

Michael Dean

Lamp black on sack cloth (love for fucksake)

02/12 2023 – 20/01 2024



Michael Dean's sculptures are capable of transforming an exhibition space into a theater, into an action. They remind us of characters performing a scene. A group of works, which almost seem as if they are about to climb a set of stairs, shows how characters and language are central to his work. The sculptures in the room and on the walls interact with the space, forming a perfect triangle with the observer. The organic development of the alphabets trapped in concrete forms is further exalted in this exhibition. Dean's work always strikes a balance between form and text, predominated by materials such as concrete and paper, and this time is no different. In this first solo exhibition in the new Paris gallery space, the artist presents a series of paintings framed by concrete sculptures, subverting the paradigm of the frame itself.

This unprecedented series of paintings is built upon two elements that form the basis of the artist's works: the structure of the sculpture and dialogue with the context. The wide-mesh sack cloth evokes an analogy concerning the function of the rods, which are the skeleton of the work. In fact, paint clings to the canvas just as concrete does to the metal grid. This paint-concrete combination becomes even more accentuated. Color has appeared in his concrete works for several years now, first in brightly colored, monochromatic sculptures, and, as seen in recent exhibitions in New York and London, favoring an increasingly polychromatic palette that adds further semantic depth to the concrete form. His method of adding the color in question, by squeezing it out of plastic bottles onto the surface of the sculpture, is repeated in this new series of works. The artist applied color to the open-weave sack cloth with the same technique, using plastic bottles.

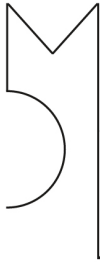
A continuous motif arises from the repetition, in italics, of the first letter of the word "fuck." This italicized letter "f," repeated many times in a row, is transformed into the number "8," the symbol for infinity.¹ This letter symbol and arm movement is integrated into a sack cloth structure, but it ultimately has that dense, deep, and intense black color typical of construction material. This series of letters is repeated so many times that it becomes an abstract sound and object. Through this element's repetition and intensity, language is transformed into something different, into a dimension suspended between symbol and movement, visible and invisible. It runs through the canvases, frames, and sculptures in a rhythmic way, reverberating in the space and connecting the visitor to the works.

Language conveys a sense of duality: on the one hand, it's a static, written element, while on the other, it moves with the spoken sound. This dual dimension of language is reflected in Dean's works through the physicality of his concrete figures and the performances often created by the artist as part of his artistic research. In this series, the fluid aspect of color is highlighted, harmonizing with that of the concrete structures.

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In the artist's new series, the relationship with sculpture is multifaceted. In one respect, the frame is used in a traditional way, separating what is inside from the outside world. But at the same time, in Dean's work, the parameters of the relationship between paint and sculpture, between gaze and space are overturned.² In some way, we can say that if a frame "defines" a space and its interior, in this case, the definition is generated by the sculpture itself.

— Lorenzo Benedetti

* Derived from its origins of ink and ashes, *Lamp black on sack cloth (love for fucksake)*, becomes a meditation on language, a historical tale of form, flesh, mourning and protest. Yet, the written word has presented itself by way of a doodle. What happens on this stage of an exhibition is a mode of becoming—between object, between subject and being. The hand that writes manifests and leaks through concrete forms to cloth.

¹ One could view this cursive "f" as a variation on a theme. At once this stuttering language slips and spills into a figurative gesture of the artist's hand and body, this too echoes the veritable structure and metaphor of an 8ball. The 8ball as a function, figure and symbol of probability and possibility. Built off a series of dualities—of one for another; of luck and chance; of life and death.

² Painting has thus become writing, in a similar vein to how Dean's sculpture translates into the painting hand that writes. This too is played out through the presence of the works and visitors, the artist's self-published paperbacks become means of measuring device. The pages torn out by people reflect the relationship between presence and absence, a metaphor for how when visiting an exhibition, you always "bring something home with you."

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