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ART

“PANGRAMMAR”

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Twenty-six letter-based art works spell out the famous pangram “The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.” Mel Bochner’s small painting of a drippy white “Z” nestles next to a poster of a lowercase “A” by his onetime professor Jack Stauffacher; a fine cyanotype print by Robin Cameron conjoins impressions of gears and blocks into an ornery “Q.” (The “P” and “S” of “jumps” are cleverly provided by Elaine Lustig Cohen’s 1966 cover design for the now-iconic show “Primary Structures.”) Punctuating the end of the sentence is a footnote of sorts, a projected animation of a gyrating star by the publishing collective Dexter Sinister. Through Nov. 1.

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Robin Cameron's 'Who You' Opens at Room East Gallery

By Kristiano Ang

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Artist Robin Cameron at her workspace in New York. *Andrew Hinderaker for The Wall Street Journal*

When the Canadian artist Robin Cameron was crossing the border last spring, she had difficulty convincing an immigration official that she could survive in New York on the relatively low wages she earned as an art director for a now-defunct magazine.

"It was hard to explain what I did to this woman, who had a very different view of what was a successful life, when I always thought I had a great one," she said.

That moment of having to define herself led to "Who You, I See," Ms. Cameron's collection of vignettes about her friends' personalities. The book is part of a series of works she created for "Who You," a solo exhibition that opens at the Lower East Side gallery Room East on Sunday.

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Ms. Cameron, 33 years old, traces the show's focus to her long-standing interest in inner lives—neuroses and all. One of the works is "Foggy Self III," a roughly 150-pound, wall-mounted mirror glazed over with white etching.



'Ear Face,' a brass-and-marble sculpture by Ms. Cameron. *Andrew Hinderaker for The Wall Street Journal*

"Every day you look into the mirror, but you are never fully able to get a grasp of what people think of you," she said. "The etching shields your own image of yourself."

The roots, however, are more plebeian: It was inspired by a whiting chemical Ms. Cameron used to cover the windows of her former Morningside Heights studio, which overlooked a construction pit.

She moved to New York in 2005 to work as a graphic designer. Her self-published books, which contain a mix of text and photography, have been collected at the Museum of Modern Art's library and shown at the New Museum.

Cameron has since expanded the range of materials she uses. Like "Foggy Self," many of them reveal clever twists on otherwise quotidian objects, such as brass sculptures and works on paper as well as a slideshow of iceberg photos, inspired by a quote frequently misattributed to Sigmund Freud that "the mind is like an iceberg." They are priced at upwards of \$3,000.

Perhaps the most labor-intensive piece is a set of 17 posters that were treated with chine-collé, a process whereby Japanese paper is pressed onto a rougher layer. Sixteen of the posters describe a personality

derived from the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator test, while the 17th features a key linking the results to different personality types.



A photogram by Ms. Cameron that is included in her book 'Who You, I See.' Robin Cameron

"It's almost a cross between astrology and psychology," said Ms. Cameron.

Steve Pulimood, Room East's director, described her as an artist interested in "the ordinariness of life."

"She seizes upon mundane details to add colors and character," he said, noting the characters in Ms. Cameron's book and how "Foggy Self" was sparked by the need to hide an eyesore. "A lot of her work deals with a kind of imperfection, and the idea of productive failure manifests itself in everything she does."

ARTFORUM

Robin Cameron

LEFEBVRE & FILS

24 rue du Bac

November 23–January 31

“*Une Seconde Vie*” (A Second Life), Robin Cameron’s debut European solo exhibition, is an irreverent romp in a ceramics- focused Parisian gallery founded in 1880. Nineteen sculptures have been made with discarded pottery that Cameron had refired. Held together with porcelain, these works form anatomical suggestions of hands, feet, limbs, jawbones, craniums, and a ribcage. Supported by steel rods on pine bases, they are shape- shifters of interiorities, and their structural balance buoys their precariousness. As in *kintsugi*, the Japanese art of mending broken pottery with lacquer and gold, failure serves as a generator of these rough-hewn marvels. Displayed on glass-topped tables, as well as inside a ceramic-tiled cabinet, the shards of motley glazes are punctuated with occasional flashes of gold. Plastic lemons and oranges are arrayed around the sculptures to diffuse the preciousness of handiwork.



On one wall, a large chine-collé abstraction (*Movement I*, 2012) pays deft homage to the *gouaches découpés* of Henri Matisse, whose second burst of creativity after his diagnosis of cancer inspired the exhibition title. Completing the *mise-en-scène* is a towering floral arrangement (*Vayse*, 2013), perhaps evoking the Baudelairean elegy in *Les Fleurs du mal* in which “the flowers evaporate like an incense urn.” Modernism is further reassessed in the form of a buttoned-down shirt printed with an oil-stick drawing, as part of Cameron’s capsule collection for French men’s clothing line-book

publisher Études. Inouciantly hung on a bathroom door, it attests to the suppleness of Cameron’s practice.

In the dim cellar, one encounters a lone ceramic sculpture (*The Gold Debacle*, 2013). It is frontally gilded, and Cameron has likened it to the golden idol in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, even as it conjures up the spirits of James Lee Byars. Nearby, *Still Life I*, 2011, made with William Santen, is one of three 16-mm films on view; in one sequence it shows the artist’s hands arranging mundane objects on a metal stool: envelope, semicircular piece of wood, pineapple top, dollar bill, plastic comb, deck of cards, key, lightbulb, and chess piece. Stuart Sherman-esque but with the body out of sight, the films are void of any spectacular denouement. The matter-of-factness is evidence that Cameron is interested not in magic but—as in her sculptures—in the trust of objects, and in physicalizing the seductive power of material fact.

— Jo-ey Tang

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Sebastian Black and Robin Cameron: _____
Bodega, Philadelphia

A favorite Ed Ruscha painting of mine, from 1977, depicts a small fire burning in a red-brick fireplace with a plain wooden mantel, rendered obliquely in the single-point perspective typical of his famous Standard Gas Stations and set against an expansive field of earthy browns. Unlike many of the artist's works, this one lacks a textual element in the composition, and the painting's title—*No End To The Things Made Out of Human Talk*—precludes the need for words. With its warmth providing a gathering place, the fireplace symbolizes sociability in all its forms. Spinning a yarn, chewing the fat, or spilling the beans: what draws people together, Ruscha tells us, is a sustained, even universal engagement with conversation.

Two New York-based artists, Sebastian Black and Robin Cameron, seized upon that subject—conversation—for their joint exhibition titled _____ at Bodega in Philadelphia [April 5–May 19, 2013]. The gallery invited Cameron to do a show, who in turn asked Black to join her. Their “untitled” project—whose title is 10 underscores followed by a period—comprised two parts: assorted artworks made individually and collaboratively for the physical space, and an e-mail exchange between the artists in the months leading up to the exhibition, published as an unpaginated, saddle-stitched booklet (all works 2013). Black and Cameron are conversant in diverse media: he paints, writes, and runs an exhibition space in Brooklyn called Malraux's Place, among other things; she produces artist books, ceramic sculpture, drawing, photography, video, and other works. The discursive turn in contemporary art situates their work in good company: the spoken dialogues of Tino Sehgal and Liam Gillick, as well as the object-focused inquiries of Ryan Gander and Benoît Maire.

The booklet chronicles the evolution of the exhibition, informs the works in the gallery (more on them later), and presents the artists as equal partners. Black and Cameron recognize the eventual circulation of their correspondence and could thus be described as “performing language.” The published “quasi-philosophical speculation,” as Cameron calls it, meanders appreciably but contemplates purposefully many trivial but fascinating instances of human interaction, such as miscommunication through translation and humor-inflected linguistic jolts. “Have you ever tried to walk down the street and directly look everyone in the eye?” Cameron wonders at one point. “There's an aggressive body language to that.” Slightly imperfect grammar and the occasional typo appear, left uncorrected by a light editorial hand, and the unique characteristics of writing via e-mail come forward, such as itemizing a laundry list of Wikipedia links and hitting “send” instead of “save.” As the weeks go by, the artists deliberate over the exhibition's title, floating numerous potential names—including *Communiqué*, *Laymen's Terms for the Cayman Islands*, and, my favorite, *Shower of Babel*—without finding the perfect one. A Bodega staffer steps in eventually to advocate *Words for Art*, and by March 21 Black and Cameron settle on the remarkably perfect _____.

In the booklet the artists discuss the particular works for Bodega only infre-

quently; the real conversations about them, it turns out, took place in person, on the phone, and through other, unprinted e-mails. “I think maybe the objects,” Cameron muses, “are stand-ins for other larger conversations.” The installation in the gallery's three rooms offered conceptually based works that, if I read them correctly, explored obstructed or dissected communication. The two artists constructed the largest piece, *Tall Table and Vayse*, from ordinary plywood and two-by-fours; the simple, wobbly table measured more than 6 feet high and 27 feet long and extended through a doorway. At its midpoint rested a craggy ceramic vase with a decomposing arrangement of flowers, foliage, and twigs, blocking the sight lines of all who might hoist themselves onto the two high-seated chairs at the ends of the table. Here the tone and diction of such imaginary sitters would eclipse facial expressions and body language.

Two works by Cameron isolated individual graphemes. In *Ere hypocrisies or poses are in, my hymn I erase. So prose I, sir, copy here*, a continuous slide show spelled out that nonsensical palindrome letter by letter. In *Alphabet*, 16 characters constructed out of small geometric pieces of brass cut from thin sheets and tubes appear evenly spaced along one wall. Interestingly, she chose to exhibit less-frequently occurring letters, such as F, J, K, Q, V, W, X, and Z, ones that would score high in Scrabble.

Black addresses abstraction, erasure, and spatial dynamics in painting and collage. For *New Yorker Drawing (Hats)* and *New Yorker Drawing (Two Left Feet)*, he scrubbed the ink surrounding tiny photographic reproductions clipped from recent issues of the cultured magazine—among them a beret, an engineer's cap, and a fedora in the former work, and a dapper collared shirt, colorful paisley bow tie, and loafer in the latter—and scattered the snippets on a board, which was then matted and framed. These images underpin the notion that both clothing and reading material often conspicuously indicate a certain kind of status.

Black's painting *Green Top* is composed of arbitrary shapes and lines and casual splotches of mostly iridescent paint. He adds the letters T, O, and P across the upper part of the canvas, which might explain the work's proper orientation if not for the same three letters appearing upside down, with tighter kerning, along the bottom center. A similar painting, *Brown Top (Malraux's Place)*—a sloppy mess of chocolate, coffee, and nut browns onto which he centers a printout of the press release for a Fia Backström exhibition called *Post-Sensitive Rhetorics*—hung on the wall in a cramped loft area whose floor was littered with bright-orange foam earplugs.

Through the gallery and the booklet, Black and Cameron presented themselves as educated, clever, and articulate. Their writing rarely reveals biographical details and instead conveys a general sense of their personalities, perhaps indicative of relationships, in the art world and elsewhere, which are neither strictly personal nor entirely professional. Understood in a certain way, their artworks recognize how disruptions, slowdowns, and fracturing can snarl both written language and visual communication, while at the same time leaving open a buoyant opportunity for conversation to take interesting, pleasurable, unexpected directions.

—Christopher Howard

ABOVE, LEFT: Sebastian Black, *Green Top*, 2013, oil on linen; RIGHT: [left] Sebastian Black and Robin Cameron, *Tall Table and Vayse*, 2013, wood, ceramic, and flower arrangement; [right] Robin Cameron, *Alphabet*, 2013, brass [courtesy of the artists and Bodega, Philadelphia]

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