

## BMW Open Work

# THE WORK IS THE WORK IS THE WORK

**For his commission at Frieze London, Sam Lewitt is ordering parts from BMW's production line**

The title of Sam Lewitt's commission, premiering at Frieze London is *CORE (the "Work")*. Lewitt calls the *Work* of the title a 'contractual patois' – derived from a term that is both a legal, contractual designation and a more informal, professional expression. The word 'work' needs to be considered in its trifold meaning for this project. The titular *Work*. BMW Open Work: the name of the collaboration between Frieze and BMW that commissioned Lewitt, named after the Umberto Eco essay, *The Open Work* – which argues that art that it can be closed or open, the former art that has a singular reading delineated by the author, the latter art that exists as a field of meaning that awaits completion by its audience, or chance elements. *Work*: what is required to create an object, whether a cultural product or a car engine

Lewitt describes his process as, 'not exactly "site specific", but rather specific to the conditions under which a request for work is made'. In past exhibitions this has led him to look at the exhibition space itself: in *More Heat than Light* (2016), heating circuits placed on the floor were linked to a gallery's lighting grid, exploring the standards that rationalize display while also generating data about visitors' experience of the show. At the last Venice Biennale, his subject was energy use in the exhibition's specific venue, lighting a section of the Arsenale with lamps taken from the staircase of a recently decommissioned Venetian power plant, as *Stranded Assets* (2017). The lamps accompanied reproductions of the decorative shades that would normally envelop such



Above  
Sam Lewitt, *Weak Local Lineament (MHTL)*, 2016  
Photo: Philipp Hänger.  
Courtesy: the artist & Galerie Buchholz

Sam Lewitt's BMW Open Work commission will be on view at the BMW Lounge at Frieze London throughout the week.

lamps, all made of fuel ash: a byproduct of fuel refining processes.

For *CORE*, Lewitt's starting point was the terms of the commission itself, and how it is realized. 'What *CORE* is on the most basic level,' he explains 'is a negotiation with BMW for them to give me, using the money for the commission, a product that comes out of their production line but with reworked intellectual property rights'. That product is the first physical object from the engine production line. It's a sand core: a mold made from hard sand of all the internal pathways of the car engine. In the process of building the engine, aluminum is poured into the pathways. When it hardens, the sand is shaken or broken out. 'It's a circulatory system', Lewitt says, 'which I thought is appropriate for this work which is a kind of detour in both the circuit of manufacturing and the circuit that is established between commissioner and commissioned'.

Because of the terms of the contract signed between the artist and BMW, Lewitt maintains all rights to *CORE (the "Work")*, meaning he owns his sand core, and it is within his right to reproduce it. At the fair, Lewitt is displaying two sand cores. If one is designated the "Work" it is Lewitt's – if not, it is BMW's. Two identical objects with very differing status. 'I hope' Lewitt says 'to loosen the semantic threads in the work and its presentation enough that these processes are fleshed out'. Next to the two sand cores will be an aluminum mound: a complete engine that has been melted down, its material returning to its original form. The room where these are displayed will be completed with an exhaust

fan, cycling air between the space of the exhibition and the space where a final product of another production circuit – a complete BMW car – is displayed

*Work*: interrupting a production line of BMW's scale is a costly affair. The material Lewitt is exhibiting (sand, aluminum) is not the technologies of car design and manufacturing, but rather the components of their end product, its building blocks. 'What I was interested in' he says, 'was the way that I would be able to negotiate the different offices and branches of production: whether the production of cultural representations of the company or production on the level of the actual goods they turn out'.

*Open Work*: to view *CORE* in a room adjacent to the car, the product from whose production process the *Work* is extracted, is an exercise in vision that encapsulates all the beginnings and ends that led to the object – just as to separate out every aspect of the word "work" (in italics or capital letters or lowercase or in quotation marks) is to constantly consider how meanings and uses intertwine and interrelate. To stand in front of the work (*the "Work"*) will be to examine the car as a product, as a history, and as an idea. To witness the artist as an agent to question objects and their histories. And to consider the process of commission: as an instigation, a situation, a question to explore.