

***ECSTATIC ALPHABETS/HEAPS OF LANGUAGE* EXPLORES THE MATERIAL QUALITIES OF LANGUAGE IN CONTEMPORARY ART ACROSS A WIDE RANGE OF MEDIA**

Exhibition to Include Works by Tauba Auerbach, Trisha Donnelly, Shannon Ebner, Paul Elliman, and Paulina Olowska, among Others

Ecstatic Alphabets/Heaps of Language

May 6–August 27, 2012

Special Exhibition Gallery, third floor

Press Preview: Tuesday, May 1, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

NEW YORK, March 29, 2012—The Museum of Modern Art presents *Ecstatic Alphabets/Heaps of Language*, an exhibition that looks at some of the ways contemporary artists have experimented with language, freeing it from the page and from its communicative and descriptive duties. The exhibition is on view from May 6 to August 27, 2012. Works by 12 contemporary artists and artists' groups are presented in juxtaposition with works by key 20th-century artists, all of which concentrate on the material qualities of language—visual, aural, and beyond. The exhibition includes painting, sculpture, film, video, drawing, prints, and audio. The title is taken from two touchstone objects in the exhibition, one historical, the other contemporary: Robert Smithson's seminal illustration of words as material, *A Heap of Language* (1966), and Shannon Ebner's video *The Ecstatic Alphabet* (2011), which animates, atomizes, and presents language as a time-based experience. *Ecstatic Alphabets/Heaps of Language* is organized by Laura Hoptman, Curator, with Eleonore Hugendubel, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art.

The contemporary works featured in this exhibition belong to a distinguished history of poem/objects and concrete language experiments dating to the beginnings of modernism, and include both Futurist and Dada objects as well as Neo-Dada experiments of the late 1950s, and works that sprang from international literary movements like concrete and sound poetry in Europe, Latin America, and the United States. This history is presented in the form of a timeline of objects in many mediums that tell a story of concrete language in visual art, including Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's iconic *Vive la France* drawing from 1914; Marcel Duchamp's disc poems for his film *Anemic Cinema* (1926); *Noigandres* (1952–58), the publication by Augusto and Haroldo de Campos that introduced the concept of concrete poetry to a wider public; Robert Smithson's *A Heap of Language* (1966); and a re-creation of poet and performer John Giorno's *Dial-A-Poem* (1969–), an interactive telephonic work exhibited in MoMA's legendary *Information* exhibition (1970). *Dial-A-Poem*, which features poems by poets, artists, and musicians like John Ashbery,

Joe Brainard, William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, Philip Glass, and Laurie Anderson, among many others, allows visitors to access poems inside the exhibition space, for free via telephone by dialing the following local New York phone number (347) 763-8001 (active from May 1 until the exhibition closes on August 27, 2012) and through MoMA.org.

Although they are similar in inspiration, the contemporary works in *Ecstatic Alphabets/Heaps of Language* represent a radical updating of the concrete language experiments of the 20th century. Moving freely among disciplines, the contemporary artists in this exhibition function simultaneously as poets, writers, performers, and graphic designers, producing hybrid works of art in which the letter, the word, and the phrase are transcribed into sounds, symbols, pictures, or patterns, scrambled, negated, and most importantly, freed from the page and, in some cases, the duties of communication altogether.

In the spirit of earlier concrete language experiments, all of the recent works in the exhibition have an abiding connection to poetry, which runs like a subtheme through the show, adding the ecstatic element to each work. The contemporary section of the show includes works by Ei Arakawa/Nikolas Gambaroff, Tauba Auerbach, Dexter Sinister (David Reinfurt and Stuart Bailey), Trisha Donnelly, Shannon Ebner, Paul Elliman, Experimental Jetset, Sharon Hayes, Karl Holmqvist, Paulina Olowska, Adam Pendleton, and Nora Schultz. Among the notable installations included in this portion of the exhibition is Paul Elliman's *Found Fount* (1989–present), an ongoing collection of more than 10,000 manmade found objects (in the words of the artist, “a system to describe the world using the world itself”), which together create a usable font in which no character is used more than once. A legendary project that has been influential to artists and graphic designers alike, it is exhibited here for the first time. Other works include Auerbach's *RGB Colorspace Atlas* (2011), a series of three computer-generated books, which offer a vibrant physicalization of the color spectrum in book form; and Arakawa and Gambaroff's *Two-Alphabet Monograms* (2011), a set of 325 unique canvas flags that contain all combinations of two-letter monograms, which is combined with a single-channel audio recording of the phonemes being pronounced.

SPONSORSHIP:

The exhibition is made possible by Hanjin Shipping.

Major support is provided by Jerry I. Speyer and Katherine G. Farley and by MoMA's Wallis Annenberg Fund for Innovation in Contemporary Art through the Annenberg Foundation.

Additional funding is provided by The Junior Associates of The Museum of Modern Art.

RELATED PROGRAM:

Words in the World

April 16—May 12, 2012

Various locations around the Museum

In conjunction with *Ecstatic Alphabets/Heaps of Language*, MoMA hosts ***Words in the World***, a series of performances and programs that examine the different facets of language and the

relationship to performance. *Words in the World* looks at the intertwining of political, poetic, and linguistic structures through theatrical and staged events, dialogues and forms of public address, and experimental actions. Utilizing different presentation formats, the program takes place in various locations in the Museum from April 16 to May 12, 2012. The performance series is organized by Sabine Breitwieser, Chief Curator, and Ana Janevski, Associate Curator, Department of Media and Performance Art.

Words in the World explores performative aspects of language as a means of perpetuating the flow and movement of thoughts and as a tool for political activism. The series further reveals the life of words, signs, and numbers when liberated from their conventional forms and meanings.

The Performance Program is made possible by MoMA's Wallis Annenberg Fund for Innovation in Contemporary Art through the Annenberg Foundation.

PUBLICATION:

Ecstatic Alphabets/Heaps of Language is accompanied by a publication designed and produced by Dexter Sinister that includes text by Ms. Hoptman, reproductions of works in the exhibition, and an exhibition checklist. The publication also exists as an issue of the composite printed and electronic publication *Bulletins of the Serving Library*, a continuing series published twice-yearly by Dexter Sinister. The book is published by Dexter Sinister in the United States and by Sternberg Press in Europe (with distribution by Motto). It will be available at the MoMA stores and online at The Serving Library. This volume comprises Dexter Sinister's contribution to the exhibition.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS:

Artist Paul Elliman

Wednesday, May 9, 2012, 6:00 p.m., The Celeste Bartos Theater

Paul Elliman, a London-based artist featured in *Ecstatic Alphabets/Heaps of Language*, will discuss his work and how it relates to the material qualities of language. Elliman's work has engaged the human voice in many of its social and technological guises, as well as imitating other languages and sounds of the city. For the New York performance biennial Performa 09, he created Sirens Taken for Wonders, a project involving a live radio panel discussion on the coded language of emergency-vehicle sirens, along with several guided siren-walks through the city. In 2010 he contributed a series of whistled versions of birdsong transcriptions by Olivier Messiaen for the show *We Were Exuberant and Still Had Hope*, at Marres Centre for Contemporary Art, Maastricht.

Artist Shannon Ebner in conversation with writer Angie Keefer

Wednesday, June 20, 2012, 6:00 p.m., The Celeste Bartos Theater

Artist Shannon Ebner, whose work is on view in *Ecstatic Alphabets/Heaps of Language*, will be in conversation with writer Angie Keefer. Ebner was born in 1971 in Englewood, New Jersey. She received her BA from Bard College and her MFA in photography from Yale University School of Art. Selected group exhibitions include the 54th International Venice Biennale (2011); Sixth Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2010); Les Recontres d'Arles 2010/41st Edition, Arles, France (2010); 2008 Whitney Biennial, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2008); and *Learn to Read*, Tate Modern, London (2007). Solo projects have been exhibited at the Hammer Museum (2011) and PS1 MoMA (2007). Ebner currently lives and works in Los Angeles, California. Angie Keefer was born in Alabama in 1977. She graduated from Yale University in 1999. In 2010, she wrote an eight-part text on octopuses and post-symbolic communication for a project by Dexter Sinister and Shannon Ebner called *An Octopus in Plan View*. In 2011 she co-founded *The Serving Library* with Stuart Bailey and David Reinfurt.

Tickets (\$10; members \$8; students, seniors, and staff of other museums \$5) can be purchased at the lobby information desk, the film desk, or online at www.moma.org/thinkmodern.

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For downloadable high-resolution images, register at MoMA.org/press.

Public Information:

The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019, (212) 708-9400, MoMA.org

Hours: Wednesday through Monday, 10:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m. Friday, 10:30 a.m.–8:00 p.m. Closed Tuesday

Museum Admission: \$25 adults; \$18 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$14 full-time students with current I.D. Free, members and children 16 and under. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs). **MoMA.org:** \$22.50 adults; \$16 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$12 full-time students with current I.D. *No service charge for tickets ordered on MoMA.org. Tickets purchased online may be printed out and presented at the Museum without waiting in line.* (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs).

Film Admission: \$12 adults; \$10 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$8 full-time students with current I.D. (for admittance to film programs only)

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