

## Chuck Ramirez, Andrea Caillouet and Jesse Amado: sub-TEXT

Transformer Gallery [Washington, DC]

Paul Ryan

Operating within the permissiveness of poststructuralism, *sub-TEXT* features multimedia text-based work by three Texas artists who create through strategies of isolation (Chuck Ramirez), interpolation (Andrea Caillouet) and dissection (Jesse Amado). For these artists, appropriation is a given. They each collect and intervene, revise and transform, their art emerging from idiosyncratic readings, interpretations and manipulations. The exhibition is an array of dialogues that function as metacommunication, referencing the exchange between viewer and object and the object's "site" of origin—its initial conceptual and/or visual context. Accepting the statement that any text is a story, Ramirez, Caillouet and Amado have created works that are conceptually layered narratives. Each piece has an internal story that can function autonomously and an external reading that cites the transformation of—or from—the causal text.

*sub-TEXT*, deftly curated by Henry Estrada in Transformer's small, eccentric storefront space, is circuitously informed with questions raised by literary and art criticism, particularly those relating to subjectivity, interpretation and context. The show humbly embodies the contemporary practice of collapsing theory into art and art into theory—a dual process that, admittedly, is sometimes an unconscious absorption on the part of an artist. But here, refreshingly, although theory is verbal and this is a show of and about text, the substance of *sub-TEXT* is more about art and artmaking, especially through different modes of appropriation and transformation. The subtext of the exhibition is the ever presence of mediation—the inescapable mental and physical web of context that renders language political in varying degrees.

In his exhibition essay, Estrada states that *sub-TEXT* "explores the hidden, implied and underlying content of words and texts when they are taken out of their original context and re-presented in another." Perhaps more than this, though, the works reveal the chameleonlike nature of language—specifically, how meaning exists in the transaction between reader and viewer, and text and physical/visual context. Meaning does not exclusively reside within any one of these, but emerges through a multidimensional web. Consequently, when context is altered, so is meaning. What is curious about *sub-Text* are the selections of texts and choices about new contexts that each artist makes.



Andrea Caillouet, *Fortune*, 2004

1000 hand-folded offset prints randomly inserted into library books at the Martin Luther King Jr. Library in Washington D. C.

A former graphic designer, Chuck Ramirez appropriates visual and auditory advertising copy and texts from product labels in a circular play of connotation and denotation. Through a lens that serendipitously combines aspects of reader-response with Marxist criticism, his work is also an oblique critique of the manufacture of desire. Ramirez borrows texts that are heavy with connotative meaning in their original, designed context and recontextualizes them, through some strategy of stripped-down visual isolation, in ways that enforce denotative meaning. This isolation exposes the market-oriented intentions of the manufacturer and its authoritative voice, but it also suggests quirky new narratives that take the reader/viewer down unexpected, often humorous paths.

*Taglines*, installed on the gallery's front window, is a dense collection of transposed sound bites and taglines from television advertisements. Revealing the cheesiness of the copy, the *naiveté* of consumers and the will to self-indulge that surrounds and underlies American consumerism, this work also reads like a stream-of-consciousness narrative springing from the mind of a twenty-first-century Fred Flintstone. To a certain extent, retooled texts become the artist's own words and ironically but inevitably allow a new, denotative context to become a connotative one.

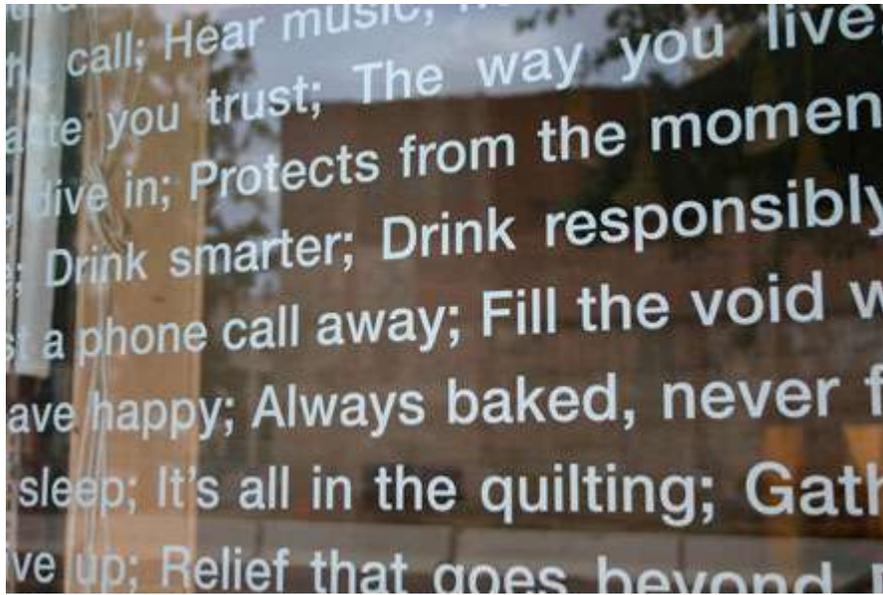
While Ramirez extracts and revises information from the commercial realm, Jesse Amado explores text within and through a specific creative medium and genre: art cinema classics. In *Subtitles*, (*Exterminating Angel*), the artist dissects Luis Bunuel's film *El Angel Exterminador*. Removing all footage except that which contains English subtitles, Amado presents a sequence of dialogues transposed against stills—a cinematic poem or collage that is more puzzling, though perhaps less "disturbing" (to reference Bunuel's disclaimer at the beginning of the film), than the

original. It's a kind of "what if" experiment, where rules for establishing the form of the new work are exclusively determined by the presence of subtitles.



Jesse Amado, *Screenplay (Un Chien Andalou)*, 2004  
Mixed Media

*Screenplay (Un Chien Andalou)* is a large, muted triptych on panels that combines forms of painting and sculpture. The two flanking panels are beautifully subdued fields of text—stacked horizontal rows of painted Dymo Label Maker<sup>®</sup> strips, which contain the entire script of *Un Chien Andalou*, Bunuel and Salvador Dali's classic 1929 surrealist collaboration. On the left and right edges of the unpainted central panel are letters densely stacked into two three-dimensional "blocks." If laid out flat, these groupings of letters would spell the words *screen* and *play*. However, the adjoined letters forming each block are oriented vertically, attached to the panel by their narrow edges. Extending into space at a 90° angle, the compact clusters of sandwiched letters read as geometric shapes rather than readable words. Through the juxtaposition of the shapes of each letter, these literally constructed words are distinct sculptural forms that contain a surprising series of nooks and crannies. In this piece, the word *play* in screenplay is key, both conceptually and formally. For Amado, it functions as an open-ended invitation—more a verb than a noun.



Chuck Ramirez, *Taglines* (detail), 2004

Vinyl on storefront window

Dimensions variable

Andrea Caillouet's work *Fortune* is covertly interactive. Practicing a kind of literal intertextuality, she randomly inserted 1,000 hand-folded offset prints into 1,000 books at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Library in Washington, D.C. Each print is prefolded in the form of a child's "fortune teller"—an origamilike puzzle that is repeatedly opened and closed with both hands to a fixed rhythm, revealing a selection of messages or choices inside. Each of Caillouet's forms contains only two words: LONGING and BELONGING. When an unsuspecting reader at the library discovers one of these enfolded messages, he or she encounters a third voice that acts as a gentle and poetic invitation for reflection and reverie—perhaps a paper shadow cast by the patient resident angels of Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire*.



Jesse Amado, *Subtitles (Exterminating Angel)*, 2004

Video-installation view

In a perceptive statement that addresses her interest in these two words, Caillouet says: “I like that these words rhyme. I like that long is within belong. I like the onomatopoeic nature of long, as it cannot be uttered without a slight linger in tempo. I like the complex relationship these words have with each other.” Regarding the selection of subjects and texts by Ramirez and Amado, these two words echo desires that operate in the realms of advertising and the cinema, establishing a conceptual bond between the works in the exhibition.

The issue of selection is integral to appropriation—a practice that is represented in *sub-TEXT* by a variety of intentions and attitudes, which, in the actual work, result in an abstraction of, a reference to and sometimes a distraction from the original. Ramirez gathers and isolates with an attitude of inventive observation and social critique. Amado’s posture is more aggressive, but embedded in a practice that embraces experimentation. In the role of artist as author, he commandeers, dispossesses and plays, though with a formal elegance. The tone of Caillouet’s practice of appropriation is one of empathy. Through interpolation, interception and chance she initiates reverie and a kind of improvisational, reflective poetry within the unsuspecting reader/viewer. What is gleaned from *sub-TEXT* about appropriation—a concept that has unfortunately and inevitably become a *cliché*—is, in practice, multifaceted and far-reaching. *sub-TEXT* reinforces the postmodern claim that all acts of creation are acts of appropriation—a premise as, if not more, instructive than the perceptions and questions the exhibition offers about language and text.