



I Want Your Text

Explore the frontiers of font with the Kramarsky Collection at the University of Richmond.

by Amy Ritchie

For more than 50 years, Wynn Kramarsky has been collecting modern and contemporary works on paper of largely minimal, conceptual and post-minimal inclinations. He's amassed a formidable collection, with many pieces exhibited in major museums and galleries nationwide. Kramarsky's holdings can be seen through Oct. 16 at the Harnett Museum of Art at the University of Richmond.

"Art = Text = Art" includes 72 works created between 1960 and the present and explores text in various modes: as concept, as formal element, as symbol, as instruction and even as empty space. The public has never viewed many of the works, particularly the artists' books. William Anastasi, Mel Bochner, Jane Hammond, Jasper Johns, Ed Ruscha and John Waters are among the distinguished array of artists included

in the exhibition.

As expected, some of the works deal explicitly with text in terms of written communication, addressing ideas behind semiotic language while creating a visual aesthetic within the text itself. Lebanon-born Annabel Daou's sprawling 50-by-38-inch "Constitution" (2004) uses the U.S. Constitution as reference for the written Arabic, which creates a compelling rhythm of line and shape. The text isn't an exact translation, but a transliteration based on immediate sight and displaced historical context. Daou's handwritten words squeeze into the upper two-thirds of the paper, hovering over extensive bare space, creating a visual tension in tune with that of the languages and histories.

Other artists further exploit the blank space as part of the textual landscape. Karen Schiff begins with quintessential textual media — among them illuminated manuscripts and newspapers — then invents a composition of wordless space indicated by our memories and familiarity with these printed formats. In "fol. 70, Psalm 101 (David Beseches God)," the traditional illuminated image and text is reversed and the text space is left blank, resulting in a multidimen-

sional creative process.

Process dictates much of the work in the exhibition, such as the pieces created by Jill Baroff and Christine Hiebert. The result in both cases is visually simplified work that has absolutely no relation to text other than its original source, and that takes on richer meaning when the creative process is revealed. Baroff's

"Untitled (Tide Drawing)," from 2006, is a visual representation of a tide chart in a specific geographic area. A single point of departure ripples with compass-drawn lines, the distance between them dictated by the changing tide. The result is a series of musical, even emotive, concentric

circles made with ink on fiber.

"Art = Text = Art" exhausts the possibilities of art-text relationship in a way that stimulates the mind and inspires innovation. Kramarsky is known to be a passionate collector and a friend to artists, and that passion for the arts is plainly visible here. **S**

"Art = Text = Art: Works by Contemporary Artists" will be on view at the University of Richmond, Harnett Museum of Art, Aug. 17-Oct. 16. For information, related events and an online exhibition catalog visit artequalstext.com.