

Meliksetian MB Briggs



Catalog essay

Made in L.A. 2012

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by Kurt Mueller

The multiform but austere practice of Cody Trepte engages a seemingly impossible problem: to give shape to that which resists having form. Utilizing the strategies of conceptual art, as well as the history of philosophy and science, Trepte makes prints and drawings and appropriates photographs to represent paradoxes, linguistic or pictorial ambiguities, and other absences, contradictions, and anomalies that defy direct explanation or concrete visual exposition.

Trepte's graduate thesis exhibition at California Institute of the Arts, *Uncertainty Twice* (2010), arrayed a selection of seemingly simple text and photographic works around the figure of the theoretical physicist Werner Heisenberg and his uncertainty principle. Simply stated, Heisenberg posited that the more precisely we know one property of a subatomic particle, the less precisely we can know another property. Consequently, he argued that knowing one unpredictably alters our knowledge of the other. Following this notion of a deficient double, Trepte paired works that, through their correspondence, registered a sense of or produced a sum value of incompleteness.

In the center of the room the artist hung a mural-size photographic print of Heisenberg standing with a system of pulleys, *Studying a Real Machine* (2010), so that it obscured another print directly behind, *Everything Has Always Already Begun* (2010), a reproduction of a gallery wall containing a framed drawing of the titular phrase. On an existing gallery wall, Trepte hung a pair of actual framed hand-

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inked drawings of the same phrase. Each of these permutations featured part of the phrase superimposed over itself in italics, formally accenting its self-negating declaration, which simultaneously suggests both stasis and movement. Complementing this koan-like construction, another pair of works, both titled *Nothing Will Ever Be the Same Again* (2009), presented their eponymous phrase in ballpoint pen and offered a similarly circular expression of universal change. (Installed on opposite sides of the room, these last two ostensibly identical drawings actually differed in size.) Elsewhere, photographs of Heisenberg at work or leisure focused such broad, fundamental ideas into the presence of a singular, mercurial figure—a gesture not unlike the atomization of quantum mechanics.

Trepte's labor-intensive but minimal, evocative but recondite work, like any epistemic puzzle, requires investment and patience from the viewer—the willingness to look twice and think beyond what is immediately present. For example, one half of the diptych *So This Is* (2011) features the titular phrase silk-screened onto paper with UV-sensitive ink that appears and disappears according to its exposure to sunlight. Notably, the *o* of *So* is filled in to create a solid form that rhymes with the other half of the diptych: a small photographic print doctored so that its solitary subject, a midcentury woman in clown attire in the desert, appears to hold a matching black ellipse or hole. The absurdity and narrative opacity of the found, altered image suggest that here, as in much of Trepte's output, what is omitted or obscured is more significant than what is apparent.

For *Made in L.A. 2012*, Trepte has created a new suite of prints that invite viewers to experience knowing through absence. Taking as a starting point the device of the ellipsis—the unstated but understood—the images articulate what he describes as “the everything,” a conceit both obvious and elusive, the infinite encapsulated in a finite form. Each print contains a unique handmade ink marble pattern over its surface, upon which the artist silk-screened text and shapes in the same color as the paper, thereby rendering these signs visible and legible only through contrast with the surrounding visual ornamentation. Trepte proposes that it is through the friction of displacement, interference, and contradiction that something other and profound appears amid the noise of daily existence.