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T.N.T. Text.

Curated by Travis Childers

In times of chaos and upheaval, creative people often turn to the most powerful tool available: the written word. The six artists in this group exhibition at WAS gallery entitled T.N.T. Text. are no exception. Some use words aggressively and publicly, others subtly and privately. Some look outward to the world around them and some look inward to the private world we create within ourselves. The text the artists choose to use becomes another tool in their arsenal, seamlessly integrating with all the other visual elements they incorporate, and not simply something they fall back on. The six artists in this group show at WAS gallery approach their content differently, but they all have one thing in common: they treat their studio not as a bunker, but as a war room.

ABOUT THE WORK Perhaps no other artist working today serves more as an early warning signal for society than the work of Kate Kretz. The artist addresses everything from male aggression and the bully culture, to racism and bigotry, misogyny, and- the current administration. She is aggressive and unapologetic in facing these hard issues head on and confronting the viewer. The ugliness is out in the open in a way that media outlets have failed to present. There is no place to hide; there is no denying what you see. It is also painfully obvious she has paid a heavy price to her psyche to create these works, but she

doesn't hesitate or turn away. The works in this exhibition are from her Bully Culture series in which she suggests unchecked bullying is the source for many of the problems we face in society. We create our own monsters, both from the behavior of the perpetrator and victim.

Barry Jones is a collector of story and his work is a family and communal affair. He enlists the aid of his children and brother to produce his work, using their thoughts and words as a starting point for his installations and site-specific projections. He doesn't stop with his relatives. He reaches out to his community, collecting the stories and concerns of just everyday people, you know, the people who often don't have their stories known. Jones is on a mission to show us the common ground we share; to show us our concerns and fears are not that much different from others around us. And through confronting this awareness he hopes he can heal society and create more understanding. And he also takes on the most important task of all in his work: attempting to teach his children empathy and kindness. Quilting has often been used to tell the story of the craftsperson creating it, using fragments of material available to them.

John Thomas Paradiso approaches this traditional craft in a very contemporary way using what is available to him in telling his story as a gay man. Instead of leftover fabric, he incorporates items found in construction sites and images and text from magazines. His work touches on many aspects of the evolution of the gay community in America: the acknowledgement and

addressing of the AIDS epidemic, it's place in the cultural revolution, and the mainstreaming of gay culture. But his work also reminds the viewer of the negative stereotypes that currently still exist and deals with his own struggles and selfexpectations in finding a balance between his masculine and feminine side. And like traditional quilting that is often taught and passed down from generation to generation, Thomas Paradiso was first exposed to quilting from his grandmothers.

In watching and learning from them, the seed was planted that would later be inspiration for his work as an artist. Aliza Tucker takes text out of context. Her work touches on the concerns of the Internet age; issues of authenticity, authorship, and making sense of the constant bombardment of information. She creates visual poetry by reconfiguring found words and juxtaposing them with images and color to create new meaning. She approaches her work with the concerns of a millennial, both with the greater world abroad and the more immediate world in front of her. Like a lot of those in her generation, Tucker deals with the insecurities her generation faces, which are inward and outward. Many of her themes touch on both the embrace and fear of technology, an uncertain economic future, and the feeling of inheriting a world of problems. Tucker also deals with the anxieties that can affect anyone from any generation: finding one's place in the world, in a relationship, or in your own skin. All this comes from an acute awareness of the people and things around her, and in this she serves as both recorder and commentator.

Judy Southerland is the kind of artist who picks up things along the way, materials and experiences, and seamlessly blends them into her art-making processes. She incorporates traditional material such as paint with fabric and found objects, and then jumps to video and text. She has the enviable trait of being restless, always searching and examining everything around her and finding inspiration from a number of sources. Growing up in the American South and witnessing all the racial issues from her youth, she gained a distrust of words, seeing the hypocritical nature between what someone says and what someone does. Nonetheless, she decides to use them in her work.

Last but not least, Linda Hesh explores human relationships, both public and private. She explores our own preconceived ideas about others who are different from us, and the effects those ideas have. Through text, photography, and public works she addresses the marginalization of identity and how control is maintained through politics. She is not afraid to address the taboo, and also to confront the viewer with the taboo. In fact, it is easy to say Hesh's work is not truly completed until it exists in the public realm.