

Amy Sillman

H O R I Z O N L I N E



Contents

Introduction.....	III
Diana R. Block	
Acknowledgments.....	V
What You Find There.....	1
Dave King	
Plates.....	9
Exhibition Checklist.....	28
Biography.....	30
Credits.....	33

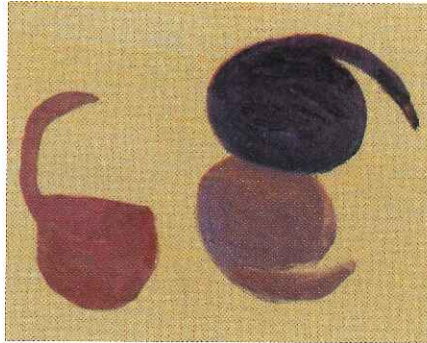
What You Find There

Dave King

1.

Everyone knows Zeno's Paradox, whereby a letter will reach its destination only after first traveling halfway there, then half of the remaining distance and half the distance that remains after that—so that ultimately it never arrives. Of course, in Zeno's world, letters weighed a ton, and the punctuation was giant! You could stand around all day watching them not arrive.

Seriously, though: correspondence is by nature a translation, arising spontaneously but delayed in transmission and sticky. It will always be.



is by nature a translation, arising from mission. Weighty and diaphanous

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2.

Years ago, a friend told me she didn't understand painting because it wasn't structured like sex. What she meant was that wherever time is a factor, a work will begin with seduction and build to a big moment followed by satisfaction. Though no one mentioned sex at the time, this is the same five-point plot format they taught us in ninth grade—*exposition* to *complication* to *climax* to *falling action* to *denouement*, laid out in a diagram that looked like a witch's hat—and it's reliable in works where time, or more accurately, sequence, is controlled by the maker. But with paintings, we're much more on our own. Our guide withdraws, and the viewer decides where to look first, next, last. Even the most blatant painting allows the viewer to sidle in arbitrarily, at an edge or at the center, with image or color or shape or line, all the while

yearning for that moment of seduction, that stolen kiss. So where is a painting's exposition; where's its climax? In "Letter From Texas #23," a great argyle turtle swims toward an arabesque (petals; turbine; roller coaster) beyond which glitters a busy dreamland of a marina. Is this the moment I lose my heart?



Or is it with a line of discs, rolling into, then out of, pink rubber clarity?
Is it red?

A friend writes letters filled with character, with description, with adventure.
You don't want those letters to stop, or to peak.

3.

"Outside in the corridor it sounds like one of my boar-like neighbors is having an asthma attack. Yesterday I heard a scraping at my door... It was the lady upstairs with one of those carpet sweepers that are really like brooms with a compartment for the debris..."

—Letter, AS to DK, July 6, no year, most likely 1975



4.

Often when Amy and I visit galleries we create a list of words, two words per show or artist or room, each DK word paired with one AS. Sometimes our pairs rhyme or alliterate or otherwise compliment each other—homonyms, cryptonyms! Sometimes they form a curt directive or pose a question, or both. Occasionally, they're the same word.

(I think of a writing assignment I've given college freshmen: 1, select one word to describe yourself; 2, investigate the meaning of your first or last name; 3, compare. Invariably, some kid announces he's far too multifaceted and complex for part one; can't or won't. "But it's a *game!*" I cry. "An exercise in resonance, precision, vibration! turns in papers, and inevitably, one

More than reduction, the best of our subjective but not inaccurate. Every distortion, but as a record of our up well. The art achieves a kind of fions of when, where, which nar-doors opened, and what we wore,



veiled. The generating impulse—that just knocking around with a loved one is among life's goodnesses—is the most invisible, most implicit of all.

Just pick something!" Then the class word predominates: "unique.")

lists yields a kind of cracked haiku, translation contains aspects of occasional afternoons, these hold headline prominence, while ques-row stairs we climbed, which glass ate, or carried in our pockets grow

5.

But back to Zeno. Is it too obvious to equate his concern for arrival with my friend's notion of accessible structure? Perhaps movies and TV have turned us into climax junkies, or perhaps earlier audiences, too—from, say, the days when chamber music was the featured entertainment—heard in developing chords the evocation of sex, of a party.

Still, there's more to the paradox than a race to the finish. Even to reach the halfway point, that letter must first travel halfway to the half, and before that, halfway to the half of the half, et cetera. It makes you wonder how a letter ever leaves a desk! Again, though, it's not arrival or departure, but the division of time: time infinitely split and parsed itself approximates stasis, becomes of a flipbook. It's the cells that matter now, more than the flipbook. And somewhere in this multiplicity of moments, of shifts through time mutations set off sparks. A hand, a sam piling up under the clouds. This is what letters of friendship are like: *not* schematic, *not* regular, *not* points cresting into a wave, but haphazard. Bulletins lit by adrenaline. A letter will crackle with what someone felt or knew or saw — and captured — before the moment passed.

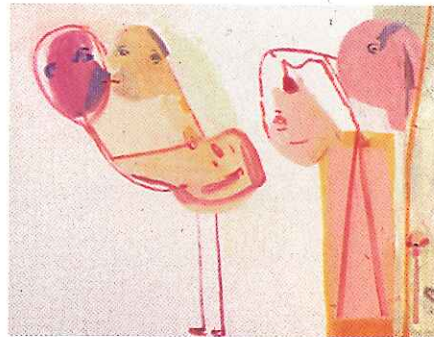


6.

I've made a list of words based on the "Letters From Texas" paintings. I did this casually, but there are other approaches, speedy as flashcards or one word a day for a month. The methodology is not at all rigid.

For starters, it's lonelier playing a game alone. The task of compression is more encumbering without a partner to step up and fill in the gaps. If I write "Lasso," I want someone to contribute "Family portrait" or "Ghost rodeo" or "Curtain" to the recipe. Regarding "Punchwork," I demand a second opinion. And there are rebuses and double-entendres here, tricks of scale or light or perception—as in life! From just such second guessing, slippery responses: "Emergent;" "Recreation;" "A pace." The words land on whatever seems prominent in the paintings, but the paintings themselves short-circuit and overturn vocabulary.

Additionally, doubles abide here. pelgangers and stop action dem- from one. But there's the twoness parade. Company, friendship, co- stewardship, solace, and kissing. realize these are social paint- oddballs, couples, enthusiasts.



ers. We tote around shared bur- over individual burdens. Some of crystal shirts, or sport thumblike sit on laps, perform yoga, maybe we instant-message. We cop some Z's when we are weary, then get up and race around. What are we pursuing, if not ourselves?

Shadows and mirrors and dop- onstrate the twoness that springs of two, too, threaded through the operation, conversation. Yearning, The more you look, the more you ings. They're about us, and we are We are pet lovers and wallflow- dens—or at least, we commiserate us dress funny, in bag heads and noses. We lean together, gossip,

And kissing. Is there a single better word for "Letter from Texas #12?" Of a thousand viewers, is there one who will draw some other reference? Of course, there are crowd scenes, too, and all manner of fanfare.

7.

"The best museum I've been to ever is the back part of the science museum—The Pitt River. It looks like 500 years of objects kept on your kitchen orange rinds and wooden horses) insane because it's all in glass with handwritten tags... Every case (with more junk piled in) that you of detrita from every culture and a 3-story building which is basi- is so crammed with 300,000 year heads, dead bird necklaces, pa- masks, and on and on, that there's thing has a tag with TINY handwriting like this: RING, 458 A.D. NEPAL. WORN TO INDUCE VOMITING... Great stuff. They have a bee colony living in the side of the building near the stairs... Then we went to 'Gandhi.'"

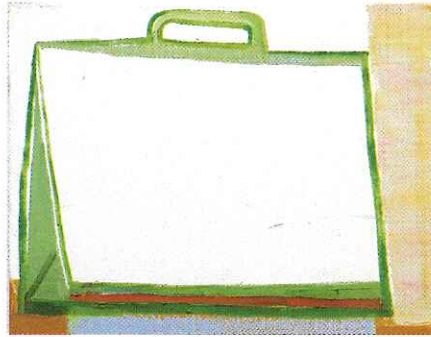


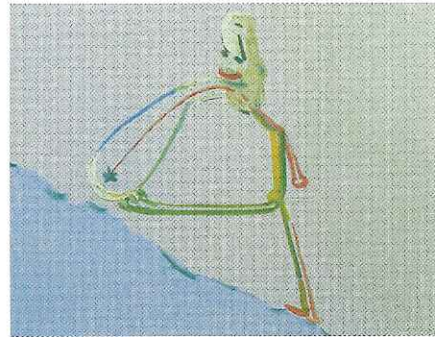
table (all that junk like shriveled but the stuff they have is totally cases and all labeled elaborately has about 6 drawers underneath can open and look in. It's a mess every era of human history, all in cally a large tiered room. The place old beads, scraps of lace, shrunken pooses, magic wands, guns, cradles, practically no place to walk. Each

—Letter, AS to DK, undated, probably 1982

8.

I have on my desk a set of prints of the "Letters From Texas." The reproductions are tiny, roughly postcard size, and the reduction of so many busy and complex scenes reinforces the sense that these are indeed postcards. You can imagine turning them over to scan the messages on the back: "Hey, this just occurred to me ..." "I thought of you here ..." "Just realized ..." "You'll flip your wig ..." Some messages pick up where others left off, and you make the connection because, of course, you're the recipient. You've been following along. Sometimes a blank in the correspondence takes on friendship itself. Each painting con-

Turn the cards over. There's a moment of loss, and you relish this moment for being delicate and irretrievable. Then thought takes over. This one's a cityscape: Viewings? Sun on rippled pavement, on tumbling in excitement. Tourists at



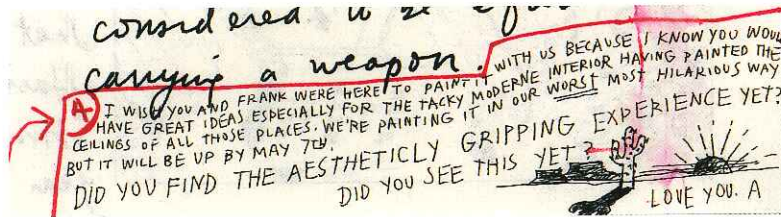
link's missing, but as you fill in the shaggy, relaxed rhythms of the stitutes a missive to each viewer.

ment of thrilling vertigo before you ish this moment for being delicate over, and here's a sunset, then another ...; are those two doomed build-wavelets, on flower beds, sunlight railings or peeping into tunnels (one

funnel has curtains and might be a forehead). Above the harbor, an interesting tree. As for action, it's not so much interrupted as captured in progress: we pass the teal zone on the way to the ochre. In the midst of the hubbub, a girl plays the clarinet, and someone's paused and sent you a postcard. You want to respond.

“Hello, there! Received your latest batch of correspondence. As always, my blood races a little to learn what you’re doing. This morning I like the one with the two intrepid hikers—at least, that’s what I’m drawn to in my current sentimental mood, though I know that by nightfall some more lopsided, more craggy, less lovable image will clutch at the imagination. Which one will it be, I wonder. As you must have guessed, I dig the red...

9.



—Letter, AS to DK, April 14, 1982

Dave King holds a BFA in painting and film from Cooper Union and an MFA in writing from Columbia University. His poems have appeared in *The Paris Review*, *Big City Lit*, and the anthology *This New Breed*, and his novel *The Ha-Ha* will be published by Little, Brown & Co. in January 2005. He lives in Brooklyn, New York.