

Wendy White And Five Other Artists Deconstruct Text In Paintings

Published November 9, 2013

By Kristin Bauer



Wendy White



Feodor Voronov



Jose Parla



Glenn Ligon

Text phrases, words and letters abound in contemporary art, ranging widely from direct witty phrases to text that has become illegible in its adaptation. With increased crossover between different fields of art, the craft of editing text in literary arts is a skill and practice that has been incorporated into the visual arts more frequently. Jenny Holzer is an artist who comes to mind in this regard.

However, in this article I am examining the other polarity of text in art. As an artist who regularly uses text in my own art work, I am always interested in discovering the ways in which other artists step beyond the all too prevalent witty-one-liner on the wall into an artistic language that is far more expansive and uniquely cultivated. The artists included here demonstrate the beautiful grey area that emerges between abstract painting, graffiti, constructivist painting and the written word, to name a few. Here text becomes a vehicle for additional forms of communication, used as a foundation to expand upon with the artist's particular vision or agenda.

Wendy White, Feodor Voronov, Glenn Ligon, Annie Vought, Jose Parla and Jel Martinez are all artists whose work takes text and language and pushes way outside the box. Wendy White's use of the lines and structure of letters themselves is deconstructed and echoed in lines that emerge within her abstracted and color washed work. In the images of her work shared here, I particularly love the way in which she goes beyond the canvas in architecturally reconstructing the text-like elements along the border.

Feodor Voronov's works are composed of acrylic, ballpoint pen, spray paint and marker on raw canvas in a tense, yet harmonious orchestration of contrast. The dance between textural, richly pigmented strokes of color, and fine rigid ink marks create a seemingly non-objective result. The text is heavily abstracted and obscured, while providing a foundation for the compositional nuts and bolts of each piece, conceptually nudging that the often unseen dynamics that exist within simple words and phrases take precedent in these works over the text alone.



The papercut works of artist Annie Vought seem familiar and almost impossible. I first came across her work on exhibit at New Image Art Gallery in West Hollywood. Vought takes scribbled notes and painstakingly recreates them in larger versions, cutting the background out completely. All that remains is the scribbly and scripted writing, cut flawlessly from a single sheet of thick black paper, and perched an inch or so off the wall with the tiniest of pins. Through her process the marks become the substance, the foundation has been removed, and the rawly personified handwriting stands alone and naked on the wall.

Glenn Ligon is a forerunner in the domain of pushing text art forward, by way of process and the conceptual and passionate exploration of his materials. The works featured here are among my favorites of his works. His studio process of aggressively screening and stenciling typewriter text to the point where it is illegible conveys the intensity of his feeling and relationship to the text in use, which is often related to race and identity.

Jose Parla and Jel Martinez are two artists whose work finds a beautiful textural balance between graffiti and abstract painting. Parla is known for his layered script which echoes street art stylization and is highly calligraphic, forming swarms of dancing marks, and invoking textures of walls covered over in monikers for years. Martinez's paintings share similarities in this regard, but what strikes me in his paintings is the obliteration of graffiti mark-making and monikers. Several of Martinez's newest paintings bear slight remnants of the text painted in a street art stylization, barely visible through layers of paint covering them. Reminiscent of the visual aftermath of buffed out monikers and tags on urban walls, there's a sentiment of struggle in these pieces, which gives one pause to consider the process of obliteration and oppression of culture and identity inherently involved in both the practice of creating and destroying graffiti.