

The **word.** exhibition honours and explores the storied legacy of text art through the work of Canadian artists: Graham Gillmore, K.C. Hall, Nicole Dextras, Joi Arcand, Don Mabie, and Shane Koyczan. These artists illustrate, by turns, the irreverence and DIY of punk rock, the stylized POP of popular culture, and the honesty of memoir, through a diversity of media and artistic sensibility. Text is a unifying element and vehicle for meaning.

A single letter or character from any language is basically a series of straight lines and intersections; building blocks for ideas, not yet ascribed. The aesthetics of text-based-art can take myriad forms and run the gamut from conceptual art to advertising and all points in between. A word can stand two stories tall (Robert Indiana's *LOVE*) or it can hide in the small print of a Guerilla Girls poster ("Conscience of the art world"). The Guerilla Girls' biting satiric 'The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist' made me start to think critically about what I was seeing in art galleries and textbooks in the 1980's and what was absent (and why), part of a larger conversation that pulses through the history of art and discourse, from hieroglyphs to #hashtags.

Conceptual art and the use of text are a perfect marriage of means and method. The ideas, systems and concepts of text carry both perceived and imposed usage, made all the more convoluted by the intent of the artist who employs them, and the context they are placed within, as well as by the viewer who perceives them. Take Rene Magritte's infamous *The Treachery of Images*, a stylized painting of a pipe underscored by the words "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" ("This is not a pipe"). A playful but meaningful example of the disconnect between perception and intellect, truth and fiction. Not only are semantics an interesting and important tool within the legacy of such artistic wordplay, but so too are context and contrast, tools that make text elastic and evocative. Barbara Kruger – 'Your body is a battleground', The blah blah blah of Mel Bochner, and the described setting and space of Lawrence Weiner all starkly connect concrete words to concept, and elicit emotion in so doing. Nicole Dextras does this with her bold and elemental sculptural statements, which defy and define the environments in which they are created. As does Shane Koyczan's nature placed poem *Dear Ocean: An appeal to the Young*:

*You are the drop that becomes the ripple
that engineers the wave that crosses the ocean
in search of the next frontier of promise.*

The words are supported by the visuals of the video, and there is a pastoral perfection to the poetic appeal, made all the more powerful by the context in which they have been placed.

Vancouver artist, Tiziana La Melia's visual onomatopoeia 'Page of Vapours' concrete poetry series skirts the grey area between text and visuals, just as Adam Pendleton's 'Black Dada' almost destroys language as an act of creation, and in doing so conveys a purposeful and powerful dissonance. Graham Gilmore achieves this with his tongue in cheek rejection of a *Rejection Letter* which seems to crumble under its own weight. The language of the artist is defeated but defiant and slumps in the effort of creating the work. K.C. Hall's graffiti inspired fonts and Northwest Formline (the design style of Coastal Indigenous groups, comprised mainly of ovoids and u-forms) both obfuscate and support his *hálút* work that looks as if it was ripped off the street and hangs with ragged edges on the wall, challenging the whiteness of the gallery space. As Jessica Stewart describes, "From projections to canvases, sculptures to public murals, the versatility—and power—of the written word forces the viewer to reflect. Clever word play, political activism, subversion of advertising, and appropriation of form are just some common characteristics of powerful text art." (*My Modern Met*)

The **word.** exhibition explores the messages that the use, and purposeful mis-use of text within both traditional and new media: acrylic paint, vinyl, graffiti, sculpture, artist trading cards (ATC) and video, poetry. The reflective flourish of Joi Arcand's personal story mirrors a golden spiral and reminds us of the connectivity and communality of culture. Joi's use of the Cree language reinforces the presence of her people and refutes the erasure of a culture and a language by re-creating it within a modern space. Don Mabie's banks of artist trading cards (ATC's), speak to a legacy of artistic and cultural exchange from the genesis of this conceptual art project in 1997 to present day. The riot of irreverent wordplay and psychedelic design on display runs the gamut from declarative statements to dedicated design, from the seemingly inexhaustible brain of an artist who communicates through a complex but devil-may-care code. Together the artworks featured here can be seen to revel in but also challenge the theme that unifies them. There are no steadfast rules that govern what art can and can not say, even when it is spelled out. A word is a word, unless it is a sword or a memory, or a revolt or a lark. Art is awesome that way!

Arin Fay, Curator