

Seeing the Forest and the Trees

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Do individual letters, devoid of all semantic content; have the ability to make images? In Gustavo Bonevardi's drawings the case is consistently made that letters, not words, are enough to create coherent and recognizable visual forms.

These works are not related to Guillaume Apollinaire's Calligrams or Concrete Poetry, whose visual layouts play an equal role to language in creating their meaning. Bonevardi is primarily interested in the shape and forms of letters as graphic building blocks and not in phonemes, words or narrative – so these works cannot be considered poems.

Nor are they referencing the more recent conceptual linguistics turns in contemporary art being practiced by artists like Ed Ruscha, Lawrence Weiner or Joseph Kosuth as his interest in using letters is not about challenging the semiotic signified/signifier relationships in language or objectifying language to create a link to its sculptural capabilities. He is more interested in actually using letters to make

For Bonevardi drawing with letters is "like writing assignments freed from the tyranny of spelling, punctuation and grammar systems seemingly devised by petty bureaucrats to foil my attempt to communicate."¹ These drawings represent then an attempt to relearn, take back and make relevant the whole system of language to the artist in a personal and visual way. A form of reading and writing that is not in service of trying to communicate more clearly but is more expressive— a moment situated between language and image that is pre-linguistic and expansive. In Bonevardi's work just as quickly as our eye is able to assemble and "read" his images – when we move towards or away from the drawings their content dissolves back into the fragmentary elements that make them up.

For the series of drawings featured in this catalog, Bonevardi uses aggregated letters offset by empty space to bring into focus the bodies, bark and knobs of trees at different focal points. These works are fairly large scale and have been the intense focus of his work over the past two years. But why trees? Trees make paper that later becomes a substrate for writing. So in some ways there is an interesting causal relationship between drawing trees out of individual letters. As well, Bonevardi could be highlighting our ecological concerns about deforestation – which has been dramatically reducing our natural animal and plant habitats and has had a deleterious effect on our climate and environment.

So maybe Bonevardi with these drawings is trying showing us a way to see the forest and the trees at the same time.

¹ Jacobo Fiterman, et al, *Bonevardi Works / Bennett – Bonevardi Collaborations*, (New York: Foundation Alon, 2012), 22