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TEXT AND SLOGAN 'STATEMENT PIECES' DRAW INSTAGRAM CROWD TO ART BASEL

by Anny Shaw

Being heard above the hubbub of an art fair—particularly one as loud as Art Basel in Miami Beach—can be tricky for dealers, but this year exhibitors are making their voices heard with a cacophony of text and slogan works that holler, cajole and accost you from every corner.

VIPs in search of that perfect Instagram photo were seen queuing on Wednesday to take their picture in front of Jeppe Hein's neon work, *All I Need Is Less* (2019; priced at €40,000), strategically installed on the outside of Nicolai Wallner's stand. So popular was the Danish artist's work that, after all three editions of the piece sold out, a second text work, *All You Are Is The Result Of What You Have Thought* (also 2019, and priced at €40,000), was hung in its place, with one edition finding a home within hours of the fair's opening on Thursday.

Hein's work is a hit with fairgoers, Wallner believes, because it consists of a text embedded in a two-way mirror, providing the "perfect excuse to take a photo of yourself without taking a selfie". He adds: "That's what Jeppe wants you to do, to become part of the work."

Alex Fitzgerald, an associate director at Andrew Kreps gallery, whose stand is lit up by an eye-catching text and LED installation by Andrea Bowers, notes how "more people are coming to fairs just for the Instagram moment". Positioning a "statement piece" on the external wall of the stand "gives us a bit more visibility that translates to Instagram too", Fitzgerald adds.

It is not all about the "gram", however. While pretty to look at, many text-based works at the fair have socially conscious undertones; Superflex's powder-blue LED signs (on show at Nils Staerk and Kukje galleries) fall into this category, as do Doug Aitken's sunset-hued slogans such as *DRAMA* (2019), priced at \$225,000 with Eva Presenhuber gallery. "Drama is a good word in any situation—in today's political climate it might be read differently, less personally," Presenhuber says. She notes that Aitken's work resonates with "a new crowd of US collectors"; two of four editions sold during the VIP preview on Wednesday.

Other slogan pieces are downright political. Bowers's practice marries art and activism, and the Los Angeles artist has long incorporated found words from protest posters in her work. Her illuminated piece on Andrew Kreps's stand, *Let Boys Be Feminine/Sensitive* (2019; priced at \$75,000), takes toxic masculinity to task.

Even without the frill and fanfare of glowing lights or bold colours, Carey Young's conceptual piece at Paula Cooper gallery has been stopping passersby. Declared *Void II* (2013; \$25,000) consists of a "zone" delineated by black duct tape on the floor, which Carey invites viewers to step into. A text on the wall reads: "By entering the zone created by this drawing, and for the period you remain there, you declare and agree that you are a citizen of the United States of America."

Anthony Allen, a director at Paula Cooper, acknowledges that it "is not the most fair-friendly", but adds: "We wanted to make a political statement. It's a border crossing of sorts."

Looming large at the entrance of the Canadian gallery Catriona Jeffries's stand is another monochrome text work written in English and Spanish that conjures up the US-Mexico border crisis. Ron Terada's 3m-high aluminium road sign, *You Have Left the American Sector* (2005/2011; priced at \$120,000), was last shown at Art Basel in June, on the Rhine border, but takes on a "whole new significance" in Miami, says gallery director Peter Gazendam. A 2005 iteration of the work, in English and French, was installed on the US-Canadian border but removed five days later after Canadian politicians complained.

No less controversial is Gardar Eide Einarsson's blood-red painting, *Hey Iran* (2017; priced at \$52,000 with Nils Staerk), which also invokes US foreign policy. Based on a bumper sticker from 1979 condemning the Iran hostage crisis, the canvas was removed from the Norwegian artist's Instagram account the day before the fair opened.

Proving, meanwhile, that not all slogans have to make sense, all three editions of Alex Da Corte's kinetic work, *Title Card* (2018; around \$100,000), had sold out at Karma gallery by Thursday. The split-flap sculpture generates 57 phrases from his 2018 film *Rubber Pencil Devil*, here arranged as a poem. Texts from Bob Dylan's *Subterranean Homesick Blues* and Joe Brainard's *I Remember*, as well as other fragments from poems by Anne Carson, Tao Lin and Goethe are appropriated and regurgitated in phrases such as "live + let live", "get well" and, appropriately, "a season in hell".