

## MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

PRESS RELEASE Art |41| Basel - Art Statements (Hall 1.0 / S12)

### SAM LEWITT

#### *Paper Citizens*

Miguel Abreu Gallery is pleased to present Sam Lewitt's Paper Citizens for Art Statements at Art|41|Basel. This work results from Lewitt's ongoing focus on the use of written language in art and its bond to technologies of production and display. Utilizing various systems of writing in a wide range of media, his work is populated by drawings, photographs, books, newspapers, posters and coins. In his self-questioning constellations of images and texts, Lewitt constructs allegorical records of literacy by throwing a sideways light on material supports for the imaging of language.

For Art Statements, Lewitt turns to the archaic typographer's tools employed in the early days of printing. He deploys an assortment of this equipment assembled from a defunct printing house in New York, photographically magnifying its signs of past use and digitally processing each object that he acquired. Lewitt uses this set of elements as an artificially closed combinatorial system that he variously reconstructs. Blown-up to a bodily scale and floating in frames, these images suggest a confrontation between a chaotic yet structured order of linear, alphabetic writing and the physical space inhabited by viewers.

The fragmented utterances spelled out in these photos circulate motifs derived from the two sides of a factitious dust jacket. Floating on the wall, the jacket features reproductions of a Latin grammar book for English speakers, and an advertisement for a "Citizen" wristwatch. Like the prepared content for pages of an unprinted book, the distorted texts in Lewitt's photographs oscillate between declarative statements and impoverished examples of English grammar. The texts' lack of a clearly defined subject collapse grammatical consistency into disjointed patterns of linguistic and optical material, leaving open a space for viewers to decide in what capacity they are addressed. Taken on one level, these works might be read as specular images whose capacity for reflection is in the process of imploding. On another level, their fractured English grammar perhaps suggest that the *lingua franca* of English might be as decadent as the unified Latin culture of Europe at the moment that the printing press catalyzed the spread of vernacular languages.

Lewitt writes of this work:

This dead technology for printing letters is an exhibition architecture for the public use of language. The strictures of its crude matrix impart a model for interplaying notions of pre-determined order and a sense of spontaneity, which is flattened in this work between a printer's flatbed-grid and the particulate detail of digital resolution. That is to say, a syntax of compression guides the production of these images. Like an interface for distracted consumers, these material techniques of compression hold images that are too detailed for sustained overall concentration. This framework seemed then like a representative of an absent public, delivering stumbling lessons to the contemporary, stimulated subject of information, staged – *as if* by a foreigner, like a paper citizen – in dislocated productions of language.

*Sam Lewitt's work is currently included in Greater New York: The Baghdad Batteries, curated by Olivia Shao, P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York. He recently participated in the group show, So Be It: Interventions in Printed Matter at Roth, New York. In 2010-2011, he will have one-person exhibitions at Miguel Abreu Gallery and Galerie Daniel Buchholz, Berlin.*