

# At Krakow, text that makes its own context

ROBERT BARRY  
BARBARA KRAKOW GALLERY  
10 NEWBURY STREET, 5TH FLOOR  
BOSTON, MA 02116  
THROUGH JUNE 14,  
617 262 4490  
INFO@BARBARAKRAKOWGALLERY.COM  
WWW.BARBARAKRAKOWGALLERY.COM

By Cate McQuaid  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Art is about the unknown. So conceptual artist Robert Barry has said, and his work often embodies what cannot be pinned down. In the 1960s, Barry made art based on language and ideas, along with other founders of the conceptual art movement such as Lawrence Weiner and Joseph Kosuth. Barry was a proponent of nothingness, or non-events. He released inert gases into the atmosphere - which did nothing. For his exhibitions, galleries would simply close.

These days, he bases much of his work on text. His show at Barbara Krakow Gallery spins with open-ended words such as "strange," "everything," "again," and "illusion." The language is intimate, and not concrete. If he used the word "chair," we could point to a chair in the gallery and agree on a meaning. But "illusion"? Understandings of such words are idiosyncratic. Even "everything" carries a different feeling for anyone on a given day. Say it with a sigh. Say it with a smile.

In Barry's untitled works these words float - across three electrifying yellow canvases, or in mirrored decals over the walls and ceiling of a small room. Material matters to this artist with roots in nonmateriality: The mirrored decals reflect and energize their space, and navigate it with care - dropping out, almost respectfully, around doorframes.

Words on the yellow painting pulse in a pale violet. The first panel features text that disconnects: "unnecessary," "distant." "Together" bridges to the second panel, where the words have more traction, for good or bad: "despair," "strange." "Almost" crosses to the final panel, where "possible," "needed," and "meaning" bring us around to hope. Barry's words prod and settle in the way of poems; they leave room for us to fall into their interstices.



In this untitled work by Robert Barry at Barbara Krakow Gallery, words "float" in mirrored decals over the walls and ceiling of a small room.



Robert Barry "Untitled" 2014, Acrylic on canvas in three parts, 60 1/4 x 60 1/4" each, This installation size: 60 1/4" x 182 3/4"



Robert Barry installation view at Barbara Krakow Gallery

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