

## Tauba Auerbach at New Image Art

In this quietly stunning debut show Tauba Auerbach presented works on paper of invigorating simplicity, restoring the connection between written language and the hand that shapes it. She also invites us to savor the consonance and friction between letters' dual roles as images and building blocks of meaning.

A recent graduate of Stanford University, Auerbach works as a sign painter in San Francisco, in a shop devoted to the traditional practice of hand lettering. Of the works in the show, three large ink drawings (each about 4 feet high) read as intricate calligraphic odes to individual letters, though the letters themselves are so elaborated as to be nearly impossible to identify. Articulated in exquisite swirling strokes, edged by fine scalloped lines and delicate geometric tracery, they've been subsumed by the beauty of their own ornamentation, like the capital letters of illuminated manuscripts. Auerbach's work resonates with the late Margaret Kilgallen's (a friend from overlap-

with vernacular forms.

Most of the other works in the show reenacted, in one way or another, the everyday magic of cognition, the miracle of mind and eye in concert, transforming what we see into what we know. *Eye Exam #4* features rows of black block letters of diminishing size, like those on an optometrist's chart. Here, though, every letter is the letter "C"; with clinical economy, Auerbach sets in motion a delightful, punning circularity. In *How to Spell the Alphabet*, she writes out each letter phonetically in red capitals: EY, BEE, CEE, DEE, EE, EF, DJEE and on through EX, WAI and ZEE. The graphically crisp, retro lettering style adds a whiff of nostalgia to this evocation of language's reflexive capacity.

Throughout her canny work,

Auerbach illustrates how visually pliable language can be, and also how malleable its meaning. *All True #1* was the show's most amusing example. A small, accordion-fold book, it's an experiment, the artist writes in an accompanying statement, "with using language to cheat itself." The book begins with the word "yes," with one of its near synonyms, "consent," on the facing page. "Consent" is then paired with one of its synonyms, "permission." The pairs of equivalent words continue, one small step at a time, until you reach the final word, "no," which follows logically and yet comes as a shock. "Yes" has changed into "no" before our eyes—a feat as provocative and revelatory as this show itself.

—Leah Ollman

Tauba Auerbach: *E*, 2005, ink on paper, 50 by 38 inches; at New Image Art.

