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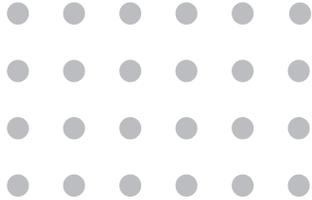


Text Messaging

September 17 - November 16, 2008

Curated by Karen Shaw

Islip Art Museum



Text Messaging

September 17 - November 16, 2008

KenAptekar

Jon Bocksel

Long-Bin Chen

Tamar Cohen

Pat Courtney

Eyal Danieli

Fred Jesser

Sherry Karver

Jiri Kolar

Jean Lowe

Mac Premo

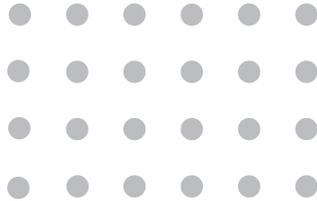
Paul Shore

Thomas Zumner



Curated by Karen Shaw

Text Messaging



Text in Art has been around since the unfurling of Chinese scrolls centuries ago. Think of illuminated manuscripts, with their marriage of words and pictures—and sumptuous Korans with their decorative motifs and accompanying verse.

Today the tradition continues in a new way: we are bombarded by the combination of images and text in advertising on billboards, posters, fliers and TV. Words plus visual elements are all around us—so it should be no surprise that contemporary artists respond to this phenomenon by incorporating words in their work. Sometimes it is for clarification; other times artists use text to illuminate visual ideas, or to create mystery and humor.

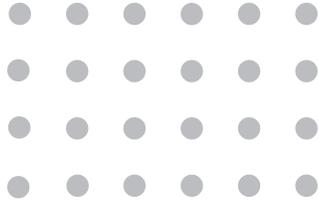
I have selected the 13 artists in this exhibition because they use text in a variety of ways and in a variety of media. Taken together, they demonstrate how rich the fusion of visual and verbal continues to be.

Jean Lowe's books are hilarious spoofs of current popular literature and self help books. In her case you actually can judge a book by it's cover.

Long-Bin Chen carves regal Buddha heads out of books. These heads literally contain thousands of words, facts and stories.

Sherry Karver is a story teller. She writes imaginary narratives on the bodies of the anonymous city dwellers she has photographed, then painted over. Her words bring her images to life, turning strangers into familiar personalities with human hopes, dreams and anxieties.

Thomas Zumner is the most philosophical of the artists in *Text Messaging*. His works consider the relationship of words to truth and exact meaning. In one piece, he writes on potatoes to illustrate an essay by Hegel—and by the end of the exhibit



he will be able to eat his words.

The backgrounds of **Tamar Cohen's** large collages are made of pages from vintage text books and comic books. The artist silk screens colors and shapes on these surfaces so that text comes through like murmurs of forgotten conversations.

Jon Bocksel illuminates a single word that has resonance from his life. He uses embellishments to define and redefine its meaning.

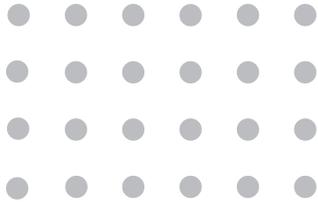
Eyal Danieli's paintings are inspired by his efforts to teach his young daughter to read. In his paternal reading sessions, he noticed how a single letter change—'spot' and 'plot', for instance—could subtly change an overall word pattern. He has obscured these small differences by cutting off the bottom or top to create patterns of lines that render his words unrecognizable.

Fred Jesser paints thought bubbles to comment on rites of passage from his youth and all the insecurities that come with that territory.

Paul Shore's blood drawings are formed completely from text. Repeating the same words and phrases over and over, he creates patterns that are based on the symptoms of his mild form of Tourette's syndrome.

Ken Aptekar paints paintings of paintings found in museum collections. He places a thick plate of etched glass with a word or sentence directly over each painting to provoke, mislead or illuminate a viewer.

Pat Courtney's digital photographs are of a tiny book given to her by an old and dear friend. The classic *Ladies Miniature Reticule Lexicon* features—along with words—maxims to live by.



Mac Premo's collages combine objects cobbled together from diverse materials. His finished works assign new meanings to these found and scavenged objects by changing their context.

In his lifetime and after, **Jiri Kolar** was a well-known collagist. He extended the boundaries of collage and assemblage with his visual poetry. We are honored to have several of his works featured in *Text Messaging*.

Academics have written thousands of words about the difference between the verbal and the visual. Conceptually these two functions are often presented as a competing duality, expressed in popular culture as “left brain” or “right brain” dominance. But as the artists in *Text Messaging* demonstrate, there is no need to choose seeing or saying when both can be fused into seamless unity.

Karen Shaw, September, 2008

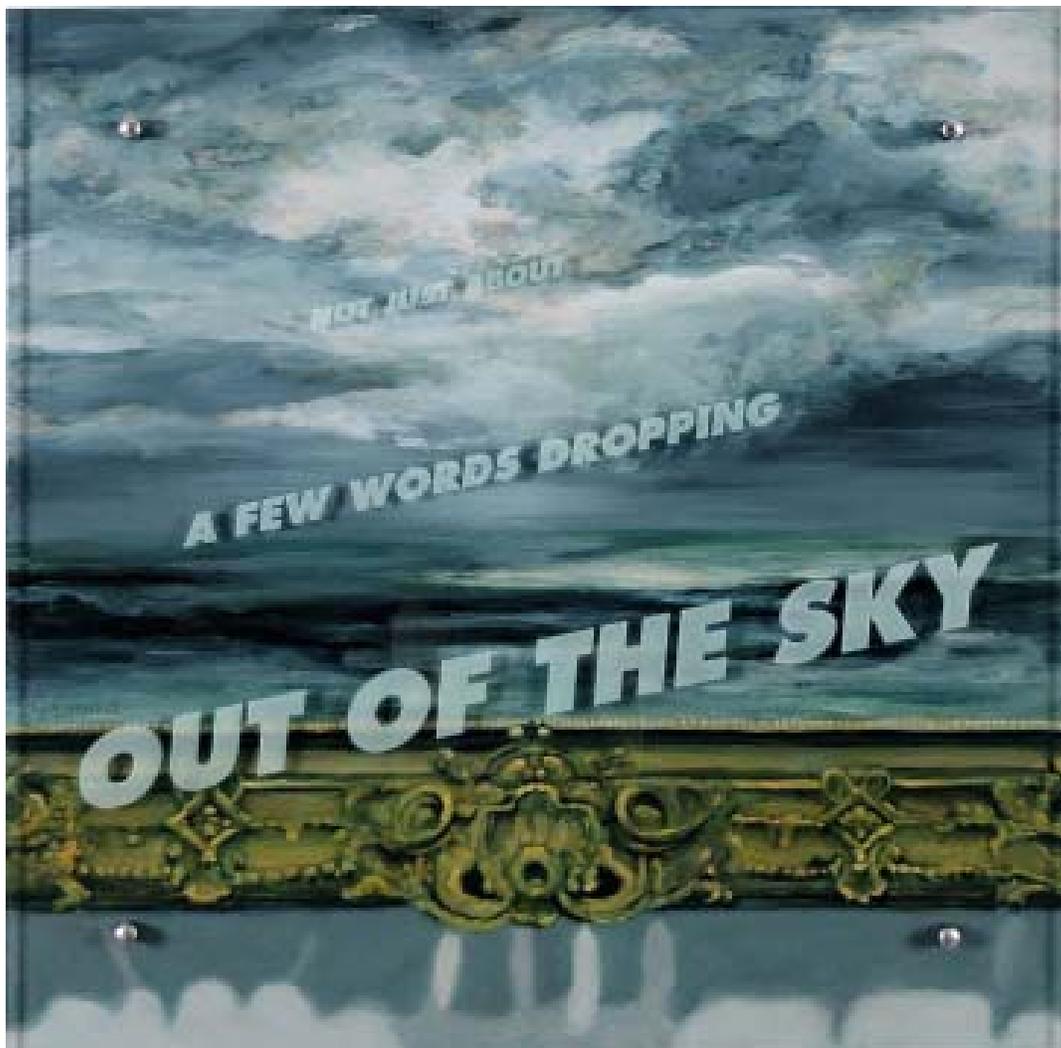
Artists' Statements

Ken Aptekar

Sure you can look, and you're proving now that you can read. So what's the big deal about a work of art asking you to do both at the same time?

For me words are just another art material, admittedly more conceptual than a tube of oil paint. I like how they interact with an image, how they guide and mislead a viewer. They take you on a little trip across the surface and deposit you back at the painting when you finish reading. Then, what you saw when you began may look quite different, or at least, you might want to check.

The history of art is a kind of text itself, and I quote it. I paint paintings of paintings. There really isn't that much distance between the "text" comprised of paintings of the past, and the text that a contemporary artist puts in front. Both carry messages. I love deciphering those old messages in paintings (for me it's harder writing the ones made up of words). And I've found that I never seem to exhaust the possibilities of communicating new messages—using only words on glass over paintings of paintings—to viewers, and to me.



Ken Aptekar

Not Just About a Few Words 2006
Oil on wood, sandblasted glass, bolts
30" x 30" x 3"

Jon Bocksel

My paintings are a topical representation of what I see around me on a daily basis, specifically what stops me and allows me to wander into rare places of digression.

Newspaper headlines, gum stuck to the concrete, steam rising out of a manhole cover, broken bricks, crusted cobblestones, graffiti markings, layered and varied facades of all kinds. Language is in all of these passed over nuanced marks that are left by society's invisible hand. I paint what I see in an attempt to make my hand apparent, just as I use words and parts of the alphabet to make my social parameters fully visible.

I create new words and marking out of the old, stale, and monotonous in an attempt at becoming indivisible and aware. More of a mark that represents this strange experience we are catching a glimpse of before it passes and the facade becomes another layer of plaster or another enameled protective coating.

When I begin my painting process this unknown place of digression is now a place of progression. Marks made that tell stories of forgotten layered compartments. I imagine the initial pictographs, ideograms, and glyphs functioned in this same way until they became a complex system of multi-layered sounds which developed an alphabet and eventually a grammatical syntax. Like all developments, that initial sound is most often seen as outlandish and regressive, but you can't dig a cave to protect what you see as intrinsic to the landscape without an initial mark from that rusty shovel.



Jon Bocksel
Where-House 2008
Gouache
22" x 30"

Long-Bin Chen

In my artwork, I use printed matter—discarded books, magazines, computer printouts, etc.—the cultural debris of our information society. My art form explores different cultural meanings and seeks to combine ideas and concepts from the East with those from the West.

I always use text in my work and the contents of the texts are relevant to my sculptures. My finished sculptures often seem to be of wood or marble though they consist mainly of paper. They are constructed in such a way that the various parts fit together in a seamless manner.

In my work I express what I consider to be the cultural conflict and problem with communication in the world.

Since colonial times, Westerners have taken Buddha heads from the Buddha statues in Asia and brought the Buddha heads back to the West. Today, while one finds so many Buddha heads in Western museums and galleries, equally as many Buddha bodies in Asia are headless. The Buddha head is an important cultural image from Asia. Yet, by and large, it is misunderstood in Western societies. In my projects, I choose beautiful Buddha heads I find in museums to use as models and recreate these Buddha heads from New York City telephone books. The Buddha heads contain the names and numbers of millions of New York residents.



Long-Bin Chen
Guan Ying Flower Crown 2008
China Can Say No books
16" x 8" x 8 1/2"

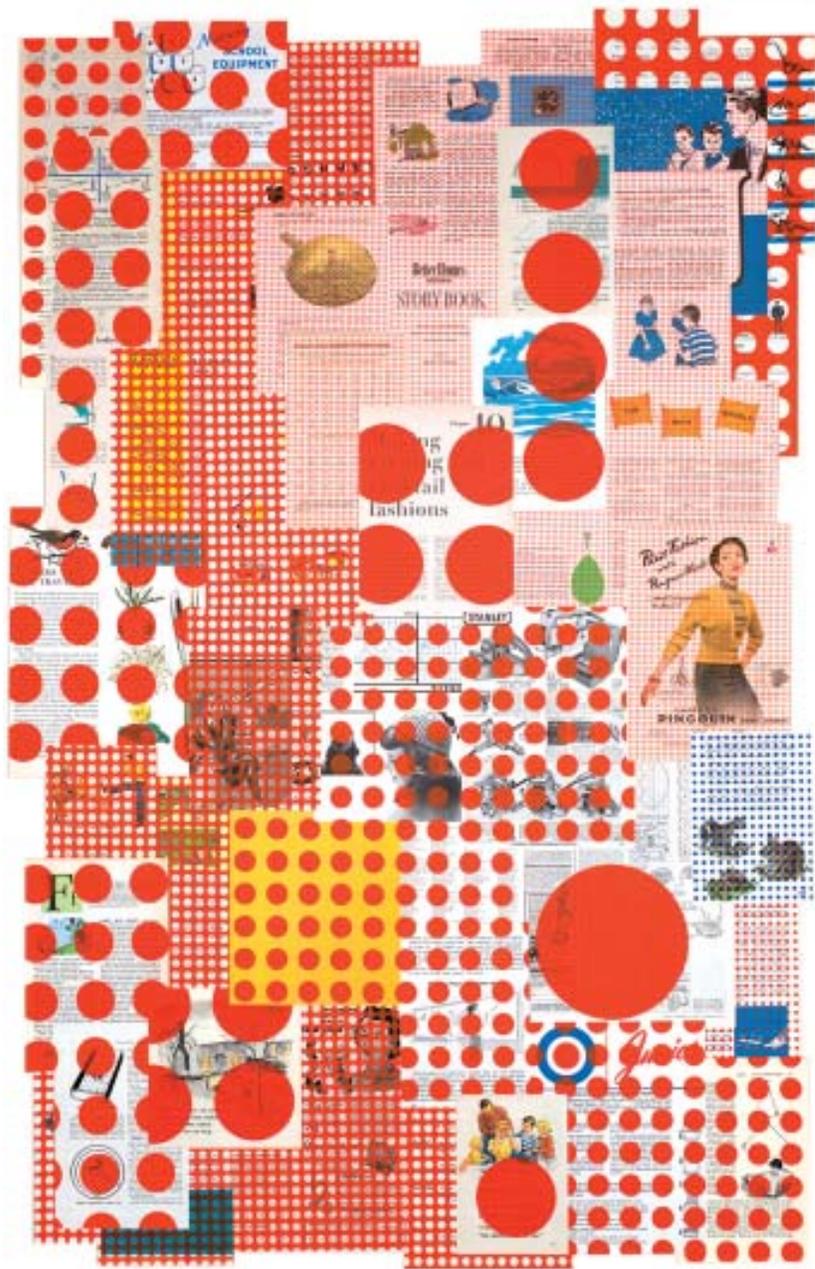
Tamar Cohen

I grew up in a household with a writer father and an artist/graphic designer mother. From them, I inherited a passion for books. I consequently use text as an integral part of my own visual language.

My parents were also book collectors and owned a shop that had rare 20th century art books. I, too, am a collector, though my own preference is for more mass-produced art: magazines, popular novels and comics. These life-long interests are the source material I use in ongoing artistic explorations.

Recently, I have been collecting vintage textbooks, dictionaries and encyclopedias produced for children in the 1950's and 1960's. I find the simple, less sophisticated information of these editions refreshing and compelling. My work is inspired not only by the words and their meanings, but also by specific aesthetic issues, such as the fonts and typographic combinations used, as well as the shape and colors of the texts. To draw particular attention to these effects, I often use foreign books—everything from Spanish comics to French children's books.

My process is to rip the books apart so that I can silkscreen over individual pages, which I then reassemble into abstracted patterns and narratives. The dialogue created between the disparate elements are determined by a range of criteria, including content, style, color, scale and sometimes simply intuition. Though I strive to make order out of chaos, it is my hope that each viewer navigates his or her own path of discovery. Like the varied and uneven edges of my pieces, interpretation is best when not limited by four corners.



Tamar Cohen
Fun With Spools 2008
Silkscreen collage
59" x 38"

Pat Courtney

Sometime after I began using dictionaries as a source for my work, my friend Judith Alexander gave me a miniature lexicon. At the time, I did not know what to make of the little book, as I was interested in illustrated dictionaries.

Her death and the death of other good friends—including my mother, all in 2004—caused me to think of the books I have that were theirs. It seemed timely in 2008 to finally open them and look again at their contents.

Judith's miniature lexicon is: "The Reticule and Pocket Companion or Miniature Lexicon of the English Language," by Lyman Cobb, New York, Harper & Brother. 1841. Stereotype Edition.

I now know that it is probably a rare book. It is in very used condition with typical foxing and binding damages, which are repaired with black cloth tape. Inside both the front and back covers is a piece of pink cloth textured with flowers (remnants of the reticule?), spotted with black ink, roughly sewn into the end pages. There is an engraved portrait of Lyman Cobb as a frontispiece, which is also marred with dark spots (possibly blood?)

What sets the book apart other than its size and thickness—it measure 3 5/8" x 2 3/8" x 1 3/4" —is the manner of its page layouts and printing. Almost all of its 818 pages are composed of an alphabetized list of definitions, each only as wide as the page, surrounded by a border, the four sides of which contain four short sayings, truisms, or maxims.

It is the sayings that became the primary focus of my photographs.

Eyal Danieli

Watching and helping my daughter learn to read and write reconnected me to a time in my life when I was apprenticing with a sign painter. Clearly spelling letters and assembling them into words reignited an intense sensual and conceptual pleasure. Yet simply painting words in my artwork seemed obvious and simplistic. I was compelled to mitigate the explicit nature of language and find a way to express its more equivocal and ambiguous sides.

Veering towards the implied and implicit, I began concentrating on four letter words. I found that dissecting these words with the pictorial edge of my format allowed me to both formally and symbolically heighten the sense of vagueness and ambiguousness within which I felt more comfortable and intrigued. This process also demanded a certain decoding on the part of the viewer.

Over time I expanded the methodology into five and six letter words, fragmenting them and drawing the words discontinuously. Later I conflated different words into one field, forcing onto them a co-existence. I also began working with colloquial phrases that are often made up of two, four letter words. Most often I have been assembling these drawings into installations that include images. In this current assembly, the text pieces have been amassed independently, allowing a “reading” of their development and their interrelationships separately from other work.

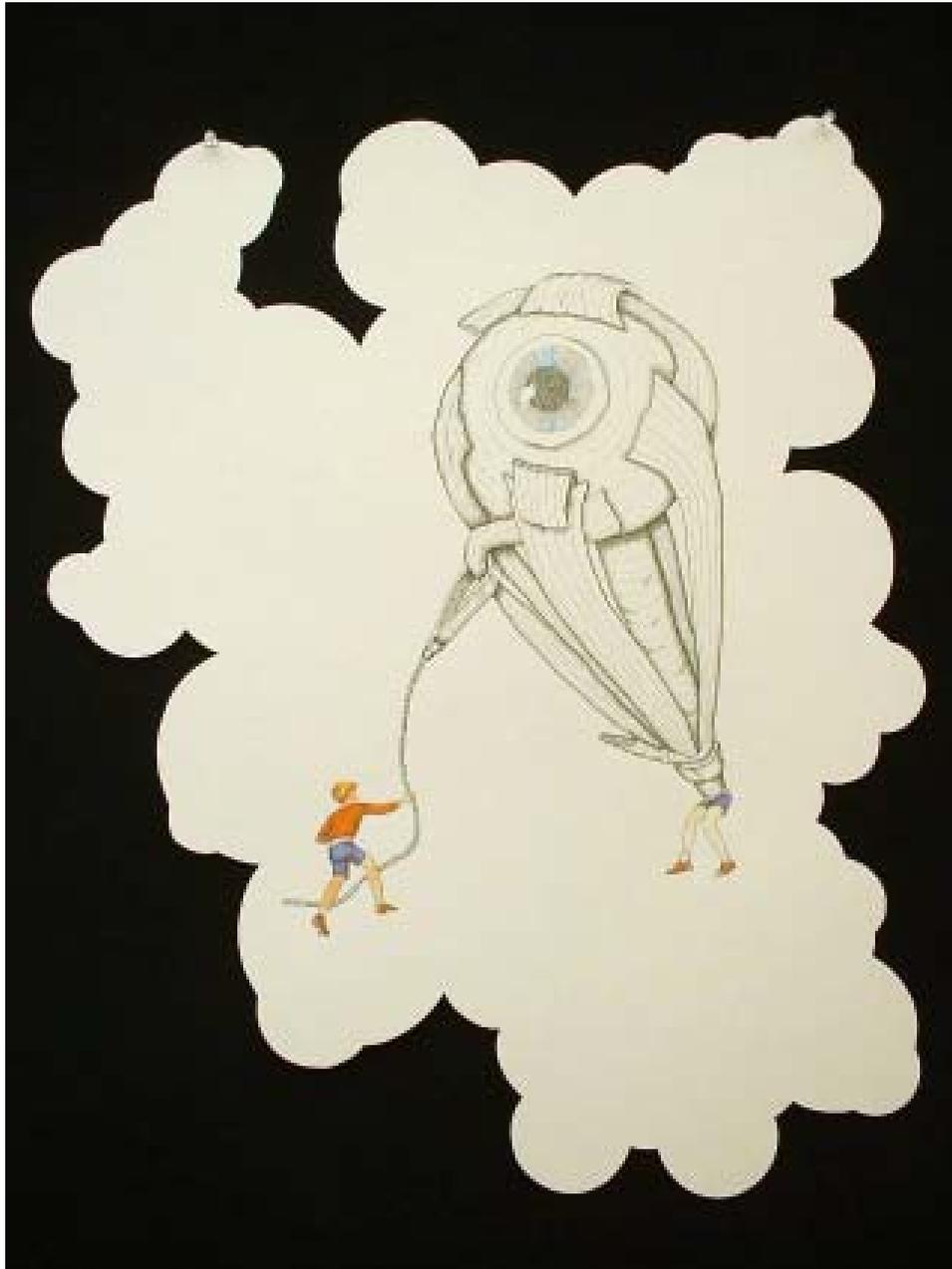


Eyal Danieli
Plot 2006
Ink on plastic sheeting
12" x 16"

Fred Jesser

Although these works are autobiographical in nature, they illustrate familiar experiences and resonate with common observations. Most everyone has lived with guilt or shame or felt insecure or confused. At one time or another, we have felt fear and doubt. Many of us are followed by demons of some nature and most of us have something or someone we can look to, or grasp onto, for comfort. Usually we need someone or something to keep us grounded.

These works on paper—stories of Billy, or birds or clouds— are a light way to document both the experiences that I have had along with those faced by people close to me. They illustrate stages of learning and present occurrence that most viewers can relate to or understand.



Fred Jesser
Self-Examination with Leash 2006
Ink collage on paper
28" x 22"

Sherry Karver

My current series of photo-based work originates from photographs I have taken on city streets in New York, Seattle, San Francisco and at Grand Central Station. I am expanding and shifting the parameters of traditional photography by combining it with digital technology, oil painting and text. By blending the distinctions between these areas, it enables me to push beyond their conventional boundaries to create a new format.

Around 2000 I began writing text over some of the people in my photos in an attempt to personalize and individualize them, making them stand out from the crowd. These brief stories about the figures are from my imagination, based solely on their appearance and stance.

By using written narrative in my work, I create a public/private dichotomy and give the viewer an opportunity to “experience” the artwork. One can become a part of the process by reading it, rather than simply looking at a painting or photograph from a distance, creating a greater impact and duration in its effect on the viewer. In my work I attempt to show the uniqueness of the individual, as we each have a story to tell.

I superimpose their “biographies” on top of the figures, almost as if they are wearing their stories like an article of clothing. I try to give a little bit of history about the person; where they are from, their age, what they do, their hopes, their dreams, and often something embarrassing or personal that they would rather not have revealed in public.

These photo-based paintings can be viewed as multi-layered. One does not necessarily need to read all the words, or any of the words, in order to understand the content of the work, but in doing so, the viewer can get an extra peek or glimpse into someone else’s life, and possibly relate to it, or find it amusing. Humor is definitely an intention in my work, and I enjoy hearing people chuckle as they read the stories.

I was born and raised in Chicago, so my work is informed by city life and the multitude of issues we encounter living in a large city: loneliness and alienation in our fast-paced society, the concept of personal identity and the loss of it, the individual as part of the crowd, and finding ourselves somewhere in the process.

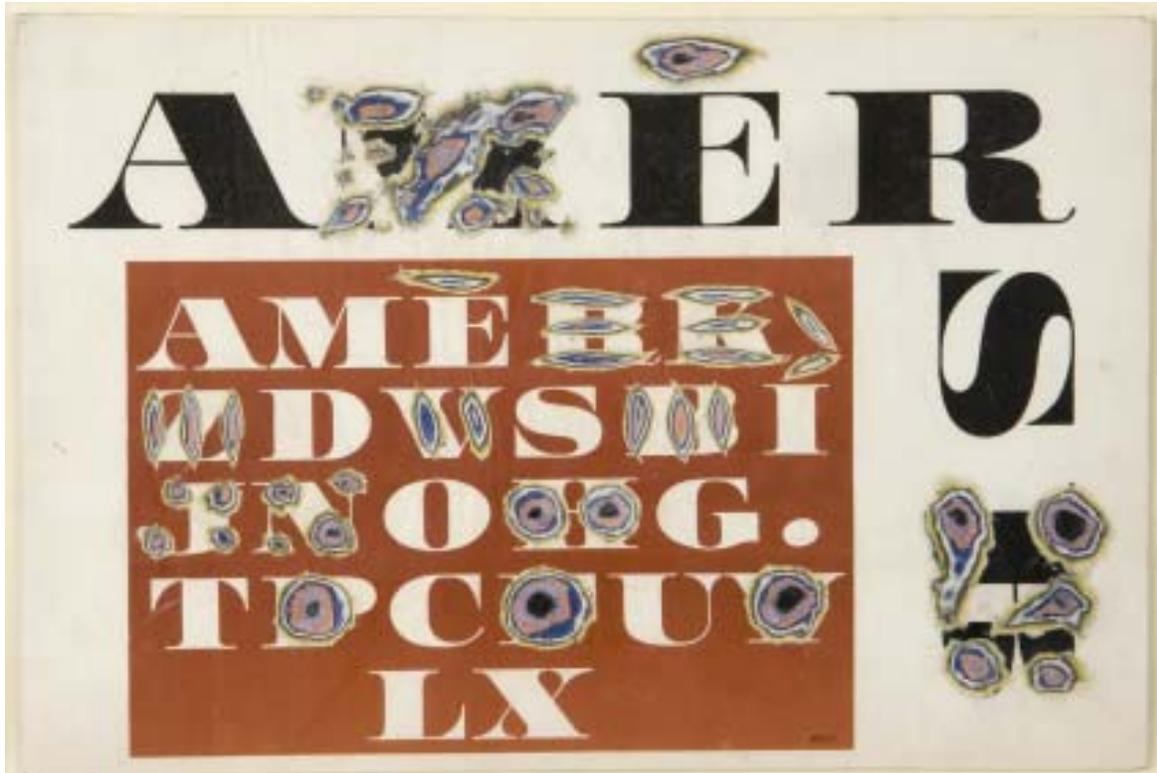
My work embraces the contemporary non-linear view of time with its randomness, spontaneity, and chance occurrences. The figures are often in movement, conveying our individual voyages. I look at them as an outside observer, watching the scene from afar. I try to capture our journey through life—a journey where we are collectively alone.



Sherry Karver
Living Painting 2008
Oil and mixed media on panel
38" x 38" 3"

Jiri Kolar

Jiri Kolar's life and work reflected economic and political struggle and years spent in exile from his native Prague. The myriad collage techniques that he pioneered over fifty years formed an alternative language at a time when the artist/poet saw those in power employing words as an instrument of oppression and misinformation. This progressively led him to a purely visual means of expression.



Jiri Kolar
Live, Hunger, Endless Fatigue 1967
Paper collage, ink
7 1/2" x 11 3/8"

Jean Lowe

I think of each book as a complete work in its own right, humorous, bathetic, earnest or some combination of all of the above. When grouped in larger numbers, however, they begin to spin a spider's web of social critique; image and text of one tome plays off of and spins the meaning of neighboring titles. This is a kind of visual poetry, albeit one with an ax to grind, however playfully.



Jean Lowe
Meeting Your Ancestors 2006
Enamel on paper mache
9" x 14" x 6"

Mac Premo

How do systems integrate? The way in which distinct vocabularies interrelate, be they systems of physical (mathematics, science) or emotional data (memory, morality) is of great interest to me.

I am fascinated with the relationship between an object or idea's intended meaning and the meaning it acquires.

I am equally fascinated with the process of that acquisition; often it is through the intentional distortion of an original idea, often it is through shifting the context in which an idea is considered.

I believe that collage, because it is largely in-part constructed of material with reassigned meaning, is the most effective medium to consider context and illustrate the subjectivity of perspective.

With stop-action animation, I seek to create a unique and consistent context through which I introduce a narrative element to my collage.



Mac Premo
Mao as a Series of Extrusions Versus Itself 2007
Mixed media
25" x 12 1/4" x 2 1/4"

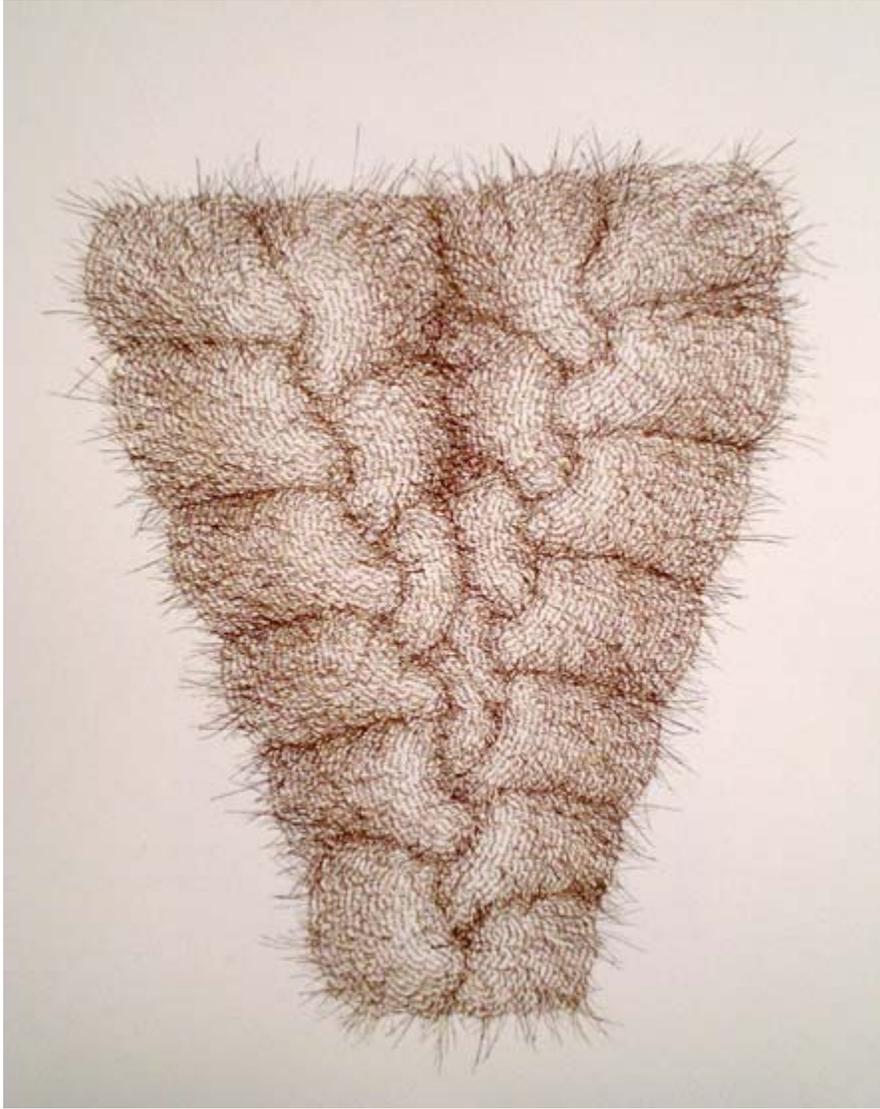
Paul Shore

On the continuum of symptoms that comprise Tourette's Syndrome, I am on the milder end of the scale. My Blood Drawings explore the influence of Tourette's on my life and work. A few of the issues that infuse this work are repetition, obsession and taboo.

The blood in the drawings is my own. For over a year I used a lancet to prick my fingers and collect the blood in a shot glass. Now a friend who is a doctor draws my blood into tubes that I store in the refrigerator. The fact that the blood is hard to get, directly informs my work. Not that I am always spare with it, but I am always aware of its precious quality.

The blood drawings are grounded in issues of intimacy. This is reflected in the forms and the medium. In addition to the obvious intimacy of blood, it is a fluid that signals both potential and loss.

The drawings are made entirely of text. I use a single phrase that I repeat for each drawing. Some examples are: inside of me; bite harder; still waiting.



Paul Shore
Blood Drawing (Put Your Mouth on Me) 2007
Blood on paper
17" x 13"

Thomas Zummer

Essay on Potatoes

The ‘essay’ written on potatoes is written in much the same manner as my other essays; it is a serious taking up of the question of the use of the phrases ‘like potatoes,’ ‘in the manner of. . .’ or ‘similar to. . .’ potatoes. In a sense it is rather unfortunate that the unavoidable physical pun of “an essay on potatoes written on potatoes” comes to the foreground, since that is only the most minor sort of effect.

The essay begins with G.W.F. Hegel’s lament that the musical manuscripts of Ludwig van Beethoven are, due to the contingencies of war, “lying about in a cellar like sacks of potatoes.” Beginning with this small anecdote, I began to research and closely analyze those incidents where philosophers have used ‘potatoes’ as an exemplary instance or object in their discourses. A close rhetorical, deconstructive, reading of ‘as,’ ‘like,’ ‘as if’ reveals a number of surprising presumptions. As in the case with Beethoven, what does “. . . like . . . potatoes” mean? That there is a cultural value designated to these artifacts (bits of paper as manuscripts) that is now somehow lost, that at some future point holds forth the promise of recuperation (that they will be recognized as valuable again). What is put into question of course is the stability—and destability—of the work of art at every moment. What kind of context assures the persistence of an artwork, and what engenders the movement from mere material to work of art and back again? It is a profoundly philosophical question having to do with the origin and permanence of art. The potatoes, for example, whose skin bears the text of this essay are, for a moment—as long as they are in this museum—art; still, they are just potatoes, and very soon they will return to their low, thingly nature, and be just potatoes after all.

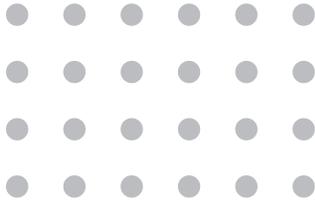
Notations on a series of ‘landscapes’

The untitled landscapes (there are twelve to date) consist of finely rendered drawings of what one might call ‘scenes after battle’—usually of broken or ruined equipment or ordinance, such as aircraft or other vehicles. Each drawing, done in a style that one might find in the Imperial War Museum, is bisected by a text printed on transparent acetate. All of the texts are true, and the sources are usually given. The texts are occasionally hard to read (by tilting your head you can see that the letters are matte black and will stand out against the reflection on the glass), and the images are interrupted and occluded by the stories. The series began with the questions ‘how is war written?’

‘what sorts of narratives are commonplace—heroism, atrocity, betrayal, strategy, victory, defeat—and what sorts are repressed –humor, irony, absurdity, the breadth of the human—?. These ‘landscapes’ reinscribe into the representation of conflict a decidedly more human narrative, all the more strange and poignant for being true. From Herodotus to The New York Times, the representation of war has had a more or less standard lexicon of tropes, terms, and figures. What these ‘landscape’ studies do is to tamper with those conventional forms of address to reveal –in some cases—an even more extreme sort of narrative: the small, very human, excesses of war.



Thomas Zimmer
(Untitled) Essay 2008
Archival ink on 31 potatoes
Dimensions variable



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The staff of the Islip Art Museum would like to thank the artists for their participation, and the Kim Foster Gallery, Lyons Wier Ott, McKenzie Fine Art, Frederieke Taylor Gallery and the Pavel Zoubok Gallery for their help and cooperation.

Slate of the Arts



NYSCA

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