

Spelling the Image

January 26 - March 3



Ken Lum, *Untitled (Sauq!)* 1987, enamel paint on plywood, 72 x 96 in. (183 x 244 cm)

It is with great enthusiasm that Marc Jancou Contemporary presents *Spelling the Image*, a group exhibition exploring artists' examination of language and the relationship between text and image. Opening on January 26th, the show will be on view through March 3rd. The exhibition will include works by John Baldessari, Erica Baum, Sam Durant, Roe Ethridge, Jenny Holzer, Larry Johnson, Mike Kelley, Sean Landers, Louise Lawler, Christian Marclay, Alan Michael, Richard Prince, Kay Rosen, Frances Stark, and Stephanie Taylor. It will also present Language Paintings from the 1980s by Ken Lum, an artist whom the gallery is pleased to now represent in New York.

Anthropologists have long argued that symbol-making, the depiction of our world through written and drawn forms, is what makes us human. Both language and art allow us to reappropriate the world around us, to interpret that which we see, feel, hear and touch, and to communicate these interpretations to others. As a vehicle for language, text assigns meaning to visual forms, constituting a network of symbols that relies solely upon a community's universal acceptance of these assignments.

The removal of these symbols from the mundane written format, and their recontextualizing as visual art, points directly to the fundamental symbolic origins and nature of text itself. It redefines text for what it is— a series of images— and points to the presuppositions that underlie our systems and the way that we communicate— the things we have to accept in order to function on an everyday basis. By reframing text outside of the linguistic realm, this art asks us to examine our most fundamental means of understanding and communicating.

Over the past century, artists have pursued these examinations by repositioning text in a variety of different ways: text as caption, text as image, text as directive, text as documentation, and even text as a means of displacing the art object all together. Examples of these gestures can be seen in the works on view here, which span nearly three decades.

In Ken Lum's Language Paintings, presented here for the first time in New York, the text carries the image itself. Using the techniques and materials of pre-digital commercial signage, Lum reveals his interest in the strategies of lettrism, Bruitist poetry and other avant-garde interventions into the rules of written language. Erica Baum's photographs employ text in a playful manner— her words are often "found," but the wit with which they are re-presented belies a simple flattening of text into form. And in the work of both Mike Kelley and Sean Landers, text is used to intimate a more internal process, as a glimpse into those inner thoughts that elude easy representation.

These works may spell it out for you, but like all pictures, they don't tell the whole story.