

visual culture emerge – Gerhard Richter's *Betty*, Chris Marker's *La Jetée*, Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, and this after having experienced one of Burgin's ex-centric pans around the bedroom of the Seth Peterson Cottage designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. Interesting, too, is the way that Burgin registers indexicality in the digital image by incorporating it into the means of production. In *Solito Posto*, 2008, the textual narrative tells of a man who looks for a woman on a particular square in Milan. We are given two pans of a square comprising black-and-white stills, the first pan shows us a cafe terrace inhabited by people, the second ex-centric pan – a slight zoom-in – shows the square with the cafe boarded up and depopulated, the before and the after incorporated into the sequence of the work itself. It is perhaps in these meditations on technology and memory that Burgin speaks to a generation which has no memory of the heated debates in photography in the 1970s about the either/or of aestheticisation and documentary which are currently being combined under the contemporary rubric of art as research, forgetting that art can make the fantastical utterly real. ■

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London Round-up

Sadie Coles HQ • Skarstedt • The Drawing Room • Arcade • Hauser and Wirth • Herald St

Thirteen photographs of the letter A, variously realised: sign-painted; backlit by neon; as a white absence among black dots; as three sweeps of a spray can; as a pixelated enlargement from a monitor. Shannon Ebner's installation, *Black Box Collision A*, 2013, at Sadie Coles HQ, figures language as advertisement, notice, autograph, performance, protest (the circled A of Anarchy, not present, is invoked) and then – in the photograph of a series of vinyl tarps along the side of a motorway bridge that have been scored into with crosses and slashes, XX/-/XI/X-/IX – as a computer binary code that resembles, when abstracted by the photograph's vertical hang, an analogue film reel, another vehicle of linear data.

Ebner has also filmed and photographed an LED motorway sign on which the lines of a poem flash. The spread of light, in negative, recalls the bleed of the sprayed A. As the sign malfunctions, or its image is obscured by the glitch of reflections, the photographs degrade into abstraction. Art is commonly supposed to be an act of communication, but visual artists often use language, the primary medium of exchanging information, to question or frustrate that assumption. But although Ebner attempts to dress down signs – through their transformation into the refractoriness of concrete poetry, into the conceptualism of computer binary or into embodied objecthood – her installation still consists of networks of signs for her act of deconstruction. It seems there is no escape from language.

The bad, sad jokes meandering across Richard Prince's 'Protest Paintings', 1989-94, at Skarstedt serve a similar function to Ebner's poem: here, narrative cyphers submit to painterly erosion just as the abstraction of Ebner's letters submits to photographic form. In Prince's work of the early 1990s, when he began to complicate the textual seeds of his earlier monochrome joke paintings, the dissolution of legibility is synonymous with psychological and cultural entropy. Voices wobble and go astray in the static of painterly gesture. The rippling white stripes of a US flag become a formalistic pattern, isolated from colour scheme and context. Nineteen paintings map an axis from monochrome abstraction through silkscreened text to a maximalist accretion of patterning in which joke fragments are glimpsed as threads of a narrative that have not survived their translation into the objecthood of a painting.



Shannon Ebner
Black Box Collision A
2013

Most of the works are constructed out of five canvas sections: four rectangles filling in the spaces around a monumental, and possibly even spiritualistic, central cross. Prince plays chaotic painterly incident and skeins of dead language off this sturdy, underlying template. Sometimes, by replacing the two upper insets with a single section, the cross becomes a T, asserting its insistence on meaning through a bluster of incoherent facture. For all Prince's cynical posturing, the series enacts a heated argument between narrative and its denial. Writing – and its subcategory, handwriting – refuses to be assigned a stable vehicle, switching from the no-nonsense typography of the Helvetica-styled jokes and the brute sign language of the T stretchers to the automatic gesturalism of layered paint. Prince almost never wields a brush directly, applying paint through the filter of photographic silkscreen or by abstract expressionist dripping – an impersonality which contrasts with the printed jokes, which are often phrased as though they were Prince's own words. He then writes in pencil over the print, qualifying it with his own hand, pushing it back into impersonality. The series elaborates a discourse on what might constitute writing, demonstrating that it may have no truck with legibility, the communication of the self ('I never had a penny to my name, so I changed my name') or may be the essence of both; that it can be as much an act of self-concealment and self-generalisation as it is self-exposure.

In her catalogue essay for *Marking Language* at the Drawing Room, curator Kate McFarlane summarises the practices of the seven participating artists as sharing 'a preference for challenging authority' and reflecting 'the fragmentation of our reality'. And yet the overriding impression left by the exhibition is of language functioning as an artistic content-crutch in the midst of a reality unamenable to naming. Of the seven contributions, it is only Karl's Holmqvist's wall writings and Matias Feldbakken's framed trash bags that dare to challenge the reassurance and sanction of legibility. Holmqvist shuffles letter sequences – suggesting infinite permutational possibilities, none of which make any more sense than any other – in a shaky felt-tip scrawl, suggesting a subjectivity its block capitals deny. Scores of K's – his initial – are stacked into one huge K, leaning precariously like a figure about to lose its feet. Feldbakken has framed three grey trash bags as grounds for his own felt-tip scribbles. The shape of the flattened bags, with two raised handles, is a geometric abstraction; but the bags are also 'carriers' – transporters of garbage, transmitters of meaning. What is being conveyed is dysfunctional language, notational trash, communicating only inchoate volition.

Anna Barham's double-screen video installation, *Double Screen (Not quite tonight jellylike)*, 2013, at Arcade, seems to proceed from an