

Concrete Islands

Kayne Griffin Corcoran, Los Angeles 5 November – 7 January

Writing is full of holes. Holes between the letters, within the letters, between the words and sentences and paragraphs, holes between thoughts and intentions and meaning. Writing is as much there as it is not. It is a wonder that it holds itself together at all. Much doesn't.

In the catalogue for *Concrete Islands*, a group show curated by Douglas Fogle and Hanneke Skerath, several of the listed and illustrated works are not, actually, present in the gallery. These include Marcel Broodthaers's *Pense-Bête* (1964), a half-unwrapped bundle of the artist's poetry books sunk into plaster, and Bas Jan Ader's installation *Thoughts unsaid, then forgotten* (1973). Why shouldn't an exhibition about the gaps between words and images, and the things made to fill them, itself contain some meaningful lacunae?

When used in the context of literature, the term 'concrete' usually refers to concrete poetry. In this sense, concretion is what happens to words and letters when they are set in place, only intended to be seen rather than heard or even read. Before he began making his typed *dactylopoèmes* during the 1960s, concrete poet Henri Chopin recorded sound poems that he scored only in his memory. He regarded those

sound poems as reconstituting 'the space of limbo that we lost when we discovered the written word'. His *dactylopoèmes* – examples of which in the exhibition date from 1978 to 2001 – evoke not spaces between things but solid edifices built from typed letters. Titles such as *The Great Pyramid* (1980) and *Monument en Mouvement* (1985) reinforce this impression.

In addition to concrete poetry, actual concrete (and its close relatives mortar, cement, Jesmonite and plaster) is present in the exhibition too. If that sounds like a bad curatorial pun, several artists used these materials to reflect with precision on the ways in which words can manifest physically. In Michael Dean's sculpture *Analogue Series* ('daysy'), *ffff unfinished notes* (2016), a wrinkly slug of cast concrete supports a steel armature on which dangles a pamphlet of phrases penned in repeating digital glyphs. ('Written out in fuck' possibly reads the barely legible back cover, in Kalashnikovs.)

The material for Jimmie Durham's humble sculpture *These Twelve Bricks Were Used to Represent the Dawn Sky in Venice* (2015) was scavenged from sites around Venice. The low stack, some bricks with blue-painted plaster

still clinging to their sides, just about conjures a watery landscape. On top, two bricks have 'A CLOUD' written on, faux-dumbly, in marker. (The mute patches of fresco are infinitely more eloquent.)

It is presumably a mad coincidence, in an exhibition about letters and words, that many of its artists share the same initial: Mark Manders, Mark Leckey, Michael E. Smith, Martin Boyce and Michael Dean. In addition to these familiar names, less widely known figures also make remarkable contributions. Irma Blank (whose name is also too perfect) began what she called her *Eigenschriften* during the late 1960s, neatly filling pages with lines of calligraphic marks that look, only from a distance, like handwriting. Fluxus artist Robert Filliou used writing, as in *Black Granite and Hostile Preceded by Naked Skull* (1973), in much the same way as he used collage and drawing.

In the exhibition text, the curators pose the question, 'where does language end and the world begin?' If anything, this exhibition shows that there is no separation between language and the world: the world is language, and language allows us to perceive it as the world. *Jonathan Griffin*



Concrete Islands, 2016 (installation view). Photo: Robert Wedemeyer. Courtesy Kayne Griffin Corcoran, Los Angeles