

Greene Naftali is pleased to present the second New York solo exhibition of Josef Strau. The show will include the artist's signature vocabulary of modified lamps and printed texts along with letter-shaped environments made of cardboard and foam, and a series of 18 white paintings replete with texts, letter drawings, Gustav Klimt-esque marks, and strings of pearls.

The exhibition takes as its starting point a show that Strau created earlier this year at the Malmnsthall in Sweden, A DISSIDENCE COINCIDENCE BUT WHCTLJS. For that exhibition, the artist's texts, posters and lamp constructions were staged in a series of large rooms made of curved letter-shaped walls. For the current show, Strau considers a different sort of retrospective and reconsideration of past works. Applying the theological concept of "iniquity" to his own art, he takes the elements from Malm with their faulty absence of values, their condition of spiritual disrepair, and asks the rhetorical question whether any kind of formal redemption is available in returning to one's past works, redeeming them. Disallowing completion to be a stopping point, a literary question is posed, of telling a story of the past and suddenly perceiving the right thing to do, now in the shadow of remembrance.

Strau's current work revises his awkwardly elegant pairings of disparate forms and delivery devices. Whether a printed text tied to a lamp, or the tracing of letter shapes as walls or here as child-size tunnels (writing as architecture), the "publishing" of ideas in art objects is a shaky proposition at best. This "shakiness" is the realm of Strau's artistic practice. Says Strau about the current show, "The ones who want to look at us from above can see the exhibition as letters ('J' 'L' 'E'). But what they cannot see is what might be inside these letters-holes. The others cast themselves into these narrative holes."

And now the iniquities of an artist's practice: Automatic drawing. Automatic writing. Using one's own subjective biographic history. Trying to do different things like being a gallerist, a critic, and an artist. Trying to be an architect. Making galleries inside the gallery. Going back and changing finished artworks. Taking the work of other artists and using it as a model. Wanting to become one's own assistant ("The A" as one painting declares). The rabbit-hole of one's own habits and artistic history is also here explored from within.

Josef Strau is an artist and writer living in Berlin and New York. He recently participated in Manifesta 7, presented a solo exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, and was featured in the touring exhibition Make Your Own Life: Artists in and Out of Cologne.

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