

DAILY SERVING

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MUNGO THOMSON: WALL, WINDOW, OR BAR SIGNS AT KADIST ART FOUNDATION

by admin



Mungo Thomson. *My Name as Written by Bruce Nauman*, 2014; neon, 60 x 120 in.

In Mungo Thomson's solo exhibition at Kadist Art Foundation, *Wall, Window, or Bar Signs*, the gallery is filled with neon works that appropriate the form of Bruce Nauman's spiraling neon text piece, *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths (Window or Wall Sign)* from 1967. Aided by the hypnotic spiral and glowing neon form, Thomson utilizes phrases from twelve-step programs and self-help literature to re-create the spiritual undertones present in Nauman's work. Though at first glance the works seem to stem exclusively from an obsession with Nauman, a neon piece tucked away in the back room of the gallery ruptures the three-room homage.

Completed in handwritten script, the neon work *My Name as Written by Bruce Nauman* (2014) is challenging to read, and only after referring to the title sheet do the words become clear: "Thank you Mungo Bruce Nauman." The inclusion of Nauman's autograph—received by Thomson at a book-signing event in New York and later transferred into neon—adds to the ongoing conversation about authorship and consent already present in the exhibition. But the work's scrawl-like effect is similar to Tracey Emin's neon works and further complicates the circle of appropriation. Emin's neons are created from love letters or sketches, infusing the cool, conceptual medium with sentimental content. The handwritten letters in Thomson's neon piece not only highlight the artist's affection for Nauman, continuing with this idea of the sentimental in Emin's work, but also instigate a larger narrative around art-historical lineage made evident through appropriation.

Thomson's presentation of his entanglement with Nauman is mediated through an art-historical lineage that includes Emin as much as it does Nauman. Feminist scholar Lisa Tickner argues that feminist art freed artists from the Oedipal narrative of art history, which she interprets as generations of (male) artists reacting to and rejecting the work of their "art fathers." Feminist art and a rewriting of art history not only gave rise to a new generation of art daughters, but also made visible the work of art mothers. As a result, all artists are now free to wrestle with the work of their predecessors on both sides of the family, so to speak. So while Nauman may have provided the framework for Thomson's commissioned body of neons, the legacy of Emin bridges the curatorially recognized lineage between the artist and his inspiration. In a show that has much to do with appropriation, it's important to recognize the artists who have previously responded to the "mystic truth" of Nauman and his contemporaries.