

# DIAZ CONTEMPORARY

## PRESS RELEASE

***Texto: A Group Show* and *Nick Ostoff: Recent Work*  
22 January to 14 February 2009**

Diaz Contemporary is pleased to present two exhibitions: *Texto*, a group show, in the main gallery and recent work by Nick Ostoff in the back gallery.

*Texto* explores how artists use text in various media. The exhibition features a wide range of work by Deanna Bowen, Ricardo Cuevas, Joel Herman, Yam Lau, Ken Lum, Gordon Lebrecht and Francine Savard. Together, this selection of photographs, drawings, prints and installations investigates questions of politics, identity, perception and the commercial dominance of words. Several of these works present text in familiar contexts such as books and storefront signage; by doing so, they make us question how we gather information, and which information to trust. These works demonstrate that the use of text, while perhaps a more direct method of communication than images, holds a reservoir of possible meanings.

### **Deanna Bowen**

Deanna Bowen's hymnal series is comprised of several large-format digital inkjet photographs, depicting covers of twentieth-century hymnbooks collected from the Southern US and Western Canada. The titles of these hymnals – *Joyful Praise*, *Treasury of Song*, *Spiritual Life Songs* – come with promises of hope and salvation. However, Bowen's books remain closed, their music and messages hidden from the viewer. We are left to judge these books by their covers alone. In these works, Bowen makes use of text by presenting a glimpse of it, but ultimately rendering it inaccessible to the viewer.

### **Ricardo Cuevas**

In this untitled series, Mexico City-based Ricardo Cuevas photographs title pages of imaginary books – the subject of which are his own artistic projects that have yet to be produced. He thus gives the spectator a surface on which to partially complete the work by imagination. This series speaks to the multitude of possible meanings that text-based art provides, and the importance of individual interpretation. Cuevas' work continually explores the potential for misunderstanding, translation, and fragmentation.

### **Joel Herman**

Joel Herman has meticulously drawn a series of title pages from various books, reproduced on a one-to-one scale. The books are chosen based on simple rules in the language of their titles: in each pair of drawings the words in the titles are inverted. This inversion highlights the distinctions between the two sides, including the subtle variation in language, font, size and design. This comes out of an interest in symmetry, or imposing an absurd sense of order or logic to things. Here, text is utilized more for its formal attributes than its semantic meaning. A sense of tension is added by the fact that these pages are reproduced by hand, which destabilizes the printed type of the originals.

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## **Yam Lau**

Yam Lau's *Citation*, installed on the main gallery's clerestory windows, is a quotation from a memoir of Mao Zedong's private doctor. This publication, banned in China, offers important glimpses of Mao in his private moments. The work is presented at the gallery in the "Big Letter News" format, typically deployed during the Cultural Revolution as propaganda and as a political weapon in ideological struggles. The quote roughly translates as, "*Stalin denounces me as a radish with red skin (white inside, red outside)*", but in an unrefined tone. This piece highlights the topic of language in text-based art, and the problems associated with translation.

*Yam Lau appears courtesy of Leo Kamen Gallery, Toronto*

## **Ken Lum**

In a previous body of work, renowned artist Ken Lum combined commonplace advertising signs with moveable letters stating absurdly emotional or political texts. This conflation of the quotidian with the deeply personal is revisited in a novel way with the Rorschach Series, exhibited in the main gallery. In these works, Lum halves a storefront sign and conjoins it with its inverted mirror reflection. The reference to the psychoanalytic method of Rorschach blots in the title and appearance of the series brings into play questions of identity; it causes the viewer to ponder or confront his or her identity and emotional functioning through a public, capitalist lens.

*Ken Lum appears courtesy of Galerie Grita Insam, Vienna, Austria*

## **Gordon Lebrecht**

For an installation on the gallery windows, Lebrecht couples the words *Sink Or Swim* with *Sic Et Non* (Yes And No in Medieval Latin), thereby juxtaposing the incommensurable. The work of Gordon Lebrecht has always come down to making connections: a phrase of one sort or another is introduced, occasioned, so that it may be linked to another. The term *Scriptio in actu* might best describe the operation: the transcription of a phrase, a sentence, or a legend directly onto the internal cover of the archive itself.

## **Francine Savard**

Savard's practice, rooted in the Plasticien tradition, is generated through singular codifications and the processing of information. The inkjet print *Et, si*, is part of Savard's larger research concerning the grammatical analysis—or as she calls it, the defragmentation, neutralization and measure—of a single text. The background reflects the combination of all the words and highlighted is each appearance of the words "et" and "si". A previous set of prints focused on isolating "et", "ou", "si", "mais". Those small words function as additions, choices, questions, and always seem to change the course of things, to induce the doubt, to propose or speculate. In this specific artwork, the unique association of those two words is a tentative reconstruction of: et si (and if).

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**Nick Ostoff: *Recent Work***

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Nick Ostoff's work explores the ways in which quotidian space is transformed through memory, absence, the mechanics of photographic representation, and the process of painting.

For the past few years, Ostoff has been focusing on spaces within the urban landscape. He is particularly interested in certain elements within these spaces – such as parking lots, subway platforms, sidewalks and high-rise buildings – that are so ubiquitous, so embedded within the complex fabric of contemporary urban life, that they have become almost imperceptible. Working from his own photographic source material allows him to highlight these overlooked elements, while removing the chaos of the surrounding context through framing and cropping. And subsequently, through the act of painting, he is able to diminish the spatial and temporal specificity of the photographic source.

With his recent work, Ostoff continues to explore these spaces, yet with a decisive shift in methodology and process. By reducing tonal gradations, removing almost all details, altering colour, and cropping the imagery to such a degree that any distinctions between foreground, middle-ground and background are eliminated, these works are ushered away from the conventions of straightforward representation. Instead, they are placed on the cusp of reductivist abstraction.

Ostoff's aim with these works is to elliptically evoke space with a minimal amount of pictorial information, thereby creating a more open-ended viewing experience. By largely relinquishing the demands of straightforward representation, he is free to focus on the more rudimentary aspects of the painting process, such as formal arrangements, brush strokes and surface treatments.