

Tony Lewis**New Song We Wrest! Who Throng Heat
Yet? Tone Got Flower Work****11.05.2023****30.06.2023**

MASSIMODECARLO is pleased to present *New Song We Wrest! Who Throng Heat Yet? Tone Got Flower Work*, Tony Lewis's second solo exhibition at MASSIMODECARLO Hong Kong. The exhibition premieres Lewis's renowned text works alongside a new series of shorthand writings, which paired together for the first time infuse a new sense of rhythmic vitality to the exhibition.

With *New Song We Wrest! Who Throng Heat Yet? Tone Got Flower Work* Lewis invites viewers to reflect on the presence and role of language in our contemporary world and to uncover the hidden messages that are often right in front of us.

Through his discerning use of language, Lewis draws inspiration from a diverse sources, ranging from the lexicon of advertising and consumer culture to more abstract, conceptual philosophical writings.

Characterised by a distinctively poetic approach, Lewis' works reveal the inherent beauty of words and their myriad meanings. *New Song We Wrest! Who Throng Heat Yet? Tone Got Flower Work* is named after an amalgamation of the works' titles.

Lewis has a deep fascination for phonetic, linguistic, and pre-lingual markings. Although words may appear straightforward, delving into the realm of linguistics can be incredibly challenging as words carry significant meanings at times and nonsensical interpretations at others. Nevertheless, Lewis has found solace in his marks, which, as he says, seem to "pull [him] out of the abyss of linguistic turmoil".

When asked about the inspiration behind the exhibition title, Lewis shared, "Sometimes I have a clear mind for an exhibition title, but often I find myself in a sea of personal writing in preparation for an exhibition, all of which has a tremendous amount of meaning, and it's impossible to encapsulate. As a result, title-making becomes more akin to free verse poetry: looking at what words (drawings) I have, shuffling them, finding meaning, finding nonsense, or holding onto a thought that hits hard. Every configuration is a legit title because it's an accurate and true representation of what the exhibition is conceptually and literally."

The works on display are characterised by symbols from Gregg Shorthand, a phonemic writing system developed towards the end of the 19th century.

Interested in shorthand, Lewis uses this framework as the basis for each work: "[it] allows for a kind of separation from linguistic meaning, and places the emphasis on gestural abstraction while also relying on an external system of meaning."

The compositions thus begin with a simple pencil mark on paper, a gesture that evokes childhood memories for many.

However, for the artist, it is an essential act of communication, to convey personal truths and connecting with others. As the graphite accumulates on the canvas, colours and shapes, interplay with the single mark, bringing the work to life. While gestural lines in the drawings may seem abstract to those unfamiliar with the stenographic script, they carry carefully crafted words with deeper meanings alluding to themes of identity, race, and societal issues.

Flower and *Flowers* feature recognisable signs in the form of words, letters, and drawings. Although the letters are legible, the artist intends to draw attention to what cannot be read - the sub-text, the incomprehensible. "This body of work has been about reading, what was missing, surface, language, and incoherent line drawing. Here, I want the line itself that cuts through the text to have more meaning than the text, which in itself has become incoherent".

Tony Lewis

Tony Lewis was born in 1986 in Los Angeles. He currently lives and works in Chicago.

Lewis's practice focuses on the relationship between semiotics and language to confront social and political topics such as race, power, communication, and labour. Lewis creates drawings using graphite, pencil and paper, mediums the artist uses to trace and develop abstract narratives and reflections on the notion of the gestural. By pushing the boundaries of drawing and the possibilities of abstraction, he expands the use of the "material" of language. As expressed by Melissa Chiu, Director of Hirshhorn Museum: 'Lewis has quickly established himself in the contemporary art world by forming a distinct visual vocabulary that integrates poetry and text with the properties of abstraction, and his monochromatic drawings pull from various visual and written sources, ranging from the personal to the political. Separating, rearranging, and erasing text, he shifts the way we move through language to open up new and unexpected readings.'

His solo exhibitions include: Tony Lewis Anthology 2014–2016, Hirshhorn Museum, Washington DC (2018); Plunder, Rose Art Museum, Waltham, USA (2017); Alms Comity and Plunder, Museo Marino Marini, Florence (2016); Art Basel Unlimited, Art Basel, Basel (2015); Tony Lewis: nomenclature movement free pressure power weight, MOCA Cleveland, Cleveland (2015).

His work has been included in recent group shows at Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo, New York (2022); ArtSonjeCenter, Seoul, South Korea (2022); Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia (2022); Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (2021; 2020); Aspen Art Museum, Aspen (2016). Lewis participated in the 2014 iteration of the Whitney Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, NY and was the recipient of the 2017–2018 Ruth Ann and Nathan Perlmutter Artist-in-Residence Award at the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University, Waltham, MA.