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'We have come to realise that looking is not just looking but that looking is invested with identity ... aesthetics *are* politics.' Felix Gonzalez-Torres.

'THE AGREEMENT' is a large-scale sculptural work by Shane Cullen, commissioned by Beaconsfield Contemporary Art, and realised in an unprecedented partnership through public funds from England, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The work is 67 metres in length and presents the 11,500 words of the British-Irish Peace Treaty of 1998 carved into 56 panels.

Delivered to every household in Ireland, the text of the Good Friday or Belfast Agreement was overwhelmingly approved by the Irish population in a cross-border referendum, and the crafting of the document keenly followed as a media event. Shane Cullen has chosen to signify this historic breakthrough by transforming the language of diplomacy into a visual work of art. Paradoxically, Cullen's practice can be equally related to the subversive ideas of the Situationists and to traditional forms of commemorative works, like the Vietnam Memorial in Washington.

Commissioning art to mark a significant event has a long tradition and over the years, Cullen has developed an appropriate contemporary form which explores the nature of language - its specificity and ambiguity. This Beaconsfield commission facilitated a live encounter between Politics and Art during its tour of Britain and Ireland 2002-04. In a series of public debates, partners in each city expanded the discussion, from a local to global level. Politicians, artists, writers, journalists and the public took the opportunity to voice their response to the urgent issues raised by the work: conflict management, human rights, citizenship, art and politics and the sustainability of peace. The touring exhibition tracked real-time events and enabled a neutral, psychological space in which to consider the seemingly irreconcilable. *The Agreement* was visited and debated in Dublin, Derry/Londonderry, Belfast, London, Portadown and Kilkenny, by key architects of the peace process as well as cultural commentators, including John Hume, Mo Mowlam, David Ervine, Liz O'Donnell, Irit Rogoff, Kevin McNamara, Gilane Tawadros, Robert C. Morgan, Eammon McCann and Lady Sylvia Herman. It is intended to revive these debates by making them accessible in the context of a publication documenting and contextualising the artwork: *The Agreement*.

Despite a backdrop of shifting political conditions, the 'Good Friday', or 'Belfast', agreement is still seen as a model for conflict resolution. So long as international peacekeepers grapple with Palestine, Kashmir, Ukraine and other sites of conflict, *The Agreement* is of international relevance. The work has already taken its place in Irish cultural history through its inclusion in Fintan O'Toole's book *Modern Ireland in 100 Artworks* (2016) and has never been more relevant.

'There's no such thing as a conflict that can't be ended.' Senator George Mitchell, 2002.

*The Agreement* was a cross-border partnership produced by Beaconsfield, London supported by the Arts Councils of England, the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland, the Agreed Ireland Forum (London), Awards for All (Belfast), the British Council, Brookfield Business Centre (Belfast), City Arts Centre (Dublin), the Cultural Relations Committee (Rep. Ireland), Fire Design (Dublin), Firestation Artist Studios (Dublin), Flax Art Studios and Flax Trust (Belfast), Golden Thread Gallery (Belfast), Imagine Belfast 2008, Orchard Gallery (Derry), Project (Dublin).