

ARTFORUM

“Postscript: Writing After Conceptual Art”

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART DENVER (MCA DENVER)

1485 Delgany Street

October 12–February 3



Glenn Ligon, *Mirror Drawing #9*, 2006, oil stick and coal dust on paper, 30 x 22 1/4".

In 1966, a thirty-four-year-old Gerhard Richter was filmed in his Düsseldorf studio while working on a canvas. “To talk about paintings is not only difficult, but perhaps pointless,” he said without once looking up. “You can only express in words what words are capable of expressing, what language can communicate.” This inherent problem—how to translate potential meaning and intentionality between the modes of visual art and language—is at the heart of this group exhibition.

Loosely divided into five subsections (appropriation, constraint, redaction, transcription, and translation), the framework of the exhibition allows cocurators Nora Burnett Abrams and Andrea Andersson to pose Richter’s question over and over again, and in every possible variation; their diverse collection of over fifty artists suggests that there is no one right answer but rather an infinite series of hypotheses. Glenn Ligon uses glittering coal dust on paper to trace and erode text from James Baldwin’s essay “Stranger in the Village”; Kenneth Goldsmith, one poet among many in this show, transcribed every word he spoke in one week, wallpapering the resulting pages on all four walls of a single gallery; Seth Kim-Cohen set prosaic audio from a Christie’s auction of nineteenth-century pistols to a video of a man being savagely beaten to death in Johannesburg.

The most effective works here are those that dispense with irony and endless self-reference, instead engaging veritable desire as a tool with which to illuminate the divide between language and visual perception. Most notably, in Ricardo Cuevas's single-channel video *Fear No Thunder, Nor Lightning*, 2006, the hands of a blind person read Braille text—printed onto book pages that depict photographic landscapes—about the experience of walking through the forest. As the man's hands traced across the tactile page, I was reminded of Roland Barthes's famous words: "Language is a skin: I rub my language against the other. It is as if I had words instead of fingers, or fingers at the tip of my words. My language trembles with desire."

— *Carmen Winant*