

JOHN BOONE'S FRIENDLY ENIGMAS

If you go to Delphi you can see the oracle's messages carved into great white marble rectangles. All the letters are the same size, there is no capitalization, no space between words or sentences. The lines read as the oxen pull the plow: right to left to right to left, all the way from the top to the bottom. Perhaps the question was, "Will the queen's child be a boy or a girl." The answer reads, "...thequeenschildwillbeboynogirl...." Get it? You can "read," "The queen's child will be boy. No girl." -- or, "The queen's child will be boy? No! Girl!" And the sun glints on the beautiful marble letters.

If you read the texts of Joseph Kosuth, the connection with language is deep and emphatic and so its the works's visual presence, whatever the particular material. The material is material but is it more material than the message. You may think such things when you look at a Kosuth.

Who can forget Trisha Brown's objectified spoken words as she danced so grammatically that the words, like the dancing, took on a heightened presence on the stage quite beyond their literal sense.

Think of On Karawa's pure markings of the date, daily white on black paintings on canvas, handmade, apparently soft, -- but in concept like a taut steel wire strung through the decades.

Add Christopher Wool, Glen Ligon and other famous contemporary word artists and you have a room full of powerhouses. And, cool as Henry Fonda, John Boone strolls in, grinning slightly, and picks up the conversation.

The italic cyber-face he designed for the messages that seem to streak across his brightly colored monochrome canvases already is ironic. The type looks like the one we all know, but actually Boone designed it. The words can't move, they are painted, but they remind us of the second or third story line of type at the bottom of the TV news screen. "Yes, Yes," you say. "Got that." "Go on.") But we all got that, eons ago. That's what cliches are.

Nothing daunted, Boone goes about his business, collecting pocketsful of such apparently innocent stuff, and lays them out on bright monochrome

canvases in sub-sets united by a common word or category. "Free Two's" spacious, slanted, open lines of white on blue include FREE ASSOCIATION... FREE FOR ALL ... FREE AND CLEAR ... SCOT FREE ... FREELANCE ... FREE SAMPLE You tilt your head and wonder what makes this so engaging. It is the work's natural straightforwardness -- verbal and visual -- that offers ample space for our own thoughts to slip in. The directness disarms, provokes a half-smile.

Surrounded by "Animal Magnetism," "Self-Portrait," "Truth Plus," the irresistible "Portrait: In Memory of My Feelings, " and all the other paintings at One Art Space on Warren Street this month, you sense you are among friends with whom you can have many long and happy dialogues in the years ahead.

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