

Casting type to illustrate language



Kay Rosen's "Key" "Black and White and Read All Over" exhibit is at the Barbara Krakow Gallery.

KAY ROSEN

Black and White and Read All Over

At: Barbara Krakow Gallery,
10 Newbury St.,
through October 16th.
617-262-4490,
barbarakrakowgallery.com

By Cate McQuaid
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

What's in a word? Kay Rosen, artist and linguist, sees more in a word than the average reader. Her works at Barbara Krakow Gallery, mostly madewith sign paint, are all text. Content is important, but Rosen's works are not messages designed to prompt reflection on society and self, as are some pieces by contemporaries Jenny Holzer and Barbara Kruger, who also work conceptually with text.

Rather, Rosen's subject is language itself. The artist pops the top off words and peers inside, using typeface, size, space, and even letter order to turn them into something bigger and airierthan a simple carrier of meaning.

Take "Pendulum," which fills the largestwall in the gallery. Rosen spells it "PNUUMLDE." To right the order of the letters, the reader's eye must swing back and forth, first from end to end, and then within the word, reenacting the action of a pendulum. Rosen has made those outermost letters the tallest, so the shape of the word arcs, also mimicking the object it names.

"Key" begins with the word "SKELETON," in bold black on white with a sans serif font. Rosen fills in the negative space between the first E and the L with gold, defining the shape of a skeleton key within that space. Letters are such powerful signifiers, it's rare that we examine the shape of space between them and find meaning there, as well.

Rosen's works cleverly embody the meaning of the words they depict. The pieces are at first puzzling, and then funny, once you shake off the rigid meaning you bring to a word and discover Rosen's fresh, physical angle on it.

BARBARA

KRAKOW GALLERY