

The exhibition of works on paper by Romany Eveleigh approaches painting and drawing as forms of written expression. Approximating the visual landscape of the 'page', the works make use of techniques and materials borrowed from the world of writing, printing and mechanical reproduction. *Pages*, along with *Triptych*, and *p says p*, all works on paper glued to canvas, and *Manifesto* a large-scale paper collage take form through drawing and repetitive, etching-like marks, using ink, newsprint, blueprints and correcting pencils.

Neither purely painting, nor drawing, the works on canvas hover between these forms. Paint and ink on paper provide the ground for the "text": hundreds of circle-like marks etched into the amalgamated ground. But these are not typographic signs and this 'writing' does not produce an intelligible message. Rather, the abstraction of typographical figures and their formation into columns or blocks merely conjures the idea of writing and the blank spaces that surround them suggest margins of a page. The directionality of the painted marks is significant here. Undoubtedly the process of inscription begins at the upper most part of the frame and moves to the bottom: the white margins at the top point to the origin of the work and also propose that we read these paintings as forms of speech, written expressions.

In some instances the 'words' stream down the page. In others the blocks of text are gridded and seem more architectural. The works evoke other forms of writing, ancient modes like scrolls, manuscripts, and notebook entries and, of course, more recent experiments with the material aspects of language—concrete poetry. In this instance, *Pages 4* (1973) reminds us of Apollinaire's "*calligramme*", *Il Pleut*, but where the poet's streamed words render the actions of the natural world, Eveleigh's pictures describe the world of ideas as rivers of abstract signs. The rows of figures in *p equals p* and *Triptych* suggest

ancient tabulations and calculations, and though the seemingly infinite repetition of the circular marks in all these works also resembles computer code, their Encaustic-like surface brings us back to the ancient world. The term Encaustic is derived from the Greek word *enkaien*, which means to burn into, and the technique goes back 3000 years to Egypt and the beginnings of early writing systems.

If these etched works refer to primitive modes of written expression, they also summon to mind a primordial stage in the process of thought. Though the gesturing of Eveleigh's work can be likened to language, its countenance is intensely visceral and corporeal—the words of a body as much as a mind. Row upon row of imperfect little circular marks are the outcome of an apparent outpouring or obsessive purging of ideation more than refined fully formulated thought. This is not a controlled and deliberate construction of an image or text but an intense and concentrated iteration...but of what?

In a poetic reflection on these tablet-like page works, the philosopher, Giorgio Agamben suggested that the illegibility of the 'writing' might correspond to the inherent violence of thought. In his estimation, these are "pages upon which potentiality has surpassed actuality, expectation has devoured its object, inspiration has superseded the work." Agamben also noted the unyielding fixity of these pages; the sense given here that potentiality inexorably protracts and even stays the actualization of inspiration. "Pages, which you cannot turn...(t)he verso of painting, that face or side which we never see. Pages: unutterable, forever open, exposed to our glance. For so long, that you can no longer remember how long." ¹

Eveleigh's work *Manifesto* represents a proclamation and enacts a declaration of space through its mere size and presence. The largest work in this exhibition, this collage commands the space of an entire wall

and the room it occupies. It also draws us in by the curious division of its inner space -- blank pages as well 'occupied' pages arranged in a large grid. *Manifesto* exists in both open and closed forms. In storage, closed, it assumes the form of a book. In public, placed in a gallery space and fixed to the wall it opens to display the book's sections. The open presentation also alludes to a folded page or a broadsheet with large margins that frame and unites the various components of a grid.

The pages of *Manifesto* demonstrate the same approach to sign making as we have seen in the other works in this exhibition with some important differences. First and foremost, these signs are drawn and (re) produced on blueprint paper. The texture of the "writing" is different too. Arranged in the center of a large grid, the density and directionality of the signs shift to form a quality that reminds us more of ancient woven materials than typographic signs. In addition, a more casual definition of the "blocks of text" point to a different method of inscription, one that corresponds to the overlaying, overlapping paper collage that lays *Manifesto's* ground.

More significantly, another gesture is added. A red elliptical circle, generously used, stands out, almost floating on top of the fine weave of typographical texture and relates iconographically to an editorial correction. Marking the text, Eveleigh indicates passages to be reworked or corrected. We can also read these signs as signs of approval, underlining those passages of particular interest. In total opposition to the cramped and intense, but delicate drawings on the paper surface, these marks add a sense of both liberation and finality.

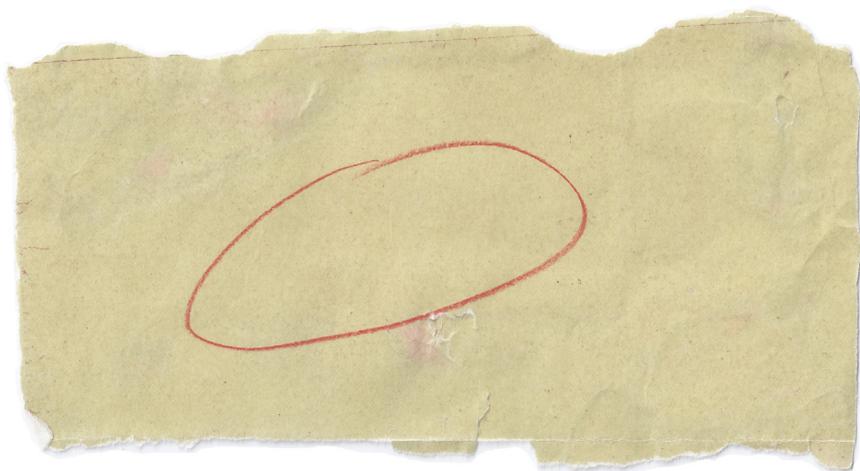
The process used to make the drawings is of special interest. Eveleigh produced a blueprint from an original drawing, which was then glued to the surface of another, thicker paper for support. The blueprint, an almost forgotten, highly light-sensitive and inexpensive form of multiplying architectural renderings disappears over time. The paper will yellow much more rapidly than its support, and the printing will eventually fade completely, with the exception of the red circles that will remain as proud reminders of once having spoken out.

Once again we are reminded of being left with the remains of the fits and starts of creation, without ever really grasping the true meaning of what is being said or thought. The marks mark intention over and over again, the infinite potentiality of language, the desire not the actualization of intervention in time and space. It is not our imagination that is being challenged, but rather our willingness to forgo understanding and put our trust in the simplicity of the artistic gesture as such. Indeed, the proclamation will be empty, just as the words are absent now, the thoughts not rendered, the message opaque.

Angela Grauerholz
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[1] Giorgio Agamben, "Pages,"
Romany Eveleigh: *Opere 1986 -1986*,
Rome: Guido Novi, 1986

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