The art of American Jasper Johns has been extensively studied within the realms of Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, and Neo-Dadaist movements. Yet his 1956 work Gray Alphabets, (1956) has not received scholarly attention. Not only is Gray Alphabets his first gray painting but also his first depicting the alphabet, which uses the established structure of the alphabet in order to subvert it. Johns does not alter the alphabet, rather, he distances its visual representation from an original concept. He creates this distance through the medium of encaustic, grisaille color palette, and a reorganization of individual letters within an established grid. These compositional choices provide the viewer with an ambiguous space with which to engage with the work. Johns challenges greater systems such as linguistics by means of this subversion. Johns supplants that the bond between visual and spoken languages is completely arbitrary by commenting on Saussure's notion that language is in itself arbitrary. While there is no author of the alphabet or language Johns' reorganization of such systems becomes a defiant gesture toward the convention of broad linguistic and pictorial systems. The viewer is enmeshed within a discursive schema that allows for one to challenge the making and meaning of language.