



Barbara Kruger, *Surveillance*, 1983, color lithograph 11 x 28 in. (28 x 71 cm). Purchase of The Friends of The Trout Gallery, 2023.29.

YOU ARE WARNED AND SURVEILLED

One of the artists most influential to Mark Thomas Gibson is prominent feminist Barbara Kruger; both harness the power of language to present bold political viewpoints.¹⁰ In Kruger's work *Surveillance is your busywork* (1983), her use of the accusatory "your" directly addresses the viewer who is positioned as guilty in the obsessive monitoring of others. Using a design vocabulary learned in the trenches of advertising agencies, Kruger pairs gritty black-and-white photography with bright red bands of color and a bold Futura font. Her work exposes and denounces stereotypes and clichés that enable power to be held in the hands of the wealthy elite.¹¹ Created as a "paste up," a work designed for billboards, subway placards, and even matchbooks, *Surveillance is your busywork* circulated primarily in New York City where it was part of a Metro Transit Authority collaboration with artists.



Ben Shahn, *Starvation Death*, 1942, offset photomechanical poster on paper, 28.38 x 40 in. (72.07 x 101.6 cm). The Trout Gallery, Gift of Robert and Francisca Kan, 2006.6.160.

in surrender. Posted on the wall behind them on a red sheet of paper in black Fraktur script is a Vichy decree from 1942 mandating that French working-class citizens be at the disposal of the Nazi regime. Shahn's poster was part of a targeted campaign to define the nature of the enemy, a propaganda strategy aimed at invoking fear among Americans—the "you" of the titular address—to bolster support for the war at home.¹²

Interdisciplinary theorist W.J.T. Mitchell examines the intersections of visual and verbal communications. He has observed that the dialogue initiated whenever text is combined with image "rarely appears without a hint of struggle, resistance, or contestation."¹³ In this exhibition, works representing a range of cultural perspectives and media provide the opportunity to examine these moments of friction. The artists' decisions about font choice and familiar address, as well as their creative use of visual elements such as borders, scale, and symbols magnify, subvert, and frame interpretation. Ultimately, these works intend to provoke; in various unruly articulations, the artists take poetic license, flip the script, and inspire people to political action.

Lithuanian-born artist Ben Shahn similarly invokes direct speech in his World War II poster, *We French workers warn you... defeat means slavery, starvation, death* (1942). Created during his time working for the United States Office of War Information, Shahn employs his characteristic social realist style to portray a group of French men gathered in front of a stone wall with their hands raised

- 1 Leslie Ross, *Language in the Visual Arts: The Interplay of Text and Imagery* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2014), 5-6.
- 2 Phillip Earenfight, "Buffalo Meat's Price Current and Re-Riding History," in *Re-Riding History: From the Southern Plains to the Matanzas Bay*, ed. Phillip Earenfight (Carlisle, PA: The Trout Gallery, 2018), 42.
- 3 Jasmine Wahl, "The Artist Unraveling American History," *The New York Times*, August 10, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/10/t-magazine/sonya-clark-flags-art.html>.
- 4 Barry Schwabsky, "Suzanne McClelland by Barry Schwabsky," *BOMB*, January 1, 2012, <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/suzanne-mcclelland/>.
- 5 "The Five Orders of Periwigs," The Metropolitan Museum of Art Online, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/392605>.
- 6 Vic Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London* (New York: Walker and Company, 2006), 38.
- 7 Mathew Wilson, "Why William Hogarth Is Britain's Greatest Artist," *BBC*, November 1, 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/culture/article/20211020-why-william-hogarth-is-britains-greatest-artist>.
- 8 "Snow in the City," The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, Online <https://snowcountry.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/explore/snow-in-the-city>.
- 9 "Mark Thomas Gibson and Mario Moore in Conversation," New Art Dealers Alliance, February 19, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-qMlepASJ8>.
- 10 Josseline Black, "The Opening Response: Mark Thomas Gibson," *Umbigo*, July 29, 2020, <https://umbigomagazine.com/en/blog/2020/07/29/resposta-aberta-mark-thomas-gibson/>.
- 11 Roberta Smith, "Barbara Kruger: A Way with Words," *The New York Times*, July 24, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/14/arts/design/barbara-kruger-artist-moma-zwirner-feminist.html>. See also W.J.T. Mitchell and Barbara Kruger, "An Interview with Barbara Kruger," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no.2 (1994), 436.
- 12 Christof Decker, "Fighting for a Free World: Ben Shahn and the Art of the War Poster," *American Art* 33, no. 2, (2019), 89.
- 13 W.J.T. Mitchell, "Word and Image," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. R. Nelson and R. Shiff (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2003).

DISRUPTIVE UNRULY TEXTS, PROVOCATIVE PICTURES

November 10, 2023 - April 6, 2024

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Cover Image:

Suzanne McClelland, *Pussy* (detail), 2002, letterpress on linen pulp paper, 14.625 x 22.5 in. (37.148 x 57.15 cm). The Trout Gallery, Gift of Eric Denker, Class of 1975, 2010.8.1.

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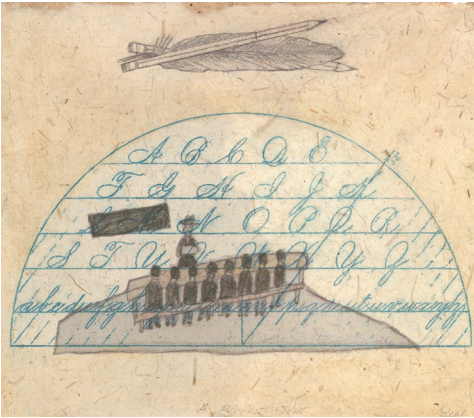
DISRUPTIVE

UNRULY TEXTS, PROVOCATIVE PICTURES

From children’s books to websites to social media, text is integrated into most of the images we encounter in our visual world. While language and pictures often seem inextricably connected in these familiar contexts, reading words and seeing images involve fundamentally different modes of communication.¹ In this exhibition, a diverse selection of artworks from The Trout Gallery’s collection demonstrates how artists, aware of the efficacy of both written and visual expression, use words within their works to satirize social convention, challenge cultural norms, and catalyze civic action. Viewers are asked to interpret and to question the many powerful and, at times, incendiary ways texts and images are combined across a variety of prints, photographs, and sculpture from the 18th through 21st centuries.

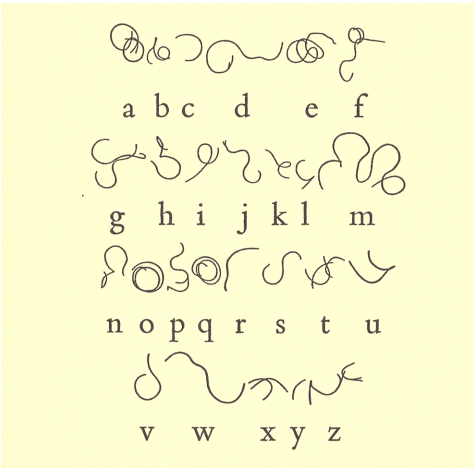
ALPHABETS THAT SLANT AND TWIST

The regular, carefully looped cursive letters that fill the center of Georgia Deal’s print, *A Perfect Slant* (2013), might recall the instructional alphabet wrapped along the walls of a grade school classroom. This allusion to education is fitting as Deal’s work was created as a response to the history of the United States’ off-reservation boarding schools for Native Americans. Specifically, Deal replicates a classroom scene from the 19th-century ledger drawings of captured Kiowa warrior Etadleuh Doanmoe, who recorded his experiences as part of an early experiment in assimilation education that took place between 1875 and 1878 at Fort Marion in St. Augustine, Florida.² There, seventy-two Plains-Indian warriors were trained in the language, religion, and cultural customs of their white captors. To observe the classroom scene depicted in the print, the viewer must look through the foreground of perfect penmanship. The lens of a uniform alphabet acts as an apt metaphor for the aims of forced acculturation.



Georgia Deal, *A Perfect Slant*, 2013, gum transfer, digital monotype; ink on hand-made paper, 9.5 x 11 in. (24.13 x 27.94 cm). Purchase of The Friends of The Trout Gallery, 2023.3.

Far from being a tool for conformity, font becomes a form of resistance in Sonya Clark’s *Twist* (2022). Clark’s work consists of twenty-six squares of lead type carved into individual curl patterns observed in the artist’s hair. Each pattern corresponds to a letter in the Roman alphabet, which appears in miniature below the carved relief. Inspired by Ngũgĩwa Thiong’o’s book *Decolonizing The Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Clark creates a writing system that exists both outside of colonial influence and in direct relationship to her own Caribbean and West African



Sonya Clark, *Twist*, 2022, hair-based font lead type in handmade cloth bound box with pamphlet, 4.5 x 4.25 x 1.75 in. (11.4 x 10.8 x 4.4 cm). Purchase of The Friends of The Trout Gallery, 2023.25.

heritage.³ Each “twist” in the curl pattern is, in a sense, autobiographical; it represents her DNA and her direct connection to her forebearers. Clark’s font thus represents an opportunity to decolonize language.

GLIB HEARTS AND MOCKING WIGS



Suzanne McClelland, *Pussy*, 2002, letterpress on linen pulp paper, 14.625 x 22.5 in. 37 x 57 cm). The Trout Gallery, Gift of Eric Denker, Class of 1975, 2010.8.1.



William Hogarth, *The Five Orders of Periwigs as They Were Worn at the Late Coronation Measured*, 1761, etching on paper, 15.75 x 11.5 in. (40 x 29 cm). The Trout Gallery, Gift of The Brooks V Limited Partnership Collection, 2011.7.69.

Framing plays a similarly important role in guiding viewers through the 18th-century satirical etching by William Hogarth, *The Five Orders of Periwigs as They Were Worn at the Late Coronation Measured Architectonically* (1761). The upper left side of the print provides a type of “key” for reading the image, with letters A through I corresponding to specific features of individual periwigs, highly stylized, powdered hairpieces worn by upper-class men at the time. With its diagrammatic grids, numbers, and letters that correspond to an analysis of individual wig types, this pseudo-scientific presentation echoes the precisely measured and labeled architectural diagrams of classical buildings popular in the 18th century.⁵ As Hogarth’s caption suggests, he was just as skeptical about ostentatious fashion as he was about England’s fascination with Neoclassicism. To keep his ridicule sharp and grounded in a modern vocabulary, Hogarth studied the appearance of text in London city streets; he took notes on the graffiti placed on walls and the signboards on public display, paying particular attention to how words revealed social conditions.⁶ Hogarth’s clever

The words “HOW TO GET ALONG WITH PEOPLE” are written vertically on the right and left sides of Suzanne McClelland’s print *Pussy* (2002). They effectively frame the content of the page, which is filled with seemingly gendered expectations such as “discuss, but don’t argue,” and “don’t burden or depress those around you by dwelling on your minor aches and pains.” Penned in bubbly letters peppered with hearts on pink paper in magenta ink, the handwriting suggests the kind of doodling that might be found in the margins of a schoolgirl’s notebook. The handwriting is not, however, marginalized. Instead, McClelland’s feminized script occupies the center of the work, foregrounding diaristic impulses and personal admonitions. McClelland has long been fascinated with language, not just its appearance and meaning, but also the ways in which it might evoke sound. Here, the handwritten text conjures a girl’s rebellion and resistance to the pedantic voice of an elder who insists on “proper” behavior. The text also provides McClelland with the opportunity to address a subject important to her: women.⁴ With *Pussy*, McClelland not only reclaims a derogatory term directed at women in her title; she also eschews traditional artistic representations of the female body, choosing instead to explore womanhood through language and abstraction.

satire and critique of modernity, specifically his ability to keep abreast of the latest happenings and cultural trends across Europe, has cemented his place as perhaps the most influential visual artist in England’s history.⁷

CRAZY VERSE, PRINT POWER

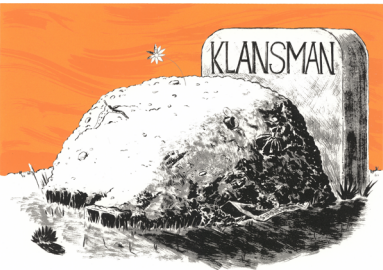


Utagawa Hiroshige (aka Ando), *Twilight Snow on the Asuka Mountain (Asukayama in the Evening Snow)*, from the series *Eight Views of Environs of Edo*, 1837-1838, Ukiyo-e woodcut on paper. The Trout Gallery, Gift of Knut S. Royce, 2013.6.

by Taihaidô Nomimasu, the head of a *kyôka*, or “crazy verse,” poetry club, this print would have originally circulated privately among club members, who likely contributed to its verses and thus appreciated the humorous juxtaposition of an idyllic image and a portentous poem. Hiroshige’s print shown here is from a later edition, published for a wider audience; it reproduces the final three verses of the initial poem, written by Nomimasu himself:

*the snow covers the signs warning against
breaking the cherry branches,
and also breaks them itself⁸*

The text of the poem stands in stark contrast to the hushed wintry scene, suggesting the irony of snow-covered signs warning humans against breaking tree branches in the midst of heavy winter.



Mark Thomas Gibson, *Everyone Should Have One on Their Wall: Sunset*, 2021, 4-color screen print, 13 x 18 in. (22 x 45.7 cm). Purchase of The Friends of the Trout Gallery, 2023.23.

The dissonance between text and image is striking in Mark Thomas Gibson’s print, *Everyone Should Have One on Their Wall: Sunset* (2021). Gibson, known for his graphic novels and comic-book style, depicts a burial mound at sunset, which is more reminiscent of a landfill than a grave, as a banana peel, fishbone, tin can, and a sack of garbage punctuate the clumps of dirt. The saturated orange background highlights a single flower sprouting almost whimsically from the gravesite. The flower stands in stark contrast to the headstone, which spells out KLANSMAN in chiseled letters. Gibson’s grave is not meant to memorialize, but to offer, in his words, “a clear stance on the perpetrators of racism.” The image shows the Klansman put in his place, something Gibson had always wanted to see represented in American history. Gibson also was interested in making the print accessible and affordable for a wide audience in order to “speak truth to power.”⁹ His hope, referenced in the work’s title, is that the image will circulate widely and provoke conversations about white supremacy and racism in American history.