

Text/Image

Collective Exhibition, curated by Ross Karlan
November 16, 2023 - January 6, 2024

“Text/Image” is an exploration of the relationship between these two often interconnected concepts, engaging in broad discussions of semiotics and visual rhetoric across multiple languages and cultural traditions. That is to say the selected artists explore the idea of attributing meaning as it pertains to signs, symbols, language, and visual tropes. Art history is full of examples of media that illustrate the text/image relationship over time, from decorated initials in medieval manuscripts to the prints of the constructivists and concretists of the twentieth century.

In many ways, this exhibition seeks to push beyond a historicized view of text-based media and approach the topic from a more theoretical angle. As such, some artists employ written language directly in their works, others pull inspiration from written texts or even create their own linguistic systems and indices. The works in this show therefore fall roughly into three overarching categories, with natural overlap: text *and* image, text as image, and image as text.

Works like Hander Lara's *Don't Play With History*, exemplify the natural connection between sign and meaning across these categories, blending typography and popular iconography to create recognizable tropes that allude to historical moments, brands, or cultures.



As a counterpoint, Carolina Sardi deconstructs the idea of text to ascribe meaning to abstract forms. Her work *White Association (Ideograma) (Ideogram)*, for example, relies on the assumption that signs have meaning. Here she abandons the “signified” — that is the meaning of the symbol — as an unknown, for the viewer to interpret. For Sardi, the image *is* the text; her metalwork evokes forms that are linguistic and attain their own legibility and comprehensibility.



Jessy Nite's intricate paracord knotting creates texts woven into her work and exemplifies the concept of text-as-image. Nite's inspiration also pulls from the fact that knots have their own linguistic elements. She is greatly inspired, for example, by the Incan culture of *quipus*, devices used to record information through different shaped and colored knots.

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What Nite and Lara also do quite explicitly is recall deeper historical and linguistic relationships. In the case of Nite, “text” and “textile” are one and the same, calling to mind Roland Barthes’ famous line that a text is a “tissue” or fabric of quotations. For Lara, notably his series, *Con otras palabras*, there is an etymological play on the word “image” and its relationship to the Latin root “imitari,” or imitation. Barthes explores the idea that images are “re-presentations,” so in copying Giacometti’s own copies of famous works of art, Lara’s images are imitations of imitations. And, while the text changes, the signified image does not.



In other works, text is a vehicle through which images attain greater or more direct meaning. Language acts as the impetus of a work’s existence in the first place, or can be a tool that adds to the overall composition. Iván Perera, for example, uses the names of revolutions and wars in reference to the signified image of dead flowers from those names. Marlon Portales’ *Goodbye Darling* is an image whose existence relies entirely on its own textual root: the AI prompt Portales used to generate the image that he then painted. Lorena Gutiérrez Camejo weaves together poetry and imagery through an exploration of censorship and geometry — two seemingly unrelated ideas

— in her work *Letra Negra*. And finally Jorge Ríos uses language to establish his own lexicon and semantic relationship between text (the word mountain) and idea (the geological structure we know to be a mountain). By naming the “first mountain” he recalibrates the idea of a one-to-one linguistic relationship.

Two artists use text as a way of engaging more deeply with local cultures. Jodi Minnis focuses on the “Bahama Mama,” a tourist souvenir figurine, and the figure of the Bahamian Police officer as signifiers of broader historical conversations on race, culture, and the Bahamas’ colonial past, with texts that play with a sense of liberation, and titles that capitalize on music and pop culture. Furthermore, Brazilian artist Cássio Markowski looks to historical texts and archives to reinterpret aspects of Afro-Brazilian history. In his “Terra e liberdade,” this revolutionary phrase adorns the flag carried by the young boy clad in native plants and surrounded by native fauna of the Portuguese colony.

A number of other works in this show from artists like José Manuel Fors, Leon Ferrari, Carlos Gallardo, Nelson Jalil, José Toirac, and others, all play with the construction, or deconstruction of texts, books, and archives. Fors’ *Palimpsesto*, for example, abstracts the history of writing and rewriting by deconstructing layers of pages while Nelson Jalil’s *Amnesia* represents the ultimate destruction of the written word through fire.

