

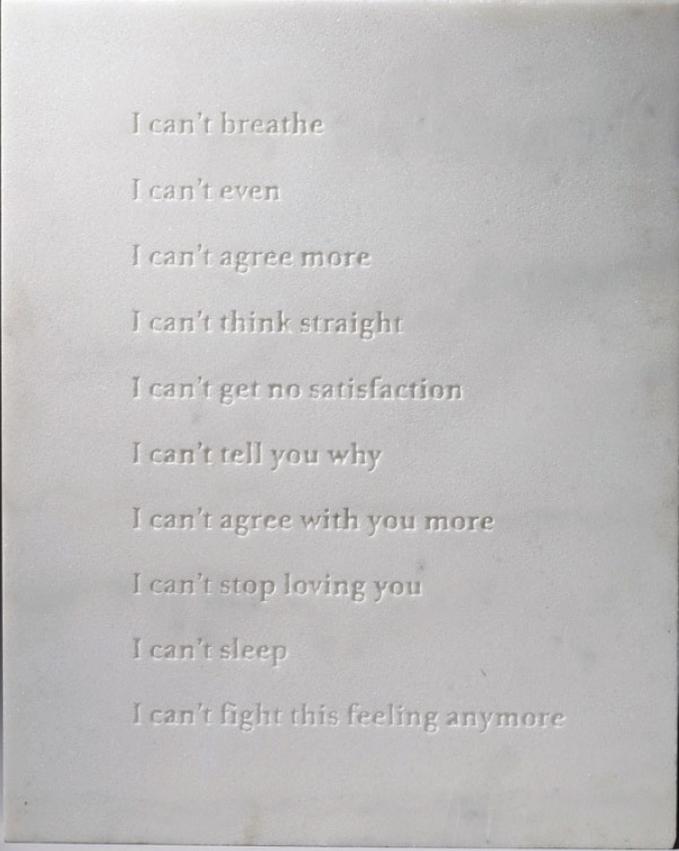
# SUPERPOSITION: Equilibrium & Engagement

**Nicole Wong**

*I can't*, 2015 and other works in marble  
at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia

**21st Biennale**

**of Sydney**



I can't breathe  
I can't even  
I can't agree more  
I can't think straight  
I can't get no satisfaction  
I can't tell you why  
I can't agree with you more  
I can't stop loving you  
I can't sleep  
I can't fight this feeling anymore

*I can't*, 2015  
marble, 50 x 40 x 5 cm  
Courtesy the artist and Rossi & Rossi, Hong Kong and London

This work by Nicole Wong uses the materials, processes and traditions of sculpture to develop a commentary on internet culture, and the place of technology in our lives. The text is sourced from the top-ten Google search results for a set of phrases, which are then translated into a marble sculpture almost like a tomb stone or memorial from an old church.

By using marble Wong references a long tradition of carving and memorials. She also incorporates the role of chance and the poetic formulations of dada and surrealism to both critique and celebrate social media as a form of communication, while foregrounding the way the internet creates an equivalence between different forms of information.

In turn, while the phrases in Wong's searches demonstrate the way we may feel individual and isolated, the fact that others have made similar searches connects us to a broader human experience. At the same time, the words themselves challenge our understanding of the literal and connotative meanings for ideas through ambiguity, play and double entendre.

We can also see the work as a contemporary reimagining of the readymade, taking the text as a virtual object and altering it by bringing it into physical form.

## Questions for Discussion

1. What happens when you take the first sentences from a Google search and put them together, as Wong has done? Is it poetry? Does it make sense?
2. What happens when you rearrange this collection of words? Or letters?
3. Are there personal pronouns in the searches or are the questions more objective? How does this make you feel?

## Reference Points

In this work Wong has captured a keen contradiction between the virtual online search, and the permanent preservation of its terms in marble. Equally, we become aware that not only one person has typed the search phrase, but that thousands of others have typed the same words. What does this say about how we use the internet? What does it say about contemporary society?

We might think about dada, conceptual art or even concrete poetry as forerunners to Wong's practice. By working with text and language, she enters into a history of questioning society and culture through our systems of communication. Her work also transforms the modernist readymade, extracting 'readymade' text and turning it into a sculptural object.

Artists who have worked with readymades, text, and ideas about communication include (listed against their years of participation in Biennale of Sydney exhibitions): Vernon Ah Kee (2008), Marcel Broodthaers (1979, 1990), Janet Burchill (1990), Marcel Duchamp (1988, 1990, 2008), General Idea (1982), Agatha Gothe-Snape (2016), Hans Haacke (1984, 1990, 2018), Newell Harry (2010), Camille Henrot (2016), Jenny Holzer (1984, 1988, 1990), Barbara Kruger (1984, 1988), Tatsuo Miyajima (1990), On Kawara (1990, 1998), Ed Ruscha (1990) and Rachel Whiteread (1992).

## Practices and Processes

This project presents the opportunity to think about technology and the internet as source material for your artwork, and as something that affects all areas of our lives, including our emotions. We can also think about technology as anything that extends the capacity of the body – and, therefore, as something we use in making work, whether that is a pencil, a camera or Photoshop. At the same time, language or text is key to what the work communicates, and there is a long history of text-based artwork to draw on in understanding visual communication. Think about these ideas while developing your work.

### Drawing

How can we think about drawing text elements to ensure that it looks different to writing? What decisions do we make about how text looks when we draw it? Choose some phrases you might put into a search engine and draw (don't write) the results.

To generate new ideas, work with anagrams of your text. List the letters in your phrases – make new words and phrases from them.

### Posters

Sometimes repetition can create new meanings for work. Make some posters of your anagrams – either digitally or using printmaking techniques – and display them as multiples.

### Sculpture

Make a series of sculptures using the ideas in *I can't* as your starting point, but make them out of cardboard. Rather than copying the material of the work, think about new ways to present the ideas you have developed.

**Subjective frame:**  
feelings,  
personal experience