

## REVERT TO TYPE

Jorge Méndez Blake | Stefan Brüggeman | Pia Camil | Idris Khan | Rirkrit Tiravanija

Galerie Fabian Lang is pleased to present 'revert to type', a two-part exhibition (5.12.2020 – 15.02.2021). One developed on a virtual platform, and one at the gallery, using the same artworks as two different curatorial interpretations.

The gallery in Zurich will display the physical works from the incredible list of international artists on show. The virtual interpretation will be online at [www.fabianlang.ch](http://www.fabianlang.ch) where you are invited to journey through a fictional space in a landscape we have created exclusively for the exhibition.

All words are created equal, but some are more equal than others! These five artists have found masterful ways of combining word play, texts and images. Conceptual rigours coalesce to create often bold and pertinent bodies of work focusing on themes of appropriation, displacement, identity and relationships. Through their commentary on our history and current time, the show is rooted in the philosophy and power of language as image and image as language. The artists' text images leave the viewer in the dark as to whether they are reading or seeing, for such is the power of the word in art. The works are often ironic, provocative, acerbic and seek to use language to expose, antagonize and flirt with today's realities.

What a difference a letter can make in **Pia Camil's** *We Will Dye For You*. A play on words and a reflection of a scaffolded house and a skip in a window of a dry-cleaning store. The image – taken with a phone camera at the time – allures to a theatricality of a potential socio-economic tragedy.

The work is part of a larger photographic archive that documents the idiosyncrasies of public texts found throughout the city of London between the years of 2006–2009. The photograph resonates with her interest in the textile industry and serves as commentary or critique of the devastating labour and environmental practices promoted in the industry.

Through her work **Pia Camil** has shown a proclivity to failure or the decaying associated to the Mexican urban landscape, aspects of modernist culture and traces of art history. Her practice has explored the urban ruin – including paintings and photographs of halted projects along Mexico's highways (highway follies); abandoned billboards or shopfronts that become theatre-like curtains therefore theatricalizing failed capitalist strategies, or the problems and contradictions that arise when engaging with iconic art works.

In the same way, the strength of **Rirkrit Tiravanija's** work lies too in its ephemerality and the slippery ways it escapes definition; he takes the material of the every-day and re-stages it, allowing the viewer a perspective at once banal and deeply profound about the quickly fleeting nature of life itself. Rather than insisting on a particular reality or truth, his work creates open-ended contexts for people to grapple with these questions themselves. *Fear Eats the Soul* shows USA Today Weekend's edition from January 20–22 2017, the first day of Trump in office. That four-word phrase, a reference to the 1974 Fassbinder classic *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*, has figured repeatedly in the artist's work over the years. Fassbinder's two lead characters, a German cleaner and a Moroccan mechanic, meet in the film's opening scene over drinks, and commence an unlikely relationship that brings out their own deepest fears as much as the xenophobia and racism of their surroundings.

Rirkrit's larger work *All You Need is Dynamite*, 2020 in the upstairs gallery space was made only two weeks before this show opened, using the New York Times from the week leading up to the 2020 election. The work focuses on the protests of Black Lives Matter, the then impending election and all the social and civic unrest that had been plaguing America under the toxic umbrella of Trumpism around this time.

In a specially designed darkened separate gallery space underneath the ground floor we are showing Tiravanija's *Untitled 2020 (I Can See The Whole Room But There Is Nobody In It)*, 2020. In this particular piece the artist has chosen to teasingly use a mirror to offer a playful alternative for the quotidian activity of looking at our own reflection. In the context of this unprecedented year, which has seen most art exhibitions happening online, the text in this piece feels humorously relevant.

The artist **Jorge Méndez Blake**, on the other hand, focuses on a different aspect of his sources - the space between reading and looking. Through translation of canonical texts, phrases, and imagery of for example James Joyce and other great masters of universal literature, Méndez Blake alludes to processes of language translation, as well as negation of textual meaning by architectural or designed conditions of literary expression. By expanding marginal elements of a text, Méndez Blake grants autonomous power to ulterior frameworks that construct and order our cultural heritage.

In his latest work *Dismantling James Joyce (The Cats of Copenhagen) II*, 2020, the artist focuses his attention on a lesser known story by the Irish author. *The Cats of Copenhagen* is a posthumously published short story. The story describes the city of Copenhagen, Denmark, where "things are not as they seem", and is critical of "fat cats" and other authority figures. Written as postcards in 1936 to his grandson Stephen James Joyce, it was not published until 2012. "...The modernist master is here at his most playful, yet Joyce's Copenhagen has a keen, anti-authoritarian quality, an almost anarchic subtext, that transcends the mere whimsy of a children's story."

Another work by Méndez Blake illuminates the upstairs room. His neon *Poem in a Corner*. Jay Pritzker described the works of Luis Barragán as "a sublime act of poetic imagination". Might certain spaces or architectural elements harbor poetry? Are there specific points, crossroads of poetic intensity, of inspirational enthusiasm? Jorge Luis Borges located the Aleph at a specific place under the nineteenth step of the cellar staircase in the house on Garay Street. Where does poetry coalesce? Méndez Blake's *Poem in a Corner* is part of a series of neons the artist calls "poetic situations". It meditates on poetry creation and where it is supposed to "happen". Cliches of places and situations - Poet on a mountain top; Poet by the pond; Poet amidst ruins; Poem in a corner... poetic wall, poetic corner...

Drawing inspiration from the history of art and music as well as key philosophical, poetic and theological texts too, **Idris Khan** investigates memory, creativity and the layering of experience. The density and precision of Khan's compositions, defined by his technique of imposing multiple layers of image, text and music upon one another - in media including sculpture, painting and photography -, allude to the excessive proliferation of information in the technical age whilst simultaneously advocating for a slower, more considered way of looking.

He is well known for his large-scale works in which techniques of layering are used to arrive at what might be considered the essence of an image, and to create something entirely new through repetition and superimposition. In *The Weight of Words*, 2020 and *Between Memory and Devotion*, 2020 Khan obsessively stamped his own writings repeatedly onto heavily gessoed blue aluminum panels, ultimately eradicating the meaning of the original text to construct an abstract and universal visual language. The work *Untitled on Wood* is a playful departure for Khan. Often working with overlaid oil stick, words have formed the sculptural gesture onto found wood and plaster in which words are stamped onto the surface of clay and then cast to form the base.

Overlaying and obliteration also form the essence in **Stefan Brüggemann's** process. His work *Hyper-Palimpsest*, 2019 brings together two existing bodies of work: Brüggemann's *45 Text Pieces* (1997-2019) are presented in juxtaposition with his *Headlines and Last Line in the Movies* (2019). Brüggemann is interested in this process of layering as a correlative to the unfettered accumulation of information in the digital age. In much the same way that an oversaturation of all the colours tends to black, *Hyper-Palimpsest* plays with the idea that an excess of inputs leads to an erasure of content: and so it posits the aesthetic of our control-copy control-paste, 24-hour news society as an ever-obliterating palimpsest of digital white noise.