

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Kay Rosen: New Works On Paper

February 21 - April 25, 2020

Opening reception: Friday, February 21, 6-8 pm

Lora Reynolds is pleased to announce an exhibition of new works on paper by Kay Rosen—the artist’s second presentation at the gallery.

Kay Rosen makes paintings of ordinary words and phrases, but the ways she structures her compositions—and their resulting implications—are anything but expected. She uses a host of devices to encourage us to look at language with fresh eyes—stacking, omitting, repeating, rotating, or reordering letters; alternating colors, upper and lower case, type size, boldness, or italics—calling attention to rhythms and patterns, words within words, and dramas inside letterforms, all of which hide in plain sight during normal reading, writing, and speech. She selects the words and phrases she does for their “potential to represent things in an alternate way [that makes] reading an active, visual, deciphering process rather than a passive, cognitive, scanning [one].” Engaging with an artwork of Rosen’s, then, can be like wrestling with a riddle or crossword puzzle that ends up alluding to culture, history, or politics. With their ample negative space, bold letterforms, and Rosen’s subtle (but sophisticated) structural manipulations, the paintings are able to yell and whisper at the same time.

The works in this show point to a range of ideas/events/phenomena/people: a landmark US Supreme Court decision from 1954, feminism, Shakespeare, self-portraiture, police brutality, caroling. Four pieces (*Brown v.*, *Rogue Rouge*, *Black and Blue*, and *I Love Yellow*) might be thought of as a mini-series built around the suggestive potential of color.

Rosen painted the text BROWN V., for example, in two different shades of brown. This piece refers, of course, to *Brown v. Board of Education*, the case that deemed racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional. Although it seems Rosen has omitted the defendant from her composition, a close look reveals she has painted her text slightly *lower* than centered on the page—and the bottom edge of her paper is the only deckled one, as if she tore BOARD OF EDUCATION out of the painting. The structure of the work seems to be saying, “Brown v....fill in the blank.” Brown v. housing discrimination; v. the War on Drugs; v. the New Jim Crow; v. Ferguson; v. Sanford; v. Baltimore; v. Flint; v., v., v., v.

In *Rogue Rouge*, Rosen assigned a different shade of red to each of the five letters in those two words. The colors in ROGUE form a gradient: the darker blood-red of the R moves toward the lighter pink of the E. Each letter retains its original color when rearranged for the word ROUGE—but no longer follows the proper order of the gradient in ROGUE. The gradient, itself, has gone rogue. (“Words [in my artworks],” Rosen says, “function less like signifiers and more like the signified—like little objects, actors, or performers.”) The word

ROUGE is not only French for *red*, but also refers to a cosmetic product for cheeks and lips, and as such, might be thought of as a metonym for a person who presents as archetypically feminine—handbag, heels, LBD, *makeup*. The idea of a woman gone rogue—that is, against sexist status quos, against the patriarchy—has threatened social norms for centuries.

Rosen uses capital letters in her compositions almost exclusively, but the visual pun of *Four lambs* depends on the overlap between the capital i and lowercase L of her sans-serif typeface. The piece simultaneously reads “I ám a líttle Lámb” and “I ám a líttle iámb.” An iamb is a metrical foot (a repeating rhythmic unit in poetry) consisting of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. The unexpected accents Rosen added encourage speaking the phrase in the specific cadence of a trio of iambs. And to engage the ground of the painting as an active carrier of meaning, Rosen scalloped the paper’s edges (evoking the fluff of wool) and painted the white paper with *white paint*. Rosen’s esoteric joke has Lamb Chop the sock puppet holding her own in Donne and Shakespeare’s company.

The broad range of stories Rosen’s artworks tell all originate with her preternatural sensitivity to language and typography. Her works, she says, “are practically self-made since they are created out of their own body parts, with only a little push from me.” She thinks of them as readymades, discoveries rather than creations. Not only do they have the potential to help us, her viewers, rediscover the pleasure and power and elasticity of language, but also the richness and interconnectivity that might be found in all of the mundane.

Kay Rosen, born in Corpus Christi, lives and works in Gary, Indiana and New York. She has had solo exhibitions at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum (Ridgefield, Connecticut), Art Institute of Chicago, Aspen Art Museum, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, Drawing Center (New York), Dunedin Public Art Gallery (New Zealand), M.I.T. List Visual Arts Center (Cambridge, Massachusetts), Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles) (which hosted her mid-career survey *Kay Rosen: Lifeli[k]e*), Otis College of Art and Design (Los Angeles), and University Art Museum (University of California, Santa Barbara). She has been included in shows at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art (Arkansas), Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (Washington, D.C.), Kunsthalle Bielefeld (Germany), Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (North Adams), Museum of Fine Arts (Boston), Museum of Modern Art (New York), and Whitney Museum of American Art (New York). Among the museums that own her work are the Art Gallery of New South Wales (Sydney), Art Institute of Chicago, Cincinnati Art Museum, Collection Lambert (Avignon), Denver Art Museum, Museum of Contemporary Art (Chicago), Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles), Museum of Modern Art (New York), New Museum of Contemporary Art (New York), Philadelphia Museum of Art, Progressive Corporation (Cleveland), and Whitney Museum of Contemporary Art (New York). Kay Rosen is a 2017 Guggenheim Fellow, has been awarded three National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships, and is working on a commission for the National Gallery of Art (Washington, D.C.) to be unveiled in August of 2020.