


## Introduction

*Co-respond* is a SEVENTH publication exploring the possibilities of collaboration and conversation between visual art and writing. Featuring written works by fifteen emerging writers, *Co-respond* critiques, expands and documents SEVENTH's exhibition program from June 2011 to January 2012.

When I first read SEVENTH's rationale behind this exciting new project, I couldn't believe the synchronicity. It quickly became clear that we had been musing on some very similar topics. There is certainly nothing new about an artist-run gallery initiating an arts-writing project—or producing a publication for that matter—but, importantly, *Co-respond* is not all about arts writing.

What sets it apart, and what attracted me to it in the first place, was its aim to involve writers from all genres and backgrounds. In doing so, it strives to present visual art in new ways and from new perspectives. It broadens the scope of arts writing beyond customary formats, and encourages collaboration and conversation. While still incorporating more traditional forms of arts writing, such as reviews and interviews, it throws some variety into the mix. Essays, short stories and poetry also feature, works that take their inspiration from art but run in their own creative direction. In this way, *Co-respond* provides an important forum for analysis of contemporary art




that is as much about supporting emerging artists through peer response as it is about supporting the authors of those responses: emerging arts writers, creative writers, poets and academics.

This strategy allows us to open up the possibilities of the arts-writing relationship. It expands the experience of the author, artist and reader. Writers are invited into a world some have not had access to before, providing a new environment from which to draw inspiration. The exhibiting artists have the opportunity to see their work manifested as prose or simply to sit down and discuss their work with a stranger. The audience—our readers—gain a new perspective on these artworks, or experience an artwork first-hand through the written interpretations of another.

The writers featured in *Co-respond* were each allocated an exhibition ‘slot’ at SEVENTH between June 2011 and January 2012. SEVENTH comprises multiple exhibition spaces, and each slot could include up to five different exhibitions at one time. Writers were given complete freedom to respond to whatever they wished, be that an artist, artwork, entire exhibition or even the gallery itself—as a space and an institution. Therefore not all exhibitions and artists are represented, and some have more than one response. The extent of the collaboration differs with every piece and was the responsibility of the writer to initiate and maintain. Some writers entered into conversations with their artists, some attended artists’ talks, while others worked more in isolation, responding to the artworks only.





The mix of styles and approaches taken by the writers was always going to produce a surprising result. The works themselves vary greatly, as different as their authors. Combining such disparate works in a single publication presents a risk, but in doing so we are able to explore just how many ways writing and visual art can relate and respond to each other.

*Co-respond* presents these writers' works not simply to explain or justify the artworks they respond to, but rather to give another reading, and in some cases another meaning, to the artworks. The attempt here is to expand the boundaries of arts writing, to increase the crossover, the grey area between writing and art. In this case the artworks are the inspiration, the beginning point; the writing, the destination.

**Victoria Bennett**

Project Coordinator