

TOTAH

Mel Bochner
ALL SALES FINAL!
April 25th – June 15th, 2024

TOTAH presents *ALL SALES FINAL!*, an exhibition of paintings by Mel Bochner opening April 25th and on view through June 15th. This is Bochner's second solo exhibition with the gallery.

Across the works included, the presence of the artist's hand and the enormity of the brushstrokes he deals out say less about his own subjectivity, and more about the way language, construed as a gloss of graduated meanings, muddles the world around us while concealing its own history. Works from a series executed between 2012 and 2014 use acrylics as well as enamel, a material which is generally reserved for signage. These paintings tacitly point out how even in something as common as signage, language is rarely transparent.

In one work on paper, *Fucked Up*, the dirge-like stream-of-consciousness story detailed across a sequence of gutter expletives, unpacks like a diagram of one's own inner monologue. The salient contours that enclose each letter makes every word and broken phrase leap from the paper, while also highlighting the essential hollowness of language as a reliable map for navigating reality. In a similar vein, the enamel on canvas work *Easy*, with its litany of assurances – "easy / no sweat / nothing to it / no problem" graphically voices an enervated sensation of malaise.

Bochner's recent work, more hybrid pieces composed of cut out foam letters mounted onto canvas, are both sculptural and painterly, humorous and serious. Elementary phrases of an almost apologetic nature take on a highly particularized nuance of meaning through his treatment of color—sometimes dripping, sometimes painting over a word—which is no less ambiguous for all these techniques. In *I Forget What I Forgot*, for instance, the word "what" is all but whited-out, a kind of aphasia shading into unconsciousness. More overtly comedic, *Don't Make Me Laugh* is hard not to laugh at, comprising an assortment of visual jokes and clichés, alluding to the current state of painting along with the history which gave rise to it.

While Bochner's works might suggest that language embraces everything, both material and psychological, his pointed use of humor and sarcasm makes light of language's ubiquitous authority. His phrases are rarely, if ever, indicative statements that can be reduced to logical forms. Rather they always have an emotional charge—a kind of slangy, worn-smooth quality. Fixating on everyday language, he serves up a naked lunch that preternaturally restates what we think we say when we think we are saying something true about reality. Truncated and magnified, we discover in Bochner's words references that ordinary language habitually overlooks: the world's tragedies, monotonies, its daily web of complicities and complications.

Mel Bochner (b. 1940, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) is considered a pioneer of the Post-Minimal and Conceptual art movements. Bochner is a master colorist and is best known for his exploration of connections between language, perception and meaning. He was the subject of a retrospective at the Art Institute of Chicago in 2022, drawing from the museum's significant collection of Bochner pieces, and included in *The Double: Identity and Difference in Art Since 1900* curated by James Meyer at the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., 2023. His works can be found in permanent collections around the world, including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) and the MOCA in Los Angeles, California, the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris, The Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London U.K., the Tate Modern, London, The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden and the Smithsonian Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C.; the Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art and the MoMA, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.

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