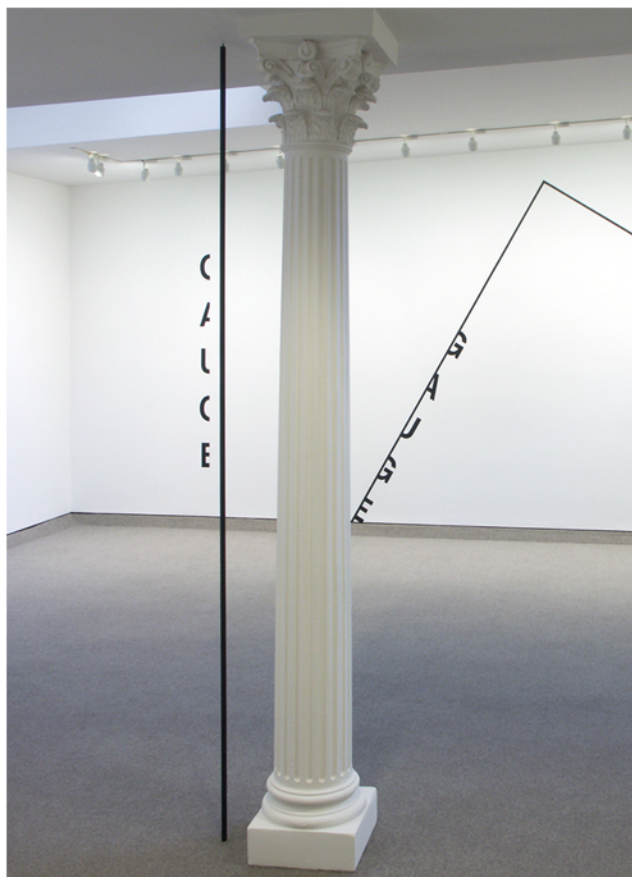


# Reading between the lines



Architect-artist offers a playful, baffling exhibit

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Peter Downsbrough

At: Barbara Krakow Gallery,  
10 Newbury St.,  
through April 14th.  
617-262-4490,  
barbarakrakowgallery.com

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By Cate McQuaid  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Peter Downsbrough's installation of lines and words at the Barbara Krakow Gallery.

The world appears askew at Barbara Krakow Gallery. The first thing you see when you go in is a black pipe hanging beside a Corinthian column that clads one of the building's support beams. They look a bit like Laurel and Hardy - the pipe slender and quiet, the column self-important and overbearing, particularly in a gallery that often shows minimalist art. They're two vertical lines, side by side. But they don't look parallel.

The piece, called "BUT" (that word has been affixed in black capital letters to the foot of the column), is part of Peter Downsbrough's playful and witty exhibit. The internationally known artist, trained as an architect,

uses lines and words to explode his viewers' assumptions about space and language.

The pipe, hanging from a cup hook on the ceiling and brushing the floor, is perfectly vertical. The column tapers upward, so its lines are not vertical. But it's part of the architecture and has the conceptual gravity of classical design, so the eye assumes that the column is straight and the pipe tilts. There's a compulsion to choose: Which line is more true? But (as the title suggests) it's more interesting to hold the question open and watch your mind work around it.

The piece "GAUGE/OT" covers two walls and features half the word "gauge" printed vertically and sliced down the

middle, as well as the mirror image of that fractured text. The other half hangs onto the inside of a diagonal square like a cartoon character frantically and fatally clinging to a falling tree. The piece ends with a long, low horizontal leading to "OT," or the word "to," reversed. Baffled? I'd say that's the artist's intent. We habitually use lines and words to measure and make sense of things. Downsbrough deliberately foils that attempt. He gives us just enough clues so we can recognize a word, or the momentum of a diagonal line's thrust, but not enough so we can fill in all the blanks. We try to gauge "GAUGE/OT," but because we can't quite pin it down, it keeps us engaged and open.

BARBARA

KRAKOW GALLERY