



TELL US PLAINLY WHAT YOU MEAN

Curated by Tatiana Istomina and Becky Brown

January 12 – February 10, 2019

Opening Reception: January 12, 6-8PM

Gallery Hours: Saturdays, 12-6PM or by appointment

Aquarius Studios | 1116-A Wyckoff Avenue | Ridgewood, NY

Every time one man says to another, "Tell us plainly what you mean" he assumes the infallibility of language... Whenever, on the other hand, a man rebels... says he cannot explain what he means... he has seen into the real nature of language. For the truth is that language is not a scientific thing at all, but wholly an artistic thing, a thing invented by hunters, and killers, and such artists long before science was dreamed of.

— G. K. Chesterton

Who has not suffered the limitations of language—its inability to express the nuance of our thoughts and feelings? Today especially, language appears complicit in disrupting communication between social groups and whole nations, blurring boundaries between truth and lies. When natural language fails and rational discourse seems impossible, artists come forward with alternative means to translate the subtler shades of our emotions and perceptions into shape and form.

What is the sound of a city map? The shape of a poem? The color and texture of children’s chatter? These ten artists push and pull at existing systems of communication and create completely new ones. They use color, stroke, texture, melody and garbage scraps for its vocabulary; and composition, scale, sequence and timing for its grammar.

The exhibition title echoes the universal plea of art audiences to all makers: “Just tell us what this means!” The appearance of text in an artwork—alongside imagery, as a title, as lyrics in a song or voice-over narration—often serves to clarify the meaning of the work or point toward a specific interpretation. The artists in this show, however, resist the impulse to explain and encourage reading or listening only to complicate the viewer’s experience and upend expectations. As Chesterton suggests, they may have a glimpse into the real nature of language—and perhaps of art itself—both of which create new ways of understanding only by rendering conventional meaning irrelevant.

Joey Fauerso’s installation of drawings is inspired by the games and conversations of her two young sons. It shows how children reimagine language to assign new meanings, using placement and proximity to build narrative and connect disparate objects and ideas.

Annette Cords’ tapestries combine abstract color patterns with signs, letters and fragments of urban graffiti, playing with the legibility of image vs. text and defying conventional modes of reading.

Bill Santen’s sound sculpture places a fragmented country song into a set of drawers. Inspired by the map of a distant city he has never visited, the interactive piece breaks verses and instrumentals into recombinable parts, transforming conventional song structure into a complex audio and bodily experience.

Michelle Rosenberg uses urban garbage and commonly found debris to invent alternative alphabets for use in public space. Each is custom-made for a given city, as she adapts to different pools of available material and different language structures in New York, London and Taipei. All alphabets stand as a proposal for the future of “free speech.”

Irgin Sena's modular sculptures resemble detached, freestanding book pages or pieces of a broken scroll. Dissociated images and words suggest a space of suspense, contemplation and speculation, compelling the viewer to a close study of a "text" that is more poetic association than decipherable code.

Catalina Viejo Lopez de Roda writes personal letters not only to people – but to feelings, places and ideas. They are composed of cut-out shapes and colors arranged into lines on standard notebook paper, replacing the discursive and literal qualities of written language with a more abstract and intuitive form of communication.

Kerry Downey's video, produced with an overhead projector, is inspired by the concept of a handle: a material object connecting our body to other bodies and objects in the world. Voice-over narration offers specific information, yet text and imagery move in and out of comprehension—are we learning a language or forgetting one?

Louise Bourgeois's audio piece "Otte" contrasts masculine and feminine endings of real and invented French words, playing with conventional linguistic structure to reflect on gender and power. Here, it is accompanied by a new interpretive translation by poet and translator **Michael Swierz**.

Becky Brown's paintings question whether technological advances and increased access to communication really increase its quality or efficiency. She collects and hand-paints automated email responses, digital glitches and misunderstandings; and combines found images into repeating patterns, suggesting an alternative language or code.

Tatiana Istomina's works are based on Euclid's Elements—an ancient mathematical treatise containing the fundamentals of geometry. She translates the clear and precise mathematical concepts and procedures into texts and diagrams that are tentative, provisional and possibly flawed, questioning the nature and limits of logical thought.