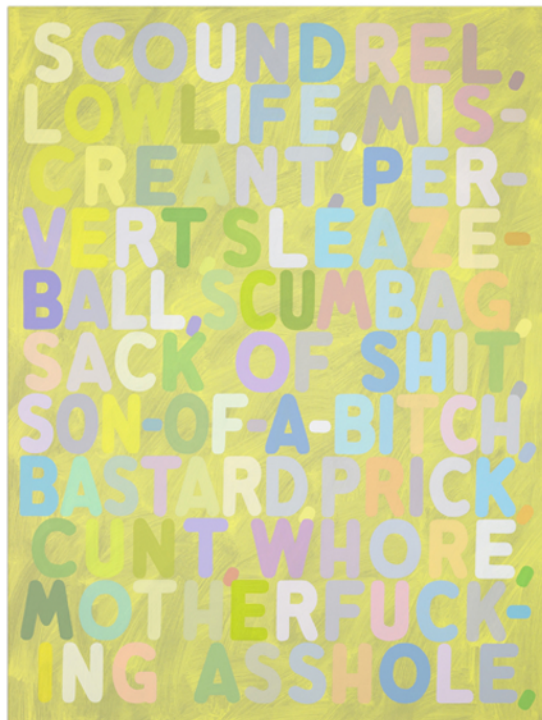


MEL BOCHNER

Barbara Krakow Gallery \* Boston, MA

September 6-October 18, 2014



left:  
SCOUNDREL, 2010  
136-color silkscreen,  
edition of 20  
60 x 45"

right:  
SILENCE, 2013  
19-color silkscreen,  
edition of 20  
60 x 45"



Mel Bochner's text-based piece *SILENCE* brings visitors into the gallery on a wave of bravado. The silkscreen is an emboldened work that shirks niceties in favor of blunt candor expounding vulgarities that at home might result in mouthful of soap.

From the offset, *SILENCE*, along with the other works on view, is anything but quiet. This survey of Bochner's editioned works from 2007 to present includes seven brand new pieces whose pigment was drying moments before installation.

There is an emphasis on color and form, ordered chaos and a playful relationship with language sparked by the introduction of slang to *Roget's Thesaurus* in 2001. Bochner, who gained attention in the 1960s for his work as a writer, curator and artist, has always had an interest in process-based works. Early on he developed a series of large-scale installations that mapped permutations and attempted to define a common language through measurements in a manner not unlike the calculated murals of Sol LeWitt. However, the presence of the process is far subtler at Barbara Krakow, seeming to lie just beneath the surface.

On one of the gallery's feature walls, Bochner's commanding silkscreen *SCOUNDREL* first appears to be a straightforward two-layer stencil, yet it is anything but simple; 136 colors are disguised within the subtleties of the composition. The text itself has a sculptural quality. Vibrant hilltops seem to rise from the canvas, but it's actually an illusion. The trompe-l'oeil was achieved by a skillful rendering of details across multiple layers, a meticulous process also responsible for the painterly background of yellow--hardly a casual swash.

In spite of the pleasant pastel palette, *SCOUNDREL*'s language increases in fervor as it trails down the canvas, a recurring crescendo that is the hallmark of Bochner's work. While in some ways, this textual de-evolution from formal to feral is notably uncouth, there is a refreshing boldness within the last line that speaks to the devil on our shoulder, conveying our innermost thoughts rarely expressed--at least not in polite company.

Elizabeth Devlin

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