

Noise! Yourself, Also Distrain

Tony Lewis

03.12.2021

12.01.2021

MASSIMODECARLO is pleased to present *Noise! Yourself, Also Distrain* by the Chicago-based artist Tony Lewis (Los Angeles, USA, 1986). The exhibition constitutes the second chapter after *Sing Plunder, Think Gentle Damage, Maintain Tomorrow, Et Al.* hosted at the gallery this Fall.

Tony Lewis presents four new large scale vibrant drawings, where graphite and coloured pencils generate dynamic shapes on paper, displaying the artist's signature glyph alphabet, influenced by his fascination with stenography.

Continuing to explore the Gregg Shorthand system and its connection to sound and language, Lewis uses shorthand notation that translates sounds into curving and bisecting lines. Lewis develops his exploration of ontology and the epistemology of language into a wider investigation that reflects upon the hierarchical systems within society and the complexity of the black American experience. The Gregg Shorthand system is a light-line stenography consisting of a phonetic shorthand based on elliptical and bisecting lines, invented by John Robert Gregg in 1888. It was the most popular form of pen stenography in the United States and is still in use today, albeit less so than before due to mainstream digitalization.

Each drawing starts with a graphite symbol which is the foundation of his biomorphic compositions. The repeated colour scheme (red, yellow, blue, and green) is reminiscent of childhood building blocks to provide a simple, direct contrast between the shapes as they are formed in response to the pre-existing Gregg Shorthand graphite form. The titles of the works - "Also", "Distrain", "Noise", "Yourself" - reflects the meaning of the glyphs on paper. The poetics of this work is woven into Lewis's exploration of drawing and language as forms of abstraction. The gestural lines appear as abstract mark-making to those unable to read stenographic script. However, each word in this series delineates a message about identity, race and communication, often referencing historical facts or current events.

Tony Lewis uses his drawing as a tool to investigate the presence and role of language today, conveying a message that is hidden in plain sight.

Tony Lewis was born in 1986 in Los Angeles; he lives and works in Chicago. His solo exhibitions include *Sing Plunder, Think Gentle Damage, Maintain Tomorrow, Et Al.*, MASSIMODECARLO, London, UK (2021); *Campo de juego*, Art Projects Ibiza, Ibiza, E (2018); *Plunder*, Rose Art Museum, Waltham, USA (2017); *Alms, Comity and Plunder*, Marino Marini Museum, Florence, I (2016); *Pressure Free Weight Power Nomenclature Movement*, Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland in Cleveland, USA (2015); *Bindery Projects*, Saint Paul, Minnesota, USA (2013).

Tony Lewis has taken part in group shows among which: *Speech/Acts*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, USA (2017); *The Revolution Will Not Be Grey*, Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, USA (2016); *Imitation of Life: Melodrama and Race in the 21st Century*, Home Museum, Manchester, UK (2016); *Walls and Words*, Elridge Street Synagogue, New York (2014); *LUMP Projects*, organized by John Neff, Raleigh, USA (2013); *News from Chicago and New York City*, Feibach, Minninger, Cologne (2012); *People of Color*, Gene Siskel Film Center, Chicago, USA (2012); Tony Lewis has participated in the Whitney Biennial of 2014 at the Whitney Museum of American Art of New York.