

Influx of information

My fascination with the use of language in art continues from my last post, this time inspired by the works of a young New York artist Becky Brown and her vigorous experiments with language and signs both visually and textually. Becky's body of work elaborates on this notion of the forever-shifting meaning in language (which is to say that language is arbitrary and that its meaning activates only within certain established context and structure) by utilizing both recycled printed matters from our every-day culture combined with her self-produced and composed components as a trajectory for her investigation and inquires. When referring to recycled printed matters, meaning she uses materials that had once existed in a different context, i.e. from an old magazine or a used book, these elements are visibly integrated into her work; however it is not just limited to printed matters, but also physical materials that had been left behind by anonymous owners previously then she alters them into free-standing pieces, take for example a piece of wall or an old suitcase.



Becky and I had been colleagues working at the New Museum. At that time she was already ambitiously pursuing her MFA at Hunter College. When she graduated this summer, I was delighted to be invited to see her thesis show.

served as the main support for seemingly an overload of information and at times denied the viewers the full access to all the information at once. This piece seemed to function as an entity when on one side it presented multiple information juxtaposed but at the same time also seemed a non-entity when all the information did not read with much direct coherence nor contained a lucid relationship of which connected all the signs together.

On the front side of the surface, the piece presented fragments of information with individual paintings, sculptural elements and images that looked to be independent of the rest. In addition, the sculptural aspect was accentuated by her carving out a large hole in the wall that served as another container for holding visual information.

"Holes" in structures always seem to have more than one function, a bit like in language, depending on the placement and usage, its function shifts. They are multifunctional and they could be the entry to something, or the exit to another place, even as a connection between what is outside and what is inside. But what Becky thought most importantly of all, they could be seen as containers for information. Another type of hole in a structure is smaller but equally necessary, such as windows. Not only do windows offer views to the outside world, but also it brings in fresh air and connects the confined inhabitants with the outside world. Therefore they could be both positive and negative in their daily physical function. Here, Becky highlighted this idea by implementing a closed door while at the same time making its content behind the door equally visible to the viewers.





Speaking of physical support for information, there were built "legs" for the flat surfaces of which the structure required in order to stand up. Most signage requires extra physical support in order to become visible to the eye- "our eyes" that is, as they say in advertising- the means to reach their targeted audience. Here, Becky propped up the billboard-like structure crudely with a block of concrete but painted its corner with brilliant colors and designs that attracted viewers' attention. This gesture vicariously emphasized the materiality of information support in such that the support became more than just a structural element but also integrated with the main information surface. In fact, the support looked to be playing a more crucial role than what was on the board since the colors helped frame the visual plane and the concrete blocks elevated all the information on this side of the surface in order to be seen more clearly.





On the other side of the surface consisted of a large painting in collage style, that visually seemed as if an independent element of its own. The choice of feeding all different kinds of information to the viewers at once aligned with how information is given and received in our everyday life. In other words, in our daily lives, we are constantly inundated with mass loads of visual and textual information; take the flashing advertising signs of Time Square for example and much of the deciphering is left to the public since everything is placed so close together and competing for attention simultaneously.

Becky's approach was a far more poetic one in comparison. She implemented obscure verses in text then paired with familiar signs and images for the viewers to interpret. Consequently, this other side of the piece offered a different viewing experience in ways that it asked the viewers to pick out signs and signifiers without her directly assigning specific meanings to each and every one of them. The surface contained visual clues in abstraction of some elements that were more literal than others. Take the oasis for example, a picture of a drippy washtub versus the more stripped down geometric shapes that served to signify the shape and function of the washtub.

Here in the last detail image, it shows another type of hole. This one is carved out then filled with silver material. It can be read literately as a holder, or a container for something and thus its function took precedence over its physicality. Unlike a window or a door, this hole served as a visual proof that when a hole is filled, its possibility of functions is limited to just being a holder for something else with restricted accessibility. Here, Becky also used the filled hole as a visual bridge for the rest of the information presented on this backside of the piece. While the visual reference to architectural elements was prevalent throughout the entire work, however here the various images from different source materials seemed to form a new language for interpreting each of the individual images. In other words, these images of architectural structures altogether seemed to present an urban landscape and with more ancient structures as a kind of a timeline indicating our ever-shifting aesthetic and functional choices when it comes to making buildings.



I chose *Luggage* as the last piece for this post because it shows an influx of objects that don't seem to belong altogether in one suitcase. As the result what we have here is an overload of information and clues. While speaking to Becky in her studio, we tried to imagine what it would be like for someone to have to physically push around this luggage with all of its content in tact.

It would have been an arduous journey of constant negotiation with the carrier herself and also the numerous streetwalkers of whom she might be obliged to make way for.

Nonetheless, it is not without humor... I see this as a metaphor for life that when you seemingly have lots of things that hold you back but at the same also feel that you are not able to let go of these things. While to other people they are all but dispensable or even unnecessary items for the sheer purpose of surviving. Then again, it is usually the excess baggage that we carry with us that makes us an unique individual that set us apart from the others. In other words it adds character. But what kind of character does it add? It would be up to you.

Becky Brown is currently planning a new piece using the "life storage" she has accumulated in her parents' closets including trophies, field hockey sticks, piles of notebooks, etc. She will be "containing" it in a yet-to-be determined furniture-vessel, in the vein of the luggage and the toaster oven piece... meanwhile when she is not occupied with the planning of her new piece she is also currently participating in an artist residency at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts.

