

## 'No Way'

Mel Bochner, Bruce Nauman, Kay Rosen and Rachel Perry Welty



Bruce Nauman "Untitled", 1994, color lithograph, 30 x 40 inches

By Joanne Silver

What does communication look like? What do words really mean? The quartet of works in this exhibition investigated those questions -- with wit and flair and a healthy dose of skepticism. Rachel Perry Welty's *You may already be a winner* -- with the title written in cursive script formed from an unbroken length of crumpled aluminum foil -- makes clear the come-on is really just a har-binger of dashed dreams. And Mel Bochner's lush oil-on-velvet grid of text "blah, blah, blah, blah" embodies the idea that this empty-sounding phrase sometimes conveys more than a legitimate sentence can. Kay Rosen's continuously looping DVD of the word "Sisyphus" misspelled 70 different ways and Bruce Nauman's lithograph of two people engaged in energized dialogue present two more wry takes on the minefield that is human discourse.

A visual exploration of this subject straddles at least two levels of meaning. There is the message embedded within an artist's creation, which appears as legible words in the pieces by Welty, Rosen, and Bochner and as an allusion to language in Nauman's print. The second layer, either intensifying or challenging the content, involves the art's ability to register with the viewer.

This striving for contact takes shape in throwaway materials (Welty's foil) and throw-away language ("blah, blah, blah"). If the mythological figure Sisyphus achieved a sort of tragic heroism in his futile attempt to roll a boulder up a hill, Rosen's *Sisyphus* (1991/2011) captures something closer to absurdity: yes, there really are that many ways to make a spelling mistake. To underscore the point, each one is accompanied by a drumroll.

Nauman and Bochner tap into a deeper sense of mystery and missed opportunity. It is impossible to decode the expressive gestures of the two individuals conversing in Nauman's untitled 1994 print. "Blah" turns strangely fascinating when it is repeated four times and drenched in Bochner's gooey colors. Meaning and connection lurk in places often too banal to mention, but sometimes too rich to ignore.

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NO WAY: Mel Bochner,  
Bruce Nauman, Kay Rosen and Rachel Perry Welty  
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617-262-4490,  
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