

Math Bass was included in the recent "With & Width" show at Chapter NY on the Lower East Side. Her work has been included in exhibitions at the Hammer Museum and Overduin & Co., where she had her first solo show in L.A. last year.

Bill Powers: You recently organized something at Chapter NY?

Math Bass: Yes, when I was asked to do this show I saw it as an opportunity to bring together my work with Lauren Davis Fisher's and Gordon Hall's. We all have these overlapping interests in the space between prop and sculpture, the performativity of that space, the activity of ambiguity. We all responded to the title of the show, to the spatial and relational parameters of this title, "With & Width."



Math Bass, *Newz!*, 2014.

COURTESY MICHAEL JON GALLERY, MIAMI AND DETROIT

BP: Are the new paintings similar to your other pictograms?

MB: They are and they aren't. I have continued to work with this vocabulary of symbols, which continues to expand and grow. I usually work in dimensions that are pretty close to square and the dimensions of these pieces refer to the scale of the body or the scale of a full-length mirror. They are hung across from each other; they mirror each other. I was imagining the sensation of being sandwiched between two seemingly identical images, roughly the size of the body, and I

was thinking about how the viewer could get triangulated in this formation. [Lauren Davis Fisher, Gordon Hall and I] wrote this “script” together and the opening sentence is, “As it multiplies it explains its difference.”

BP: Why do you put air quotes around the word script?

MB: Because I am not quite sure what it is yet, but I know that it has three voices, that it is laid out so that these voices are arranged in a left, right, and center format, and that we each read one of those positions at one point in the night. Each position and voice is unfixed. The text doesn’t directly correspond with the work but it talks around it or maybe it talks to it. We are making a stack of printouts for people to take away and read with a couple of other people if they want to.

BP: Do you think of your art as a form of ventriloquism?

MB: I think we are all invested in language not necessarily to describe the work, but to expand it.

BP: John Armleder says that art can either be seen or looked at. Does that sentiment resonate with you?

MB: I’m interested in cones and amplification. Jennifer Bolande is one of my favorite artists. She often works with cones and speakers, with devices that amplify sound and information. I like to think of ways that a small piece of information can project itself and expand outward.

BP: You use another candle icon that also resembles a cigarette. Do you smoke?

MB: I don’t smoke. I used to smoke and it is one of those things that I will never get over. I know that I will never smoke again and I know that I really love smoking. I had just quit when I started this series. I guess I was dealing with that and also I was thinking about how all of the symbols imply some kind of movement or action—the cigarette burns down, the match flares up.

BP: Tell me about your concrete sculptures.

MB: They’re casts of the interior of jeans. When I was conceiving the performance Brutal Set for the Hammer Museum in 2012, I built a group of songs that were sung by all of the people involved in the piece. The set was composed of a series of ladders and concrete pants, movable and immovable objects. I thought of the concrete pants as a physical and metaphorical inversion of the ladders.

BP: Did you write the music yourself?

MB: Yes, I write these songs. They are usually one or two sentences long, these compressed verses. I love singing with groups of people. Usually there are one or two trained singers amongst a chorus of pedestrian voices. I watched this Scott Walker documentary once and he talked about wanting his voice to just be the sound of a man singing—that really resonated with me, the desire to strip down.

BP: Jeff Koons says that in portraiture—and maybe this applies to performance—gender is the first segregator. Do you subscribe to that?

MB: I think that's true. People have anxiety about ambiguity.

BP: The performative aspect seems important to you.

MB: I think people want to have collective experiences in real time, especially in an era when we are pulled apart from one another by our devices.

BP: Do you believe in the idiom, “never paint a ladder”?

MB: I have never heard that phrase before. I say paint it.

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