

There is virtually no way to recuperate written language from becoming embedded in the realm of visual culture when words are entered into paintings. The conjunction of words and images into a

K E N A P T E K A R

single work of art creates a hybrid discourse that falls heavily on the side of vision. Ken Aptekar's intriguing constructions balance image and text seductively. Typeset words float across the pictures and reverberate before our vision, arousing interest in identifying the underlying relationship between highly disparate words and images, and how they correlate to form new, previously unknown, meanings.

34 Using a generic technique of bolting thick panes of glass, etched with text, to the surface of elegantly painted boards, the artist makes a multilayered object that subdues the potency of his image sources. The narrative and emotive power of historical recognition of paintings by Rembrandt and Raphael is surreptitiously evacuated in Aptekar's process of transcribing original sources in subtly fractured or obviously constricted manners. Aptekar approaches the business of transcription with a certain ironic pleasure, parodically teasing, for instance, in titling one work *And How Did That Make You Feel*, or, implying bombast, naming another *Heavy Equipment*. His resourceful method rephrases familiar paintings by inserting terse, disruptive texts into the visual field of each work that conjure a perverse dialectic of status.

The effect of a disconcerting non-sequitur is immediately evident in these works. Acutely edited and rearticulated texts pose elusive questions and forge ill-defined connectives between thoughts and very precise but discordantly fragmented musings. A self-portrait by

Rembrandt, an apostolic post-resurrection scene by Raphael, and a betrothal, again by Rembrandt, are ingeniously reframed, recolored, or recomposed to create cryptic reproductions. These 'object/paintings' spark revisions to the systematic definitions of aesthetic authority and socially constructed assumptions of power suggested by the unadorned imagery. The reductive list of alternations in *Pink Frick* plays a simple word game before a compassionate self-portrait of Rembrandt-in-pink that invites parallel readings about Rembrandt, the current location of the portrait—the Frick Museum—and the institution's philanthropic, union-busting benefactor and namesake. An insidious undercurrent of social networks of power and control is articulated through historically masculine voices of congregation, coupling, ownership, and authority. The messages appear enticingly acute, but operate fluidly in an open realm of floating signifiers, as the words drift over the surface of the picture plane. In Aptekar's frame of reference, this ambiguity suggests the residual force of history and language as lucid masculine concepts that are complacent, resistant, and potentially retaliatory, but palpably open to revision and recompilation.

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