	598458 BC	598457 BC	598456 BC	598455 BC	598454 BC	598453 BC	598452 BC	598451 BC
598450 BC	598449 BC	598448 BC	598447 BC	598446 BC	598445 BC	598444 BC	598443 BC	598442 BC	598441 BC
598440 BC	598439 BC	598438 BC	598437 BC	598436 BC	598435 BC	598434 BC	598433 BC	598432 BC	598431 BC
598430 BC	598429 BC	598428 BC	598427 BC	598426 BC	598425 BC	598424 BC	598423 BC	598422 BC	598421 BC
598420 BC	598419 BC	598418 BC	598417 BC	598416 BC	598415 BC	598414 BC	598413 BC	598412 BC	598411 BC
598410 BC	598409 BC	598408 BC	598407 BC	598406 BC	598405 BC	598404 BC	598403 BC	598402 BC	598401 BC
598400 BC	598399 BC	598398 BC	598397 BC	598396 BC	598395 BC	598394 BC	598393 BC	598392 BC	598391 BC
598390 BC	598389 BC	598388 BC	598387 BC	598386 BC	598385 BC	598384 BC	598383 BC	598382 BC	598381 BC
598380 BC	598379 BC	598378 BC	598377 BC	598376 BC	598375 BC	598374 BC	598373 BC	598372 BC	598371 BC
598370 BC	598369 BC	598368 BC	598367 BC	598366 BC	598365 BC	598364 BC	598363 BC	598362 BC	598361 BC
598360 BC	598359 BC	598358 BC	598357 BC	598356 BC	598355 BC	598354 BC	598353 BC	598352 BC	598351 BC
598350 BC	598349 BC	598348 BC	598347 BC	598346 BC	598345 BC	598344 BC	598343 BC	598342 BC	598341 BC
598340 BC	598339 BC	598338 BC	598337 BC	598336 BC	598335 BC	598334 BC	598333 BC	598332 BC	598331 BC
598330 BC	598329 BC	598328 BC	598327 BC	598326 BC	598325 BC	598324 BC	598323 BC	598322 BC	598321 BC
598320 BC	598319 BC	598318 BC	598317 BC	598316 BC	598315 BC	598314 BC	598313 BC	598312 BC	598311 BC
598310 BC	598309 BC	598308 BC	598307 BC	598306 BC	598305 BC	598304 BC	598303 BC	598302 BC	598301 BC

VIEW + DISCUSS

Show: *One Million Years: Past* (detail).

- ▶ What do students notice? What materials and techniques do they think were used?
- ▶ For this work, On Kawara created a typewritten list of the one million years preceding the year in which he made the work. Ask students to imagine this list's length. Each project (*Past* and *Future*) filled ten leather binders with two hundred pages per binder and five hundred years per page.
- ▶ Imagine typing one million years. What would that experience be like?
- ▶ Kawara developed a technique to reduce the labor. He glued typed columns of single digits and photocopied grids of numbers so that, for instance, 500 to 1 BC became 1500 to 1001 BC. Ask students how today's technology could be employed to reduce the labor further. How would that change the experience of making it? How would that change its effect on viewers, if at all?
- ▶ For this work and others, Kawara used materials that are often found in offices: three-ring binders, transparent plastic sleeves, a typewriter, glue, calendars, and a photocopier. What associations do students normally have with these materials? How are those associations different from those they have with traditional fine-art materials?

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- When On Kawara made his first calendar in 1969, photocopying was a brand new technology. For these calendars and for his maps, it became an important tool for reducing labor and creating a consistent look between his objects. Challenge students to work in teams to conceive of a way to use the photocopier as a tool for making art. Arrange access to your school's photocopier for them to execute their ideas. What techniques did the teams devise? How is the photocopier a unique tool for an artist? How is it related to other tools in art history?

As an extension to this activity, challenge students to use other office materials (i.e., binder clips, staplers, sticky notes, date stamps) as materials for creating artworks. Reflect on using these materials instead of typical fine-art materials. What qualities do they lend to the process and the product?

- In 1993, live readings were held of Kawara's *One Million Years*. A man and woman alternated reading the years, counting slowly from the past to the present and from the present into the future. Each subsequent reading of the work began where the previous one left off. The plan is to continue until all the volumes have been read aloud. Ask students what they think it would be like to listen to these readings. Acknowledge that it could be "boring." Ask students to think about what happens when they are bored. What are the negative and positive effects of boredom? In the 1960s, many artists played with the idea of boredom and what it said about life. For this activity, challenge students to work in groups to identify a list (i.e. a grocery list or attendance record) that they could read aloud to the class. Ask students to "perform" these lists as a reading. How does it feel to listen to them as opposed to reading or using them? How is it different from other performances they have seen? If they experienced boredom, what were the positive or negative effects of this feeling?
- Kawara was an autodidact and read many works of philosophy, literature, art, and science. Assign students to research one of the thinkers who likely inspired him and to report the connections they see between Kawara's work and their ideas. These thinkers and their contributions could include: Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) and existentialism, Albert Einstein (1879–1955) and the theory of relativity, and Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) and readymades. How did this research deepen students' understanding of Kawara's work?

RESOURCES

BOOKS

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- Weidemann, Henning. *On Kawara: June 9, 1991, From "Today" Series (1966–)*. Stuttgart: Reihe Cantz, 1994.
- Watkins, Jonathan and René Denizot. *On Kawara*. London: Phaidon, 2002.
- Weiss, Jeffrey with Anne Wheeler. *On Kawara–Silence*. New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2015.

BOOKS FOR KIDS

- Smith, Keri. *Everything Is Connected: Reimagining the World One Postcard at a Time*. Perigee Trade, 2013.
- . *How to Be an Explorer of the World: Portable Life Museum*. Perigee Trade, 2008.

VIDEOS

- Live reading of On Kawara's *One Million Years* at David Zwirner Gallery, New York, in 2009
[youtube.com/watch?v=baQr2SxMJz4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=baQr2SxMJz4)

WEBSITES

- David Zwirner Gallery
davidzwirner.com/artists/on-kawara/biography/
- Dia Art Foundation
diaart.org/exhibitions/introduction/86
- Mail Art, or Correspondence Art
moca.org/pc/viewArtTerm.php?id=22
- moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2014/analognetwork/

NOTES

- ¹ Jonathan Watkins, "Survey" in Jonathan Watkins and René Denizot, *On Kawara* (London: Phaidon, 2002), 53.
- ² Anne Wheeler, "Paris–New York Drawings," in Jeffrey Weiss with Anne Wheeler, *On Kawara–Silence* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2015), 51.
- ³ Jeffrey Weiss, "Bounded Infinity," in Weiss with Wheeler, *On Kawara–Silence* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2015), 26.
- ⁴ Watkins, "Survey," in Watkins and Denizot, *On Kawara*, 92.
- ⁵ Weiss, "Bounded Infinity," in Weiss with Wheeler, *On Kawara–Silence*, 26–27.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.
- ⁷ Wheeler, "I Am Still Alive," in Weiss with Wheeler, *On Kawara–Silence*, 149.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁹ Watkins, "Survey," in Watkins and Denizot, *On Kawara*, 87.
- ¹⁰ Weiss, "Bounded Infinity," in Weiss with Wheeler, *On Kawara–Silence*, 45.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 44.
- ¹² Wheeler, "I Met," in Weiss with Wheeler, *On Kawara–Silence*, 129.
- ¹³ Weiss, "Bounded Infinity," in Weiss with Wheeler, *On Kawara–Silence*, 37.
- ¹⁴ Wheeler, "One Hundred Years Calendar," in Weiss with Wheeler, *On Kawara–Silence*, 159.

AUTODIDACT

A self-taught person

CONCEPTUAL ART

An art form in which the artist's intent is to convey a concept rather than to create an art object

ESPERANTO

An artificial international language based on words common to the chief European languages

EXISTENTIAL

Of, relating to, or affirming existence

INVENTORY

A complete list of the things that are in a place

MEDITATIVE

Very thoughtful; involving or allowing deep thought or meditation

MILLENNIUM

A period of one thousand years

NARRATIVE ARC (adapted from Dictionary.com)

The principal plot of an ongoing storyline in the episodes of a narrative; the continuous progression or line of development in a story

PROTOCOL

A system of rules that explain the correct conduct and procedures to be followed in formal situations

READYMADE

A commonplace object selected and shown as a work of art

TELEGRAM

A message sent over long distances by an old-fashioned system using wires and electrical signals

(all from Merriam-Webster.com unless otherwise noted)