

PETER DOWNSBROUGH

Notations

22.03.19 > 24.05.19

Opening: 22.03.19 at 7 PM

Peter Downsbrough's (1940, New Brunswick, New Jersey / US) body of work distinguishes itself by a rigorous, sparse if not strictly limited use of primary geometrical forms as lines, squares and grids, isolated punctuation marks (dots, open and closed brackets) and words such as adverbs (here, there), conjunctions (and) or prepositions (as, to), fragments of maps and floor plans, that all interact in various constellations and media (installations, drawings, collages, post cards, photographs, sculptures, and notably artists' books, videos, music and sound pieces). Frequently associated with contemporaries of the 1970s conceptual art movement as Robert Barry, Sol LeWitt or Lawrence Weiner, it is Downsbrough's 4th solo exhibition at àngels barcelona after 2008 (with a room piece and wall pieces), 2011 (with drawings and wall pieces) and 2015 (with photographs).

One of the most significant characteristics in Downsbrough's artistic practice that spans almost almost six decades –he had his first solo exhibition in 1961 at Area, New York City– is his decisive, and above all precise, PACE: rather slow and steady, but continuously evolving. At times, his works take other, yet subtle directions to finally return, somehow 'mutated', to its origin form and idea. Being of such persistence, Downsbrough's work is also demanding. Not only that it requests from the viewer a certain patience –or better said long term engagement– to reveal and disseminate its very nature, it also seizes a place, occupies a room by offering an 'alternative' spatiality.

An excellent example for that is what has become the artist's signature work, the so-called '*Two Lines*'. This particular work coincides with Peter Downsbrough's publishing activity that began in the early 1970s, and that would become pivotal in his further career, given the 116 titles released to date (hundred of them shown in Barcelona at Fabra I Coats in 2013). After his first two books *Notes on Location* and *Notes on Location II* (1972, resp. 1973) he successively released several books that were entirely based to that 'signature': *Two Lines, Six Sections* (1973), *Two Lines, Five Sections* (1974 and 1975), *Two Lines, Two Lines* (1976) as well as books in which he combined the *Two Lines* with words in *In Front and In/Out* (1975, resp. 1976), or with photographs in *Beside* (1976), and the on-going series *A Place* (since 1977).

Two Lines is a formal arrangement of two vertical lines, 0,5 cm apart from each other and 6.3 cm long lines, for which the artist has made originally two rubber stamps: one of two parallel lines, one of a single line. These lines, simple but compelling, occupy an entire page and most important, provide structure and define space. Coincided with the sculptural thesis, the so-called *Two Pipes*, the lines changed over time their size and proportion and appeared as well on postcards and together with other elements (grids, words, photographs and films). In short: *Two Lines* embody as a metaphysical concept the very essence of Downsbrough's oeuvre, forming its linear and persistent pace.

Notably, the invitation card of àngels barcelona depicts *Two Lines*. Again, the lines are parallel, but instead equal in length, they measure 75 and 12 mm and it will be for the very first time that the artist adapted them on an announcement in this particular constellation / composition. As such, they suggest a perspective, in my view a 'wall' seen from a side with an imaginary vanishing point. That very same work is installed too on the gallery's front window, joined by the word BUT, set in Helvetica adhesive letters. *BUT [Two Lines]* (2019) alludes somehow an altered, yet expanded reality: an imagined perspective and a real one that continues inside the gallery. The room piece (2019) that occupies the entire front space consists of the words PLACE, HERE, AND, AS, 2A, THERE which are placed on the bottom edge of three walls and the floor, completed with three black aluminium pipes suspended from the ceiling. A forth diagonal line on the floor separates 'here' from 'there' and 'place' from the viewers' position, and directs her/him gently to the back space too. In contrast, this second room appears less charged and at first sight rather empty with some animated sequences on monitors from the series *Word Strings* (2013, ongoing), and the sound piece *The List* (2019, adapted since 2011).

Word Strings is a rarely exhibited series of computer generated work, showing an interplay of words –slanted, oblique, repeated, in motion, mirrored, cut up, multiplied–, in combination with some punctuation marks, lines that divide the screen, or two views of a city taken from an apartment and a car. In black and white, however, suddenly appear some other colours too, if only for a second (red and grey). In comparison, the ephemeral sound piece, *The List* (2019, updated since 2011) might be exhaustive, given that all 122 titles Downsbrough has ever used for his books and pamphlets are recited in alphabetical order. Only audible, this particular work nails what I consider myself the profound essence in the artists' work: a poetic dimension superimposed in space. Architecture starts to resonate, meaning gets condensed, space becomes somehow fluid. The wall piece, the room piece, the animated piece and the sound piece reveal all together an entire, although subjective universe, in which the viewer literally has to dive in. What he/she will discover is the quintessence of Peter Downsbrough's work: the profoundness of a basic vocabulary.

- Moritz Küng -

Works in the exhibitionBUT, 2019

Wall piece

Tape and adhesive letters

PLACE, HERE / AND, AS, 2A, THERE, 2019

Room piece

Aluminium pipes (painted black), tape and adhesive letters

Word String # 9, 2013

Digital animation

46 sec., Ed 3, + 1 A.P.

Word String # 15, 2013

Digital animation

40 sec., Ed 3, + 1 A.P.

Word String # 21, 2013

Digital animation

57 sec., Ed 3, + 1 A.P.

The List, 2019 (adapted since 2011)

Audio-piece

ea. 10 min., tripod, speaker, mp3 player, Ed 3, + 2 A.P.

Text: Peter Downsbrough (book titles)

Concept: Moritz Küng

Voice: Hiuwai Chu

Recording: Lúa Coderch

Thanks to Macba, Barcelona, who provided the recording logistics

BIO

Peter Downsbrough (1940, New Brunswick, NYC. Lives and works in Brussels). A versatile artist, he has worked with multiple mediums over the course of his career. After initially studying architecture, he began to produce sculptural works, works on paper, photographs, films, and books. Downsbrough maintains a complex relationship with architecture and typography, while also drawing on the achievements of the early avant-garde (Bauhaus, De Stijl) and Minimal Art. In terms of form, his is highly rigorous and exhibits a powerful geometric sense, restricting itself primarily to the use of line, plane, negative space (cutting away), and delimitation. At the core of his oeuvre we find an investigation of place and the viewer's relationship to architectural surroundings. This investigation of spatial rhythms and linear geometry also appears prominently in his black and white photographs of urban cityscapes.

Downsbrough's work has been exhibited extensively, at venues including the Vienna Secession, the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels (solo), MRAC, Sérignan (solo), the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, the Musée d'art moderne et contemporain, Geneva (solo), the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (solo), BALTIC, Gateshead, Centre Pompidou, Paris, Fabra & Coats, Barcelona (solo), and many more. His work is part of collections such as: MOMA, New York, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, Mamco, Geneva, MACBA, Barcelona, National Gallery, Ottawa amongst others. He has produced site-specific projects for public spaces in cities such as Lyon, Liège, Nimes, New York, Lodz or Warsaw.

Upcoming exhibition & fairs:

ARCOlisboa – Daniel G Andújar - 16 > 19.05.19

Ania Soliman (solo show) - 28.05.19 - 19 h.

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