



## MARK BOOTH CHICAGO

As promised, Mark Booth's latest exhibition *nothing to do with wizards* has nothing to do with wizardry but it does ask us to conjure a little [O'Connor Art Gallery, Dominican University; November 3–December 11, 2010]. The site-specific installation comprises six unrelated texts strategically positioned on the gallery walls in hand-cut silver adhesive vinyl letters. In the otherwise empty space, the texts resist coalescing into a coherent narrative. Instead, they ask us to revel in our own mental imagery or, perhaps, the sound of a particular phrase.

Booth's exhibition calls to mind text-based works by the conceptual artist Lawrence Weiner as well as the poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé, known for his experimental typographical design for the 1897 work *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* [A throw of the dice will never abolish chance], combining the purposeful use of blank space and the unusual arrangement of text on the page. Akin to Weiner's ninety-foot text-based sculpture *Built to maintain the inner edges of a cul-de-sac*, 2009, which was placed in a narrow hallway between two larger rooms at Marian Goodman Gallery in New York, Booth's work *The blue-black birds that form the rim of space*, 2010, engages with its location—above the five windows of the O'Connor Gallery. In one instance, the letters emphasize the wall's framing of the outdoor view. They also suggest a gathering of birds along a telephone or electrical wire. Mallarmé's design opened up a sense of the text as both musical "score" and visual "sketch." Likewise, Booth's irregularly-cut silver letters restrain meaning from overpowering materiality. At certain distances, the glare of light striking the letters further disrupts reading and, in the case of *A Glow from within a Body*, 2010, underlines the visual impact of the vinyl words as well as their meaning.

Although there is no explicit audio component in the exhibition, sound is still an important consideration. Booth is a member of Tiny Hairs, a Chicago-based instrumental collective. He is also a solo composer of sound work, including the drone score *my name is a constellation of rust colored birch tree seeds on a sky of*

snow, inspired by Molly Shanahan's 2007 performance *My Name is a Blackbird*. As such, Booth moves easily among the practices of drawing, writing, sound, and live performance. Here, the absence of objects and the placement of texts, which occasionally travel in and out of small alcoves, result in a heightened sense of the spatial and auditory experience of walking through the gallery. The triangular wall space opposite the entrance features the text *the congealed manifestation of words spoken over a lifetime in the form of a knotted spool of silver grey trees at the height of a tall ceiling*, 2010, a passage that begs to be spoken even as it stands as a visual likeness of its own description.

Although the hand-cut letters are surprisingly consistent in appearance, considering that each was rendered on the spot without pre-drawing, the desired sense of spontaneity is, nonetheless, achieved by the inclusion of the work while you were speaking *I imagined myself wearing a crocheted octopus costume*, 2010. In an otherwise melancholy, but immensely satisfying, show, this phrase, crawling up and down the corner of an alcove, ruptures the mood in the manner that random, self-generated thoughts sometimes disrupt the most somber of occasions. In this case, the sound component is, most likely, an unexpected chuckle.

—Wendy Koenig



## DEREK CHAN CHICAGO

Derek Chan recently traveled to the Four Corners region to seek out Navajo and Hopi villages amid the mesas and canyons. This journey, he says, was inspired by a desire to understand these indigenous peoples and their "unyielding ability to pursue a spiritual way of life" despite prolonged oppression. In a solo exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, as part of the *UBS 12 x 12: New Artists/New Work* exhibition series, the results of his research are presented as an installation of paintings, mixed-media collages, and large gouaches on paper (November 6–28, 2010). Meanwhile, a slender book presented on a pedestal gathers Chan's drawings and writings from the trip. The artist also offers a simple, ritualized weekly performance that serves primarily as a catalyst to engage individual visitors in conversation.

With a degree of self-awareness, Chan is working here in the shadow of unfortunate tendencies in American culture at large: overly generalized ways of representing Native Americans and entrenched assumptions. To wit, in her 1996 essay "The Postmodern Old West, or The Precession of Cowboys and Indians," Rebecca Solnit speculates on the reduction of Native Americans to a cultural abstraction in the public mind, effectively consigned to a conceptual museum. "Like works of art," she writes, "they are expected... to be on exhibit, to be public property, to be seen and not heard, to be spiritual rather than political, and to embody qualities to which everyone can aspire." The lifestyle-spirituality of New Age wannabes or the names of sports teams like the Chicago Blackhawks or the Atlanta Braves provide telling illustrations. Chan doesn't hide his own admiration for the native cultures he sets out to engage, but the works in his exhibition gradually trace a more complex and compelling position as he intermixes different registers of experience, including the personal and historical, the political and spiritual.

On the ground in the gallery's very center are a miniature Navajo rug and a carved figurine covered with various symbols, such as a cornstalk and a rainbow. Though blatantly re-contextualized, these apparent artifacts are

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Mark Booth, installation view of *nothing to do with wizards*, 2010, handcut vinyl on wall, dimensions variable (courtesy of the artist; photo: John Sisson); Derek Chan, installation view of *UBS 12 x 12: New Artists/New Work* (© Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, 2010; photo: Nathan Keay)