

PETER DOWNSBROUGH

APRIL 29 - June 4, 2016

A verbal "walk among" /A guide to looking at, through and with Peter Downsborough's 2016 exhibition at Barbara Krakow Gallery

When one enters Barbara Krakow Gallery, very little activity appears to occur, in terms of "art". A few black lines, a few words and not much else. However, a world of aesthetic, conceptual, philosophical and spatial ideas unfolds if one takes time with Peter Downsborough's exhibition.

The work closest to the entrance to the gallery is "PLACE, THEN", consisting of a thin black metal pipe suspended from the ceiling and touching the floor. The pipe is, in a sense, a three dimensional line but takes up little physical space. It mostly delineates and thus separates everything behind it. If one changes one's vantage point, the pipe still divides. "PLACE, THEN" is not only this gesture but also includes 2 words (PLACE and THEN), each in 1/4" thick painted black metal and resting on the floor, each perpendicular to the vertical pipe. The word "place" can be defined as either "a particular portion of space, whether of definite or indefinite extent" or "space in general". The use of this word, thus, can both reference the action of inserting the pipe into space and comment on the pipe's surroundings. This reading of the word is amplified when experienced in conjunction with the word "then". "Then" is defined as "next, in order of time or place" and so, once one has understood the experience of the pipe and its relationship to "place", the next question almost invariably is "then what?". Through these 3 simple elements that make up the work, Downsborough points to experiencing a physical object (the pipe), a physical space (PLACE), a physical object in space (viewing the room with the pipe in one's field of vision) and a physical object's effect on space (the triumvirate of two words and the pipe in space). All of this is left as an open-ended question and/or experience for the viewer to take, learn from and utilize in future viewing experiences (aka the THEN). There is no one perfect viewpoint, but there are many points of view and many worthwhile relationships.

The second work one sees when entering the exhibition is "AND/ THE, OTHER". It consists of

BARBARA

KRAKOW GALLERY

three lengths of black cloth tape and vinyl letters spelling out, horizontally, the words “OTHER” and, backwards, “THE” (these two words are in the same size font). In a larger size, the word “AND” is presented vertically (descending) but sliced in half, with the left half of each letter on the left wall and the right half on the right wall. As for the tape, one length of tape descends from the top of the wall and comes close to the ground where a second length of tape meets the first at a 90° angle. This meeting point is where “THE” (backwards) is “sitting” on the line. “THE” is easily legible as backwards but, with a little imagination, makes one think of how to read it *from the other side*. While it is a notion that makes no sense as it is on a solid wall, if one were able to suspend disbelief, one could look *through* the wall, see “THE” read forward, see another angle into the space and perhaps consider the situation that one is behind the word. The main point is to not assume only one possible viewpoint. Looking further along in the work, to the right of the backwards “THE” is the corner of the wall and the halved AND. The right half of the word is closer to the corner, while the left half is twice the distance from the corner. Important is the fact that “and” is a conjunction but here, Downsborough has split the word and made the blank wall near the corner the conjunction. “AND” surrounds the space and thus complicates the understanding of the word normally being between things. Grammatically there is no way to have something within and between “and”, thus Downsborough activates the word as a participant. One needs to read the left half of “AND” *and* the right half to read the word, aka one must do one thing and another to understand the conjunctive property. Under the right side of “AND” is the third length of tape which extends 2/3 of the way along the longest wall of the gallery. Almost at the end of this length of tape Downsborough placed the word “OTHER”. As its the same size font as the backwards “THE”, the words could be combined to make “the other”, but where does “AND” fit in? What of the backwards “THE”? These questions draw one to the conclusion that this is not a traditional sentence. This is a grouping of three words accustomed to being read and comprehended for their verbal meaning. These three lines and three words create a grammatical and formal diagram of the potential relationships between words and their meanings. Through this physical experience, space and time can be explored through the interplay of visual and textual reading.

On the back wall of the right alcove are 5 silver gelatin photographs. The negatives were made between 1978 and 2015, while the photographic prints were made in 2014 and 2015. Each of the photographs, from the artist’s “Halves” series, consists of a black and white image where one half is a solid wall or plane with texture, grid or other visual information. The other half shows a deeper scene - train tracks receding in space or a curb curving around a street’s bend, for example. The wall half prompts focus on texture, while the other half draws attention to the formal arrangements and activity in the “scene”. Since each photo has both halves, the experience of comparison occurs and suddenly each half’s details inform the reading of the

BARBARA

KRAKOW GALLERY

other half. This is further enunciated by the juxtaposition of 5 photos, each using this arrangement, yet each in a different geographic location. One wall has deep texture, another has a grid. One scene seems like a grid, another looks like a study in one point perspective. Every point of view can consist of multiple comparisons.

Adjacent to the wall of the photos is what Downsborough calls a 'word string' wall work. The piece consists of 8 self-adhesive vinyl applied to the wall, as well as one black square painted directly upon the wall. After looking at the intimate photos next to this work, the piece seems like a surprising juxtaposition both in scale (small photos/large wall work) and imagery (text/toned photographs), but this contrast is a useful aspect with which to look at the work. The "Halves" photos play with geometry, the grid, space and texture. The word string piece, too, engages these ideas. The word "AS" appears twice - once forward and once backwards. The word "AND" appears once, backwards. The words "PLACE", "SET", "THE", "THEN" and "TIME" each appear once and only forwards. In addition there is a painted square of black. The vinyl of each word visibly sits on the surface but lets through a slight amount of the wall's inherent texture. The black paint on the wall, however, shows the texture of the wall clearly as it IS the wall. However, it is new black paint that has been applied only to that square area, so while the texture is the wall, the close and detailed pattern is, if ever so slightly, differentiated from the white part of the wall surrounding it. Neither the square nor the words are large (in fact they are each smaller than the photos) yet arranged together, they take the full wall. When one steps back, after having looked at the arrangements in the "Halves", there seems to be a strong similarity, formally, with this word string wall work. However, as opposed to the imagery depicting deep space in the photos, Downsborough has spread the words across the wall so that the words, while not *depicting* space, do *hold* space. This is made further evident by the incredible formal power of the small black square that is placed off-center right on the wall. Like in the pipe and two word work, "PLACE", this time in vinyl next to the black square, serves an incredibly significant role. It references the specific location of the square and the power that placement holds, as well as the complete surrounding white wall on which the other words are dispersed. Again, there are no grammatical sentences to be formed here, but there is an exploration of space through reading/re-reading and reading through juxtaposition that helps one better see the possibilities of words to state things plainly and poetically reference the importance of open-ended approaches to comprehension.

On the diagonal wall is a work titled "26.04.2016, Two Pipes, Random". It consists of two black pipes, each 1 meter tall and each with a hook at the top. They are each hung from a single nail and can be installed in any arrangement (hence "random" in the title). The work is from an ongoing series, all with the same specs (1 meter tall, a pair, to be hung randomly), and

BARBARA

KRAKOW GALLERY

Downsbrough considers them unique for 2 reasons: 1) each is made on a different day and 2) since it is to be random, no two works will ever be installed exactly the same. Understanding this is helpful on a conceptual level, but to understand the work within the physical space, one needs to look at the actual elements. 2 vertical, three-dimensional “lines” are placed somewhere on the wall. No matter their placement, the pipes always define by a space between them and the space “outside of them”. This, perhaps, is the essence of Downsbrough’s work. Simple, identifiable things (pipes, words, tape, paint) are used to both define specific spaces and also to point to the non-definability of space and the relationships therein.

The last work in the show, “T/HERE” consists of a square that is defined by metal bars 1.5 inches deep. Halfway between the front of the piece and the wall, “HERE” sits in the bottom right corner. Halfway up the outer right side, is a solitary “T” between the back of the square and the wall. The straightforward aspects of the work are that “HERE” is one place, but “THERE” is only possible with multiple places. “HERE” is inside. To make it “THERE”, you need both an inside and an outside. “HERE”, closer to the front, is in fact, closer to the viewer, thus giving the opportunity for one to be closer to “here” than “there”. Even more than this is the blank ‘emptiness’ of the square where the wall shows through. The sculpture highlights this area and focuses on it in a bold way - the full word “HERE” and the bold black outline. THERE is further away, a bit more abstract and not fully defined.

These descriptions are not the definitive interpretations for the pieces, nor are they necessarily Downsbrough’s absolute intention, but merely one impression of how the works exist and what they cause. Please do visit the show for a fuller experience, as the spatial arrangement of the works turn the viewer into a participant. Downsbrough has created a scenario where the art brings together here and now, inside and outside, and art and architecture.

BARBARA

KRAKOW GALLERY