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HARVEY OPGENORTH

ATTENTION SEEKER

Working for over a decade between painting, sculpture, installation, performance, photography and drawing, Harvey Opgenorth has produced a potent and provocative body of work that continually challenges us to assess the efficacy of our own two eyes. Opgenorth's intentions are acute—to reveal the neglected sites of sight—but his work possesses both a humor and generosity that position his ethos closer to that of a guide than a guru. In fact, his particular role under the rubric of Conceptual Artist might be more playfully titled *Cartographer of Invisible Rabbit Holes*—one who maps the pitfalls and the portals that lie fallow in our fields of vision.

The tool for his excavations, his delineations? A sharpened question mark. For example in *Museum Camouflage*, an early series of interventions begun in 1998, Opgenorth stood in front of the paintings of Ellsworth Kelly, Mark Rothko and others while wearing outfits designed to allow him to blend into the works he was often accused of obscuring. In *Subliminal* (2006), he sculpted the very word in eye-searing crimson neon, both upending its definition and undermining its potency by making a spectacle of it. And for *Objet Trouvé – Accidental Awareness* (2010) in this exhibition, Opgenorth installed caution/traffic signs he had collected from various roadsides, each one bearing evidence of having been hit by a car. With reflective stripes that slyly nod to Op Art, these found sculptures serve as further proof of the ways in which we as a culture tend to ignore—or, at least, bump up against—even the most obvious of signs.

Opgenorth's work doesn't only call attention to what we might be seeing, but also what we might be doing. In *Peripheral Vision* (2010), the black void that engulfs our view—that at once advances and recedes from sight—paradoxically releases us from the distractions of looking at it, and we who have been given “nothing” to see by the artist are now enabled to generate (or project, or hallucinate) a vision of our own for the gallery wall. In this manner, the painting doubles as a certain reminder that an artist may very well pave the way for seeing, but that what is perceived is, in effect, always produced in collaboration with the viewer.

Pay attention to Opgenorth's work even more closely, and one begins to realize that his proposed alliance between artist and audience conveys a message that carries far beyond the confines of the museum. Reminded of our own creative powers—made aware of our tendency toward inattention—perhaps we will be moved to re-envision ourselves, and to recognize that illusions – whether optical, political, social or otherwise – succeed only with our consent.

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