



## Joe Amrhein: Typography, Painting and Poetry

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To a noninitiate, things like serifs, dropped or block shadows, chiseled, Roman, Gothic, or script may not mean much, but to those of us who love typography, these are things of beauty. Amrhein's mastery of the sign painter's flats and stripers as well as letter proportion and spacing are apparent in this series of works. Amrhein, who is also the proprietor of Pierogi, (the gallery formerly known as Pierogi 2000) is a major masher in the Williamsburg scene, and this exhibition represents a collaboration and cross-pollination that makes B'burg unique in the current art world. There are, in this show, examples of several directions of investigation, all with delicious potential. One series of work is lines of text painted on overlapping strips of Mylar film. Thicker bands are covered with progressively thinner ones. Each strip is executed in a consistent typeface, and the translucent film allows the underlayers to be read through the accumulation of text. The final product has a quality analogous to trying to listen to several conversations simultaneously. Heidi Cody, who recently exhibited at this venue, created an alphabet, which dealt with type design, but focussed on individual letters isolated from popular consumer products. With Amrhein's pieces the letters coalesce into words and sentences like "TOO ABSTRACT TO ACTUALLY REFER TO A PARTICULAR SOURCE," "LATE-MODERN, POST SPUTNICK, HARD-WARE-AND-DIME STORE TOTEM," or, "WHIMSY WITH A WHIFF OF ALLEGORY." Without a change of underwear and one of those puffy bow-ties, I'm probably not qualified to comment, but it sounds an awful lot like "POETRY," an antecedent of which could be the "Concrete Poetry" movement popular in Europe during the birth of "Pop Art." Other works utilize plate glass, a common surface for sign painters as well as the most Duchampian of grounds for the metaphorical tinkerer. "Rationalized" is a series of glass shelves each painted with black characters or fragments and words. When lit from the proper angle the shadows on the wall reveal the text. "Insite" is displayed in an alcove. It consists of large fragments of lettered plate glass some leaning on the wall others lying on the floor broken as if by an earthquake. On the shards are sentences, which begin coherently but shatter into chaos like the glass they're painted on. This could be interpreted as the fragility of language, but I couldn't help thinking of "Kristall nacht," and the delicate nature of any cultural manifestation in a hard world. □

Joe Amrhein, *Post-Sputnick*, (detail), 2001, enamel and gold on vellum with linen tape. Courtesy Koestling Hall and the artist.