

'Writing Letters'

Through Nov. 30, Luggage Store Gallery

In 1968 environmental artist Robert Smithson wrote "In the illusory babels of language, an artist might advance specifically to get lost, and to intoxicate himself in dizzying syntaxes, seeking odd intersections of meaning, strange corridors of history, unexpected echoes, unknown humors, or voids of knowledge ..."

Joseph Amrhein (Brooklyn), Tauba Auerbach (San Francisco), and Steve Powers (New York), the artists whose work makes up Luggage Store Gallery's "Writing Letters," have lost themselves in the maze suggested by Smithson, each to different effect. The exhibition's title facilitates several different reads of the show, and wordsmiths of every ilk will find something compelling in how these artists reconfigure language and text.

Auerbach continues her ongoing investigation into the properties of alphabets (Arabic, Braille, and Morse code) by either collapsing them into an unintelligible mass (*The Whole Alphabet Lowercase*) where each letter has been typed, one on top of the other or dismantling and restructuring the letters in such a way as to create a new symbol (*Components, In Order*). Powers's "signs" are a disruption of narrative and call into question the purpose of signage. In each of his untitled enamel panels, a story is evident, but the stark images and text fragments don't lend themselves to a simple story line, nor do they try to advertise anything. Amrhein offers art critics a ready-made exhibition review in his wall installation *26 Points*: A selection of artspeak words taken from *ArtForum* magazine is painted in different styles and fonts. Dotted lines run from one word to the next and create phrases such as "the images suggest domesticity yet feel coolly." He also pulled a phrase from the March 2005 issue of the magazine — "Every aesthetic detail is considered, determined, emphatic and at the same time oddly diffuse" — and painted it across the molding of the gallery's giant bay windows, drawing attention to the view framed by the windows overlooking Market Street. Out of the *ArtForum* context and reapplied in a gallery setting, the quote becomes simultaneously meaningless and applicable to anything.

Daily, noon–5 p.m., and by appt., 1007 Market, SF. (415) 255-5971, www.luggagestoregallery.org. (Katie Kurtz)

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BY TAUBA AUERBACH (2005)