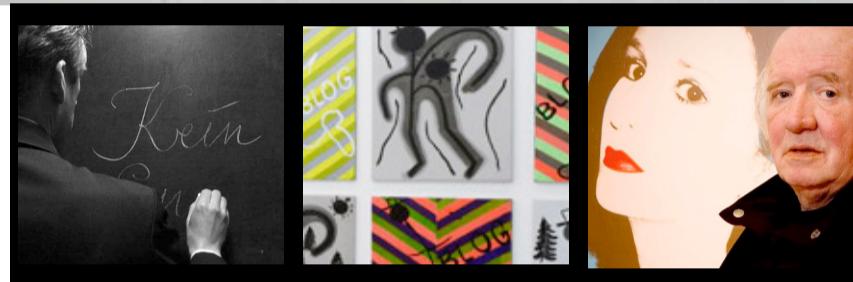
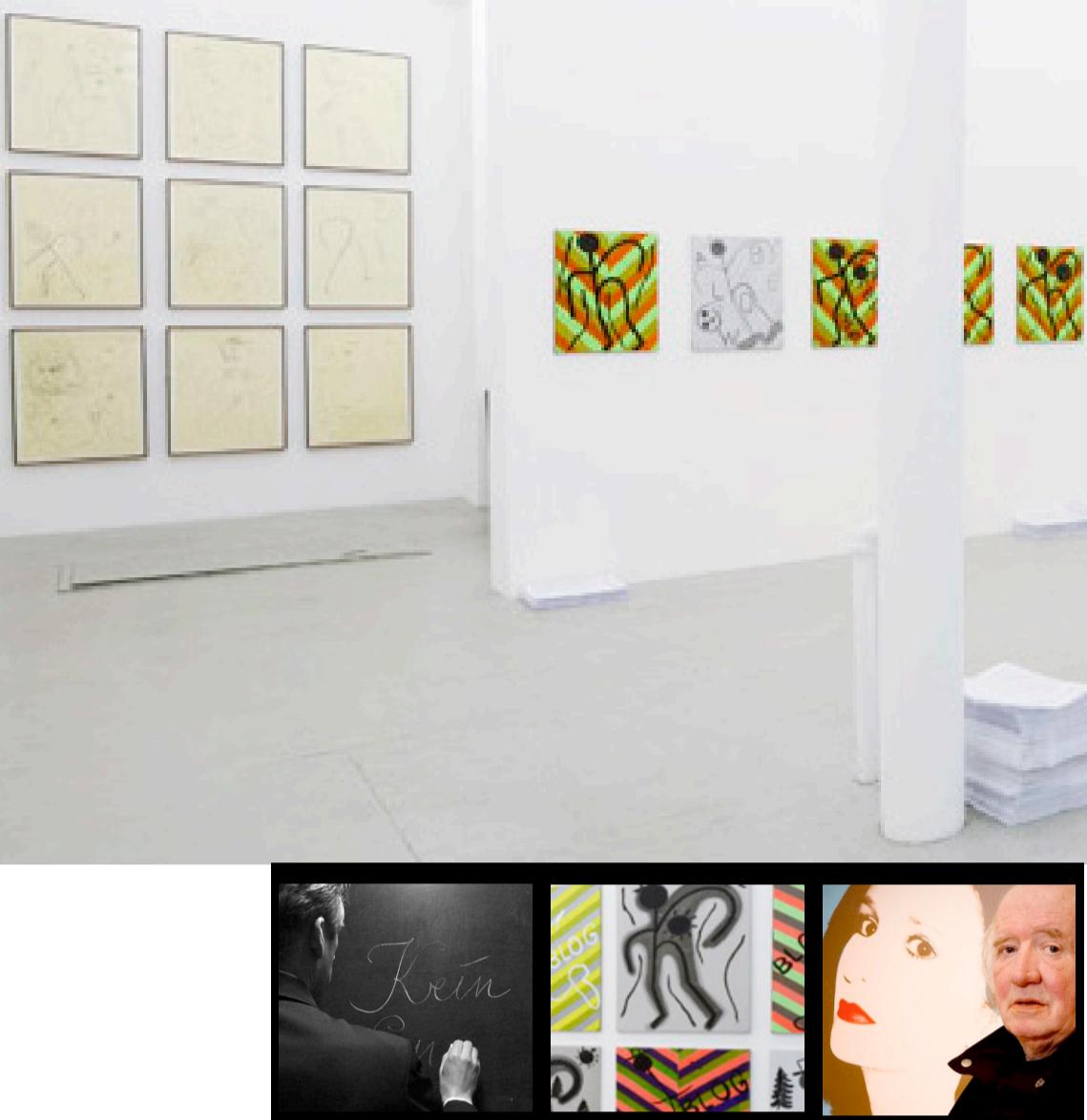




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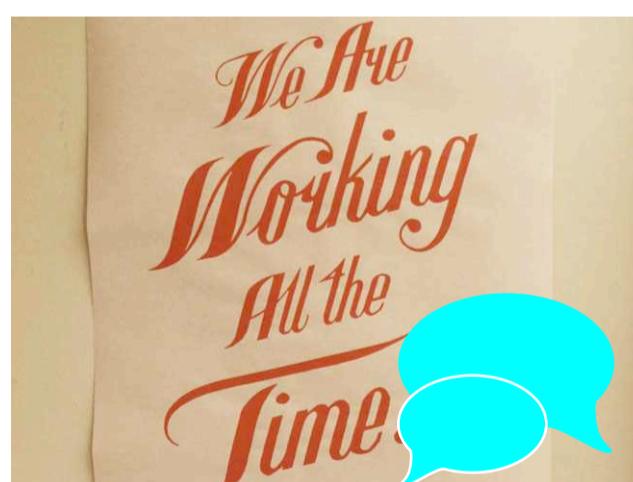
Art And/With Language

by Patrick Gantert

The facets of digital viewership have long been a part of the dominant mode for understanding artwork, both digitally and physically. However, it is not only seeing that is changing but reading and interpreting as well. As documentation images and copy exist in closer proximity, those images become inextricable from the language that is coded to them and vice versa. More artists and shows are exploring forms of textual interloping, pulling to the forefront things that exist outside of sanctioned art spaces and creating a different kind of synergy

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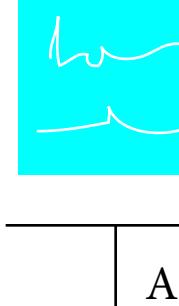
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Hello, Goodbye by Patrick Gantert



A review of
David Adamo
Untitled

David Adamo's first major solo show in New York is a stunning conflation of his strong points, spun with a subtlety that, in this case, appears as a result of that much beleaguered art school scapegoat, intuition. Adamo comes forward as an artist unafraid of his own emotion. To qualify, this is not to say that all artists are averse to their feelings, but rather that Adamo uniquely manipulates his own to create finessed, abstract narratives. Described in the press release as 'a memento of the family he left behind and as a homage to the new family he is building' his new, larger carved wood sculptures distance themselves from his older, far more representational works. 'David Adamo' is a show of surrogates, characters, and metaphor working together to create one of Adamo's most considerate and provocative installations to date.

Untitled's space is a fucking curatorial Oz. Where other galleries in the Lower East Side's Orchard street corridor wedge their wares in between a shitty laundromat and a sub-par dumpling shop, Untitled explodes outward on the ground floor of a brand new building ripped straight out of Dwell magazine's nose-in-the-air pages. Full of natural light with an enormously high ceiling, an undergraduate introductory sculpture group exhibition would look good in there and, for those of you who have seen such a show, you know what I mean. Suffice to say, David Adamo's work, rather than looking as though it was placed into the space, appears as though the gallery was built around it. The organization of his sculptures creates a gorgeous pathway which, in this space in particular, makes you feel as though you are walking amongst tall trees or burned out Easter Island-esque idols. It is with this sensation that Adamo's work begins to suggest a relationship to history, as though it may be (and to me, totally is) indebted to something greater.

Like many people, I first came across David Adamo's work at the 2010 Whitney Biennial. I was the confused spectator looking at shaved down wooden canes and axes thinking to myself, 'when did this performance happen and is the artist going to do it again?'. Much to my chagrin, I found out that there was no performance, there was no action, only the sense of intense process and reduction without an adequate explanation, reason, or utilitarian purpose. Apparently overburdened by self-imposed expectations of simplicity and head-banging referentiality, the Biennial catalogue would tell you that:

"the blunt force and aggression of conventionally masculine tools and implements – sledgehammers, axes, and baseball bats – rendered fragile and useless by the artist as he hacks and whittles hefty items into mere spindles before delicately leaning his handiwork in taxonomical groupings along gallery walls. In a wry nod to early Conceptual art, Adamo carefully pools wood chippings and shavings around each of these serially arranged and equally spaced out abused objects in self-conscious acknowledgment of his artistic process and the literally dematerialized art on display."

Don't get me wrong, I liked the 2010 biennial a lot and I was actually one of the people that appreciated the masturbatory intellectual excess that Henriette Huldisch and Shamim Momin brought to the table in '08, but this type of writing saddles Adamo's work with baggage it doesn't need.

Contrarily, Adamo's new sculptures are slyly akin, at least in form, to the semi-thoughtless phalluses erected by the likes of Dan Colen or Terence Koh, gestures designed to look as though they are high-minded but, in the end, rely on irony and apathy. Instead, Adamo's work pushes forward with subtle nods to equally veiled and revelatory inspirations (Gober and Brancusi respectively). Littered throughout the space are small fruits and vegetables, particularly apples and oranges. I wasn't quite sure what to make of these at first, they slowly expose themselves as constructions and not reality (tres Gober). I assumed, based on Adamo's Biennial offering, that these were painted bronze casts. A quick trip to the receptionist and one semi-bitchy answer later, I learned that they were ceramic, a significantly less permanent and more cost effective (?) option. Material choice here is interesting. Metaphorically, ceramic compliments his less representational sculptures with a lack of permanence, as though Adamo intends, to some degree, for meanings to change and form, though large and made from wood, to be in flux. His use of fruits and vegetables evokes something primitive, something from the earth. But those reads are boring and quickly fade away. More interestingly, the small sculptures remind me of travel, of existing nomadically. Apples and oranges are easily packed, small capsules of nutrition slammed into backpacks and eaten on the run, in trains, or in various third spaces. Taking a hint from the press release, combined with the nomadic takeaway of the fruit sculptures, it is compelling to think that Adamo might be painting, albeit quite abstractly, a picture of motion and relocation. Another revelation courtesy of the gallery staff is that some of the wood has been shipped from Berlin, Adamo's new home base. The beautiful compliment here is seeing that such a small element has the capability to offset giant, static monuments.

As you come to the large field of sculptures, they spread out like a control burned forest, jagged edges and marred surfaces, spots of chalked color. The ceiling of Untitled rises up, feeling almost infinite when housing sculptures that have the capability, as these do, to truly fill the room. Undoubtedly the high point in the show, Adamo's large wooden sculptures straddle the difficult line of feeling dated and contemporary in the same instant. He manages to evoke the spindly, mud-footed mannequins of Giacometti and the upward excellence of Brancusi and combine it with the conceptual ballsack of an artist like Tom Burr. Burr's work is particularly interesting in relation to Adamo because they are both doing, to some degree, the exact same thing. Namely, assigning very real feelings and personalities (!) to inanimate and abstract objects. Burr does this by loosely suggesting drunkenness or states of mental lapse with his toppled over acrylic sheets and abandoned cocktail parties, Adamo does this by literally carving out each of his main players.

Adamo's characters have a much more cosmopolitan purpose than Burr, they appear not always in singularity or desperation but in groups, sometimes standing in a kind of mis en scene on what could be a stand in for an institution's architectural outcropping. Think about your public library or the stairs of a courthouse, those space monopolizing flat sections of concrete that draw in smokers, loiterers and wayward skateboarders. They can be construed as third spaces, social surroundings separate from the two usual social environments of home and the workplace. They are particularly common as milemarkers during travel (gas stations, airport bars, interstate diners). Adamo's players continually show up in suggestions of third spaces and one can only imagine that they, like him, are on their way elsewhere. With this realization, the show slowly begins to give credence to the assumption that we are looking at an artist in transition. From the representational to the abstract, from the (not really) performative to the (kind of?) performing, and quite literally from one place to another. It should also be noted that Adamo constructed the bulk of this work in a temporary two month studio in Long Island, literally building signifiers of transition in a transitional space. Attitude into form indeed.

A third level of Adamo's large sculptures takes a lovely foray into the existential. Leaning against the back wall is a fallen, hollowed out, significantly smaller chunk of wood that appears to be a kind of half sarcophagus, albeit a quite crude one. It is a strange comma in the show that sends it careening into new territory though I hesitated and still hesitate to say that this show has much to do with death. Rather, it has everything to do with life...the sarcophagus, if that is what it is, is open after all. Another deep cut in this show is a sculpture, again leaning, against one of the walls just off the entry into the large main space. On first glance, it looks like a crude canoe, something that may have been made by a Native American tribe. I am instantly reminded of Peter Doig's existential (pssch, what Peter Doig isn't existential) painting '100 Years Ago' of a caveman like figure sitting in a canoe on a lone body of water. I don't think Adamo's intent here is to overburden his work with philosophical quandary but these two pieces stand in defiant harmony with the rest of the works to provide the necessary soul-searching component of any good travologue.

To come back to the lesser elements in the show, Adamo goes so far as to suggest escape routes, namely a 'Being John Malkovich' esque tiny red door as you enter the space through a pathway carved from river rocks. The door is a strange punctuation and, more than anything (similar to Gober), reiterates the mysterious vibe, its vintage, almost European appearance standing as a representational fulcrum in a wash of suggestive abstraction. We aren't entirely sure why it is there, why it is so small, or where it came from, but everyone can relate to a door. It allows you to come, go or both. With its brilliant color and location, it is almost the first thing and the last thing the viewer sees, allowing it to function as 'hello' and 'goodbye' to a show that, while containing an overwhelming air of permanence, is much more engaged with dispersion. Adamo's small red door is a formal ciao.

If this show has a weak point (and arguably, it does not), it is the Richard Long biting rock pathway. Though it makes a nice transition into the space, the tiny maze puts out a boring vibe of 21st century zen, laughable in all of its kombucha gulping reverence. I couldn't help but furrow my brow in the same manner as when I see someone with a yoga mat in their backpack and a tattoo of an Om symbol playing Angry Birds on their iPad, it just doesn't work, spirituality as a look is certainly not a good one. It is easy to see Adamo's angle here, the show is undoubtedly about movement and transition, the rocks are reminiscent of a river's edge. Could there be a better metaphor when constructing a show loosely evocative of the beat generation (yeah, I know, but you can't tell me this whole methodology doesn't have a little Jack Kerouac grease on it)? I think not. The rock pathway is most definitely forgivable but it isn't doing the rest of the work any favors. I'll take solid editing over touchy feely filler any day.

Overall, David Adamo's first major outing in NYC is a successful one. His works evoke a particular sense of restlessness and curiosity that one associates with significant travels, the ability to be untethered and dive headlong into something new and different. It is tough to find a sour note in the work but, in addition to the rocks, I think it would be his capacity to be misread. At the outset, the show manifests as cold conceptualism and, truth be told, is extremely easy to write off that way. Adamo's true success is understanding this possibility in the first place and determining a way to utilize emotion and personal narrative (without being at all tacky!) to circumvent and cordially flip off the harbingers of over-intellectualization. Basically, this stuff has some staying power and it isn't because the artist loaded it up with shit no one actually cares about. This show works because it has an air of confusion and contemplation that is relatable and, more often than not, makes for interesting dialogue.

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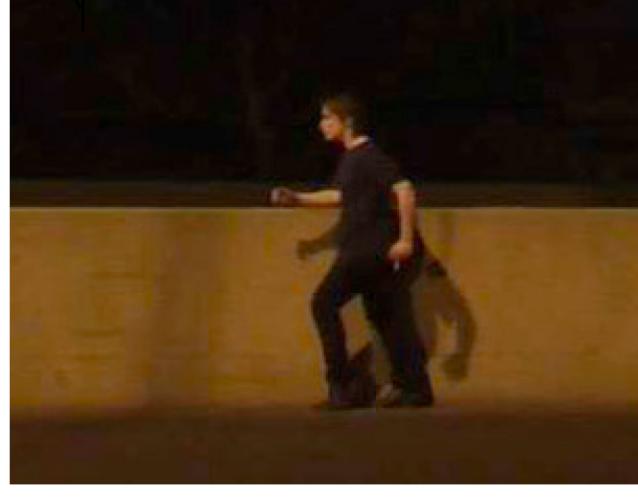
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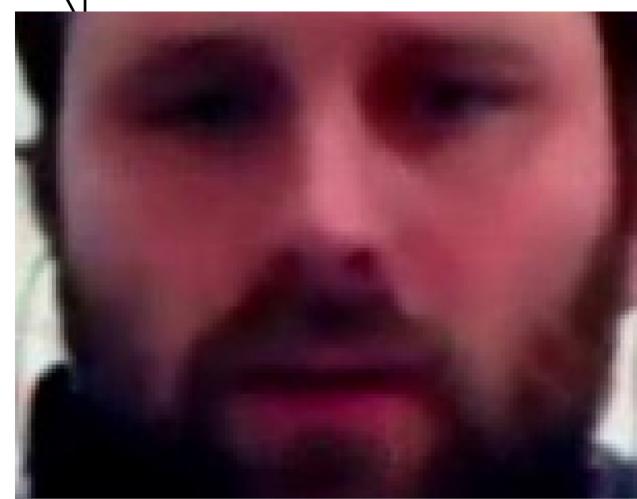


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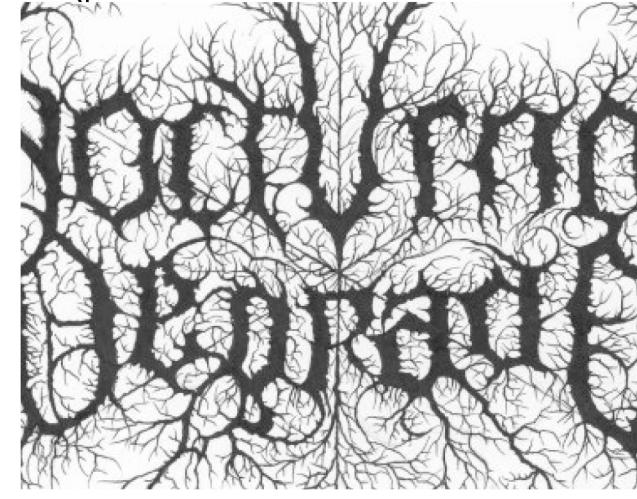
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