

# BRUCE NAUMAN

"The true artist helps the world by revealing mystic truths."

- Bruce Nauman



# BRUCE NAUMAN

Video > [Make Me Think Me](#)

Nauman studied mathematics and physics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and art with William T. Wiley and Robert Arneson at the University of California in Davis. He worked as an assistant to Wayne Thiebaud and in 1966 he became a teacher at the San Francisco Art Institute. In 1968 he met the singer and performance artist Meredith Monk and signed with the dealer Leo Castelli. In the 1980s he moved to New Mexico. Much of his work is characterised by an interest in language which often manifests itself in a playful, mischievous manner. For example, the neon *Run From Fear- Fun From Rear*, or the photograph *Bound To Fail* which literalises the title phrase and shows the artist's arms tied behind his back. There are however, very serious concerns at the heart of the work. Nauman seems to be interested in the nature of communication and the inherent problems of language, as well as the role of the artist as supposed communicator and manipulator of visual language. In 1999 he received the Golden Lion of the Venice Biennale. In 2004 he created his work *Raw Materials* at Tate Modern.

Nauman cites Samuel Beckett, Ludwig Wittgenstein, John Cage, Philip Glass, La Monte Young and Meredith Monk as major influences on his work.

# Biography

Born Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1941

## EDUCATION

1964 B.S. University of Wisconsin, Madison (mathematics & physics)

1966 M.F.A. University of California, Davis

1966-68 Taught at San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco

1970 Taught at University of California, Irvine

## HONORS/AWARDS

1968 NEA Grant, Artistic Fellowship Award, Washington, D. C.

1970 Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies Grant, Colorado

1986 Skowhegan Award, Skowhegan, Maine

1989 Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts, San Francisco Art Institute, California

1990 Max Beckmann Prize, Frankfurt am Main, Germany

1993 Alumni Citation for Excellence, University of California, Davis, California

The Wolf Foundation Prize in Arts (Sculpture), Herzlia, Israel

1994 The Wexner Prize, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

1995 Fellow, American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Aldrich Prize, Aldrich Museum, Ridgefield, Connecticut

1997 Member, Akademie der K?ste, Berlin, Germany

1999 Leone d'oro (The Golden Lion) 48th Venice Biennale, Italy

2000 Member, American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York, New York

Honorary Doctor of Arts, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, California

2004 Praemium Imperiale Prize for Visual Arts, Japan

Beaux-Arts Magazine Art Awards: Best International Artist, Paris

# Biography

## EXHIBITION

24 March 2006 through 1 May 2006, Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin

**I Not I, Samuel Beckett, Philip Guston and Bruce Nauman**

28 January 2006 through 1 April 2008, Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

**Elusive Signs: Bruce Nauman Works with Light**

17 September 2005 through 22 October 2005, Donald Young Gallery, Chicago, IL

**Bruce Nauman**

12 October 2004 through 25 March 2005, Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, London, England

**The Unilever Series: Bruce Nauman - Raw Materials**

31 October 2003 through 18 January 2004, Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin, Germany

**Bruce Nauman: Theaters of Experience**

21 December 2002 through 10 March 2003, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

**Fantasy Underfoot: The 47th Corcoran Biennial**

9 November 2002 through 26 January 2003 Museum of Gegenwartkunst , Basel, Switzerland

**Bruce Nauman: Mapping the Studio**

8 June 2002 through 27 July 2002, Sperone Westwater - New York

**Bruce Nauman: MAPPING THE STUDIO II (Fat Chance John Cage)**

9 January 2002 through 27 July 2002, Dia Center for the Arts, New York, New York

**Bruce Nauman: MAPPING THE STUDIO I (Fat Chance John Cage)**

1 November 2001 through 15 December 2001, Sperone Westwater - New York

**Green on Greene**

2 November 1996 through 14 December 1996, Sperone Westwater - New York

**Bruce Nauman: World Peace**

3 March 1990 through 24 March 1990, Sperone Westwater - New York

**Bruce Nauman: Shadow Puppets and Instructed Mime**

# LIGHT

"This exhibition is all about the visitor's experience.

Visitors will walk into a darkened gallery full of neon signs and fluorescent light environments.

They'll experience a disorientation of light and space, just as Nauman intended."

- Joseph D. Ketner II, Milwaukee Art Museum chief curator

## Window (1967)



neon tubing, 59 x 55 inches. It reads "The true artist helps the world by revealing mystic truths"

One of Nauman's first pieces, the neon sign "The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths" was initially displayed in the artist's grocery storefront studio. Hung in a window that faced the street, the artist's sign proclaims a private thought to a general public. Inspired by a beer sign that belonged to the former San Francisco grocery, Nauman's sign uses a public and familiar means of communication to relate an idea. Wanting to make art that didn't look like art, Nauman's neon sign was just another advertisement on the street, making a subtle impact on the consciousness of those who simply passed by. The occasional pedestrian who stopped to consider the work would have been confronted with an anonymous, moral conviction in an unusually public circumstance.

Related : <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/nauman/card1.html>

## None Sing–Neon Sign (1970)



Ruby-red and cool-white neon, 13 x 24 1/4 x 1 1/2 inches overall. Edition 6/6.  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Panza Collection

Related : [http://www.guggenheimcollection.org/site/date\\_work\\_md\\_117\\_3.html](http://www.guggenheimcollection.org/site/date_work_md_117_3.html)

## Human Nature/Knows Doesn't Know (1983)

> video

Neon tubing with clear glass tubing suspension frame



## Life, Death, Love, Hate, Pleasure, Pain (1983)



Collection Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Gerald S. Elliott Collection

Bruce Nauman deals with the big questions of life, in the words of his 1983 neon: Life, Death, Love, Hate, Pleasure, Pain. Nauman's work focuses on the essential elements of the human experience. Elusive Signs: Bruce Nauman Works with Light, premiering at the Milwaukee Art Museum January 28 – April 9, is Nauman's first solo exhibition in Wisconsin, the state in which he was raised. Bruce Nauman has been recognized since the early 1970s as one of America's most innovative and provocative contemporary artists.

Related : [http://www.mam.org/exhibitions/exhibition\\_details.aspx?ID=65](http://www.mam.org/exhibitions/exhibition_details.aspx?ID=65)

## Double Slap in the Face (1985)

> video

London 2006, courtesy of the Froehlich Collection, Stuttgart

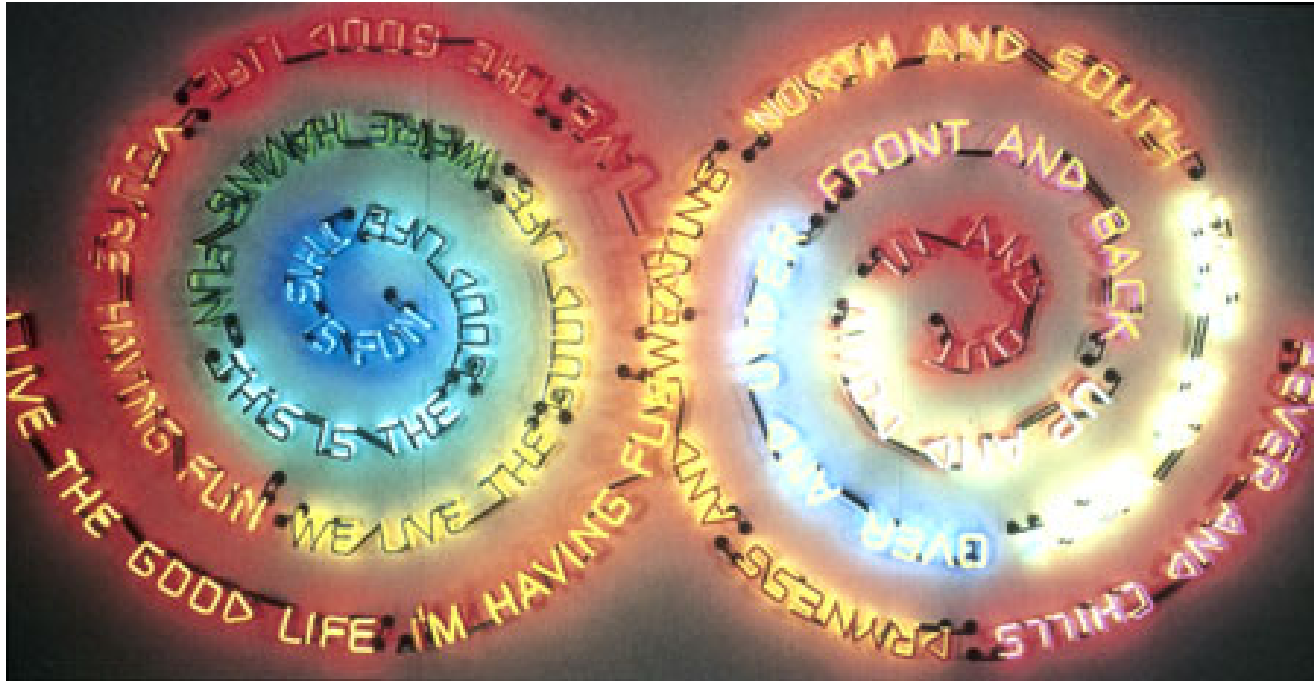
the neon figures that continuously slap each other in *Double Slap in the Face* 1985 – a violence undermined through endless repetition

Related : [http://www.mam.org/exhibitions/exhibition\\_details.aspx?ID=65](http://www.mam.org/exhibitions/exhibition_details.aspx?ID=65)

# One Hundred Live and Die (1984)



## Double Poke in the Eye (1985)



Having Fun / Good Life / Symptoms

Related : <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/nauman/card1.html>

## Mean Clown Welcome, 1985



Related : <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/nauman/card1.html>

## Green light corridor (1970)



Wallboard and fluorescent light fixtures with green lamps, dimensions variable, approximately 120 x 12 x 480 inches.

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Panza Collection

Nauman enforces the contrast between the perceptual and physical experience of space in his sculptures and installations.

Looking at the brilliant color emanating from *Green Light Corridor* prompts quite a different phenomenological experience than does maneuvering through its narrow confines

## Corridor with Mirrors and White Lights (1971)



Corridor Installation (1970)

In his corridor pieces, Nauman's sculpture assumes the dimensions of architecture. The spaces in these corridors are often claustrophobic yet they seem to extend infinitely, like a corridor seen in a dream. In this piece, the extension of space is achieved by the placement of a mirror set at an angle at the end of the corridor. Some of Nauman's corridors are areas in which he or the viewer performs by entering the space. This is impossible here; the width of the corridor has been narrowed to make entrance impossible, thereby heightening the sense of eerie isolation in the piece.

## Lighted Performance Box (1969)



Aluminum and 1000-watt spotlight, 78 x 20 x 20 inches.  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Panza Collection

*Lighted Performance Box* provokes another experiential situation. As a rectangular column, it resembles the quintessential unitary Minimalist sculpture, yet the square of light cast on the ceiling from the lamp encased inside alters one's reading of the piece: the sense of a hidden, unattainable space, one that can only be experienced vicariously, is evoked. Thus, the performance alluded to in the title is only a private, conceptual act, initiated when viewers attempt to mentally project their own bodies into this implied interior place.



# VIDEO INSTALLATION

"If I was an artist and I was in the studio, then whatever I was doing in the studio must be art. At this point art became more of an activity and less of a product."

- Bruce Nauman

## Stamping in the Studio (1968) / ARTE NAPOLI MADRE



Concerned to incorporate the mundane elements of daily life into his work, Nauman used his behaviour, obsessively pacing around the studio, as the starting point for a series of films and videos made from 1967-69. He recorded himself performing simple, repetitive activities, each responding to a specific 'problem' suggested in the title. Physically and mentally demanding, these actions were often performed for one hour – the length of a videotape. As a result, the threat of failure is ever present, evoking in the viewer an empathy Nauman described as a 'body response'.

[>> Stamping in the Studio video](#)

[>> ARTE NAPOLI MADRE video](#)

## Clown Torture: Clown Taking a Shit (1987)



Pete and Repeat were sitting on a fence. Pete fell off; who was left? Repeat. Pete and Repeat were sitting on a fence.

Four color video monitors, four speakers, four videotape players, two video projectors, four videotapes (color, sound), dimensions variable.

Nauman's "Clown Torture" is a shattering spectacle of color, motion, and sound. Displayed at high volume, the audio level of the five simultaneously occurring videos is an assault on the senses. Heard long before it's viewed, one must bravely enter into an enclosed, darkened room in order to see where all the noise is coming from. Once inside, two pairs of stacked monitors and two wall projections come into view. Immediately one senses that something is awry, as only two of the four televisions are oriented right side up. With one monitor turned upside-down and the other placed on its side, the images become abstracted and disorienting. The videos playing on the monitors record clowns in unnerving or difficult situations. In one sequence, a clown screams at an unseen antagonist. In another, a clown repeats the elliptical story.

Related : <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/nauman/card2.html>

# Good Boy, Bad Boy (1985)



Colour video and monitors / duration: 60 min., 52 sec.

This work consists of two monitors, displayed on plinths at head height. One screen shows a head and shoulders image of a young man, the other an older woman. Their heads are almost life size.

They look straight at the camera, and therefore make direct eye-contact with the viewer.

They each repeat a hundred phrases, which are conjugations of a verb followed by a line that defines the statement

They each go through this sequence five times. The delivery is flat and neutral at the beginning and becomes increasingly emotional until by the fifth recitation they appear very animated. His delivery takes fifteen minutes while hers is sixty seconds longer, which means that their performances gradually fall out of synch. As a stage actor, his delivery is more exaggerated while as a television actress working the fields of daytime tv, soap-operas and advertising, her performance is less gestural, relying more on facial expressions

I was a good boy  
You were a good boy  
We were good boys  
That was good  
I was a good girl  
You were a good girl  
We were good girls  
That was good  
I was a bad boy  
You were a bad boy  
We were bad boys  
That was bad  
I was a bad girl  
You were a bad girl  
We were bad girls  
That was bad  
I am a virtuous man  
You are a virtuous man  
We are virtuous men  
This is virtue  
I am a virtuous woman  
You are a virtuous woman  
We are virtuous women  
This is virtue  
I am an evil man  
You are an evil man  
We are evil men  
This is evil  
I am an evil woman  
You are an evil woman  
We are evil women  
This is evil  
I'm alive  
You're alive  
We're alive  
This is our life  
I live the good life  
You live the good life  
We live the good life  
This is the good life

I have work  
You have work  
We have work  
This is work  
I play  
You play  
We play  
This is play  
I'm having fun  
You're having fun  
We're having fun  
This is fun  
I'm bored  
You're bored  
We're bored  
Life is boring  
I'm boring  
You're boring  
We're boring  
This is boring  
I have sex  
You have sex  
We have sex  
This is sex  
I love  
You love  
We love  
This is our love  
I hate  
You hate  
We hate  
This is hating  
I like to eat  
You like to eat  
We like to eat  
This is eating  
I like to drink  
You like to drink  
We like to drink  
This is drinking  
I (like to) shit  
You (like to) shit  
We (like to) shit  
This is shit(ting)  
I piss  
You piss  
We piss  
This is piss  
I like to sleep  
You like to sleep  
We like to sleep  
Sleep well  
I pay  
You pay  
We pay  
This is payment  
I don't want to die  
You don't want to die  
We don't want to die  
This is fear of death.

## OK OK OK (1990)



OK OK OK consists of two picture discs shown on two monitors and projected via video beam on the back wall of the room. The picture discs show the artist's head permanently rotating on its own axis and speaking or screaming out the affirmative interjection in many modulations. While one disc reproduces the upright image, it is shown upside down in the other, giving the impression of someone hanging by his feet. With this, Nauman not only refers to his performance films of the sixties, Ok Ok Ok must also be seen in the immediate context of his wax-head installations which he has created in the past two years and also used as elements in his video installations.

# Raw Materials



> video

<http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/nauman/>

Language has always played a central role in Bruce Nauman's work, providing him with a means of examining how human beings exist in the world, how they communicate or fail to communicate. For *Raw Materials*, he has selected 22 spoken texts taken from existing works to create an aural collage in the Turbine Hall. Removed from their original context, the individual texts and voices become almost abstract elements, taking on new meanings as they are rearranged as part of a single work. *Raw Materials* also draws on Nauman's fascination with space, and the ways it can alter our behaviour and self-awareness. The Turbine Hall has been organised so that visitors encounter 'bands of sound' that run in strips across its width. No other physical changes have been made to the space. Sound becomes a sculptural material in itself, one that orchestrates and measures its surroundings.

The Turbine Hall is filled with voices, some clearly audible, others indistinct, which merge with new, 'found' sound from the voices of visitors. In *Raw Materials*, Nauman has transformed this cavernous space into a metaphor for the world, echoing to the endless sound of jokes, poems, pleas, greetings, statements and propositions.

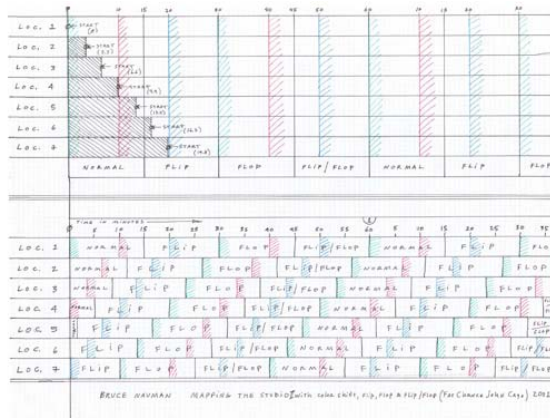
## Mapping the studio, 2001



> video



# Mapping the studio II, 2001

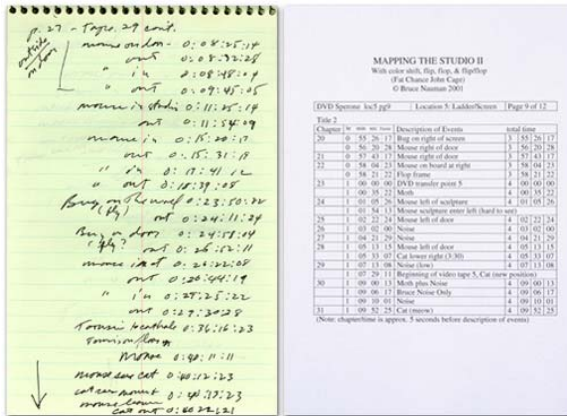


with color shift, flip, flop, & flip/flop (Fat Chance John Cage)

**Flip** – an AVID computer video process that reverses the orientation of the original image on the horizontal axis (left is right, right is left)

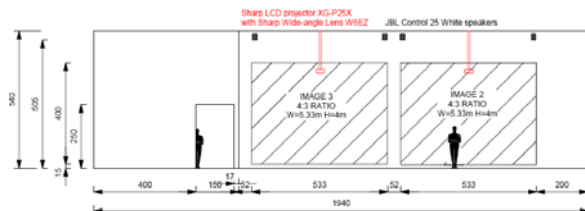
**Flop** – An AVID computer video process that reverses the orientation of the original image on the vertical axis (top is bottom, bottom is top).

**Flip/Flop** – An AVID computer video process that reverses the orientation of the original image through both horizontal and vertical axes.



T11893, Bruce Nauman  
MAPPING THE STUDIO II  
Display at Tate Modern Level 5  
2005-2006

NORTH WALL ELEVATION  
Scale 1:100 (centimeters)



Ceiling: black stretched fabric (no acoustic material)  
Walls: white  
Floor: concrete

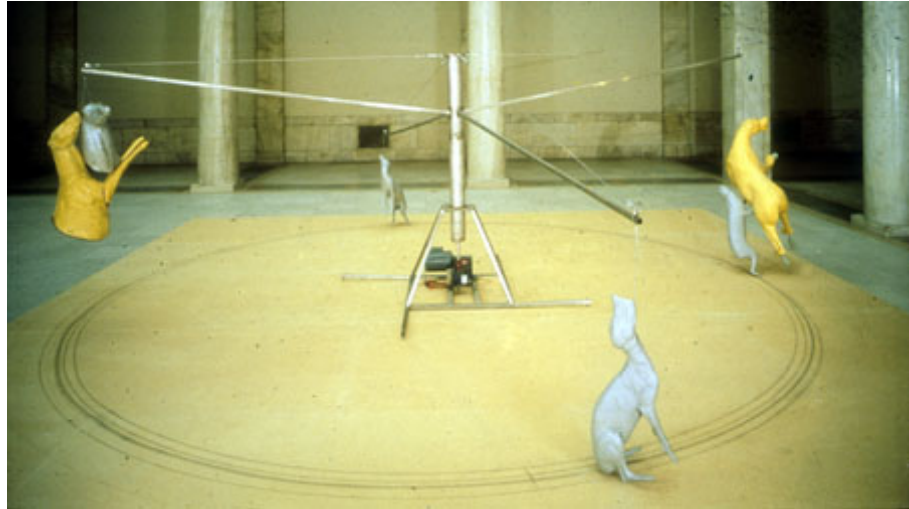
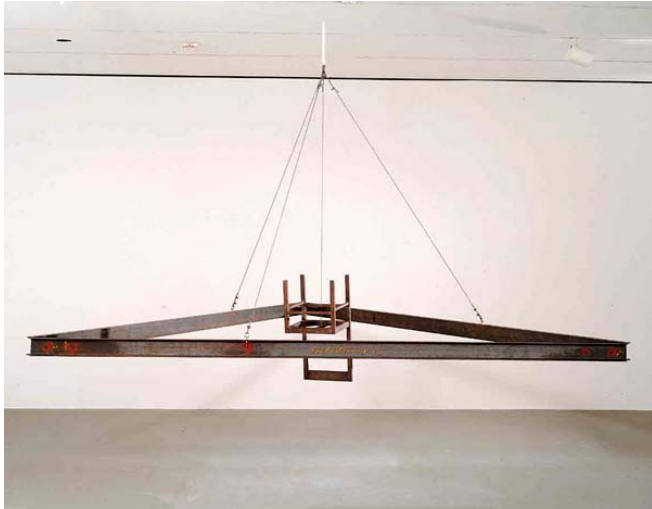
> video

What is the AVID program?



SCULPTURE

South America triangle (1981) / carousel (1988)



## One Hundred Fish Fountain (2005)



Bruce Nauman's installation of three fountain sculptures at the Donald Young Gallery in Chicago. The One Hundred Fish Fountain is made up of ninety-seven cast bronze fish spurting water from punctured holes. The water is collected in a large basin below and then pumped back through tubing. But there is nothing peaceful about this water feature. The fish fill noisily with water, then spray it out angrily until the pumps are turned off and the remaining water drips out during the ensuing silence. The other two fountains, 3 Heads Fountain (3 Andrews) and 3 Heads Fountain (Juliet, Andrew, Rinde) are smaller in scale, each comprised of three epoxy resin and fiberglass heads that are wired together. Again, water sprays from the punctures.

### 3 Head fountain (2005)



Left : Juliet, Andrew, Rinde  
Right : 3 Andrews

Epoxy resin and fiberglass

