

Stefan Brüggenmann (Mexico City, 1975) uses text in a rather unusual approach, combining a formal, and quite traditional conceptual approach to art with a rough and critical attitude. Brüggenmann has been creating works of art that find their essence in popular imagery, often in punk ideologies, and that are expressed through tautological premises, not only within themselves but also in relation to the context in which they are conceived and inserted. Sometimes I wonder if this was what happened if Sid Vicious met Jacques Derrida, read Marshall McLuhan's 1969 interview, "A Candid Conversation with the High Priest of Popcult and Metaphysician of Media,"¹ and decided to make language-based works of art that are founded in rebellion, irony and in institutional critique. There are three main ways in which most artists use text: to give a visual shape to verbal expression, turning it into an image that goes beyond its signification and meaning; to express messages: philosophical, political or cultural ones and to describe non seen issues ,or to compel others to do things, what JL Austin has called "performative utterances"².

Brüggenmann moves through all of them, adding a fourth element: using mass media messages (from advertisements to music and fashion) as a raw material, and inserting them into contemporary art's practice, he establishes a link between high and low culture and thus exposes the impossibility to separate one from another. Mainly working with neon, vinyl and magazines' extracts, he continues with the conceptual tradition of using industrial media that have a primordial utilitarian function. However, its contents also come from those same

vernacular contexts, as if putting together message and medium he is able to reveal its hidden possibilities to express deeper meanings than the apparently superficial ones perceived at a first glance. Some of his text pieces, such as THOUGHTS ARE PRODUCTS, 2001; (SUPERFICIAL), 2004; ALL MY IDEAS ARE IMPORTED ALL MY PRODUCTS ARE EXPORTED (ALL MY EXPLANATIONS ARE RUBBISH), 2003; (NO CONTENT), 2004; CAPITALISM AND SCHIZOPHRENIA, 2002; TO BE POLITICAL IT HAS TO LOOK NICE, 2003; THIS IS RUBBISH, 2004; RUBBISH, 2003 or NOTHING, 2000, ambiguously present a cynical, nihilist and lucid reflection on certain economical and philosophical aspects related to the production and reception of cultural goods, art included.

Echoing the primary concerns of punk ideologies, its critical view of the world and its conception of modern society as something that places an extensive limit on individual thought, Bruggemann's texts resound that same attitude of rebellion, discontent and skepticism. He has a contradictory behavior, oscillating between criticizing and doing nothing. It's hard to find a better tribute to punk. Other text pieces and show titles, like LOOKS CONCEPTUAL, 1999; (CONCEPTUAL DECORATION), 2004; #1 THE NEW CONCEPTUALISTS (text piece, 2000 ongoing); (UNTITLED), 2003; BLACK LETTERS, 2002; I'M NOT A CONCEPTUAL ARTIST I DON'T DO CONCEPTUAL ART I DON'T THINK IN CONCEPTUAL ART (THAT IS CONCEPTUAL ART) I KEEP THINKING THE POSSIBILITY, 2004 or (WORDS THAT BECOME PICTURES, PICTURES

THAT BECOME WORDS), 2003, make direct reference to the conceptual practices in which the artist inserts himself. However, there is a slight difference regarding orthodox conceptualism, and it lies in mockery and auto-irony: few conceptual artists play about their processes or question the validity of their redundancies, and that's Brüggenmann achievement, to tease about his own influences and creations. The artist's last exhibition at Blow de la Barra Gallery (March 2007), 'Obliteration Series', was a clear wish to move beyond text. The Latin origin of the word explains it all: ob-littera, ob (against), littera (something written). Even if maintaining his filiation to the written word, it was a statement of rebellion. The Obliteration Series consisted of abstract neons based on the act of scribbling. Assuming mistake and hesitation, the artist tested the foundations and limits of textual language, giving them a form that is usually lost during the process of creation, swollen as it is by the final product. Brüggenmann thus remembers us that text is nothing but lines, gestures, indecisions. Derrida's assertion, "there is nothing outside the text" acquaints a visual form, as the artist manages to give meaning to what does not mean and does not signify. He makes a comment on "nothing", on a "no-thing": these nothings are scribbles. However, these drafts that were turned into form and light and that seem to disturb the walls of the gallery with its rebel, graffiti-like appearance, symbolize the power of language and text, for they are encrypted, impossible to understand and only known to the one who made them, who, therefore, detains all the power contained in language.

Writing structures the content of knowledge, if it is incomprehensible, that knowledge is lost. Bruggemann's attitude towards text is caustic, disruptive and completely aware of his language-working ancestors. Shallow, the exhibition he recently curated in Gallery I-20 in NY, (featuring himself, Pierre Bismuth, Malcom McLaren and others), highlighted this approach with a reflection upon acceleration, pop culture and superficiality in contemporary conceptual production. During Spring 2008, he is going to present a solo show at Kunsthalle Bern.

1. Interview in Playboy magazine originally titled pp. 53-74, in *The Essential McLuhan*, Eric McLuhan and Frank Zingrone (ed.), New York: Basic Books, 1995, pp.233-69

2. J.L. Austin, *How to do things with Words: The William James Lectures* delivered at Harvard University in 1955. Ed. J. O. Urmson. Oxford: Clarendon, 1962