

SIKKEMA JENKINS&CO.

KAY ROSEN

NEW WORK 2020-2021

September 9 – October 16, 2021

Sikkema Jenkins & Co. is pleased to present *Kay Rosen: New Work 2020-2021*, a solo exhibition featuring acrylic gouache paintings on paper, enamel paintings on canvas, and two wall murals. Produced over the past 18 months, these works respond to the fear, isolation, and anxiety experienced during that time.

The foundation of Rosen's work remains language: its ontological function, and the mutability of text and image. She considers language to be "found material," with the potential to engender new readings through minimal intervention. Meticulously hand-painted, her works utilize a range of graphic strategies, color, materials, composition, typography, and scale to shift one's interpretation of otherwise familiar words and phrases. Humor is integral to Rosen's work, often arising from the alternatives to conventional reading that she offers the viewer. In *The Hinge Thing*, an acrylic gouache painting on paper, the three words are rearranged in a vertical stack, aligning their shared letters; the conceptual meaning of *HINGE* thus becomes literal, holding the other two words together through their mutual linguistic components in a metaphorical space of common ground. In *Leaning Tower (El Torre de Cuatro Pisos)*, italics applied to the four stacked Spanish words "piso" (floor) activate a gravitational force which causes the tower of four floors to lean; the text itself becomes a verbal surrogate for the thing it represents. As verbal shortcuts, all of the works allude to larger political, environmental, and social issues. Color also imparts its own distinct meanings on text, such the subtle blue tones of the painting on canvas *Unsung*. While the letters are arranged in order of the word "sung," the lightened blue shade of "un" draws the fragment out from the shadows and into the foreground of our perception, asking us to contemplate the oft-"unsung" roles of frontline workers throughout the pandemic. Viewers interact with these textual compositions closer to how one would move through a landscape or built structure; they are both a physical and conceptual experience of language, in all its contradictions and connotations, to the world around us.

The wall painting *Queue Up* draws on its pre-existing DNA to create a single verbal image suggesting a line of waiting people: *queueueup*. The space is closed up, the self-generating *ue ue* is continued, and the *q* and *p* are written in lower case to mirror each other and create an enclosure that depicts the beginning and end of the queue. The seeds of the new word are present in the old; *queue up* was a found phrase waiting to be turned into something else. Waiting in lines was a dominant narrative over the past year and a half of the pandemic, and it is possible that more is yet to come. For *Stay Away*, initially conceived as a color-pencil drawing, the two words are brought into conjunction through their shared final letters. These two conflicting states reveal their tension through a bifurcated arrangement of words

and colors, reflecting the desire for both closeness and distance within the newly-formed sociomedical conditions of the pandemic.

Concurrent with *Kay Rosen: New Work 2020-2021* is an exhibition of the artist's lists at Krakow Witkin Gallery in Boston from September 18 through October 23. *Kay Rosen: Lists: 1989 – 2021* are a series of multiples made over the past thirty years in media ranging from prints to book covers, videos, bus tailgate posters, wall paintings, and drawing. They organize language and subject into serial systems which redefine history, geography, mythology, mystery, pop culture, and social issues.

Born in Corpus Christi, TX, Rosen's investigation into the visual possibilities of language has been her primary focus since 1968, when she traded in the academic study of languages for the study of language-based art. Rosen's work has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions, including in 1998-1999 a two-venue mid-career survey entitled *Kay Rosen: Lijfjeli[k]je*, curated by Connie Butler and Terry R. Myers at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art and Otis College of Art Design. Other solo exhibitions have been presented at the Aldrich Contemporary Museum, Ridgefield, CT; Contemporary Art Museum Houston and Grazer Kunstverein, Graz, Austria, in collaboration with Matt Keegan; Art Institute of Chicago; Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand; University Art Museum, University of California Santa Barbara; The Drawing Center, New York; MIT List Visual Art Center, Cambridge; and Kunstinstituut Melly (formerly Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art), Rotterdam, The Netherlands. Rosen was included in the Whitney Biennial in 2000 as well as in 1991 as part of Group Material's "AIDS Timeline." Her wall painting, *SORRY*, commissioned by the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. for the East Building's main entrance will be on view through Fall 2021.

Rosen's work is included in the public collections of Art Institute of Chicago, IL; Israel Museum, Art Gallery of New South Wales; Collection Lambert, Avignon, France; Museum of Modern Art, NY; and Whitney Museum of American Art, NY. She was named a fellow for the 2017 John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship in Fine Arts, and is a recipient of Anonymous Was a Woman Grant (2009) and the National Endowment for the Arts Visual Arts Grant (1995, 1989, 1987).

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UPCOMING:

ERIN SHIRREFF

OCT. 29 – DEC. 18, 2021

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OPEN TUESDAY – SATURDAY 10 TO 6