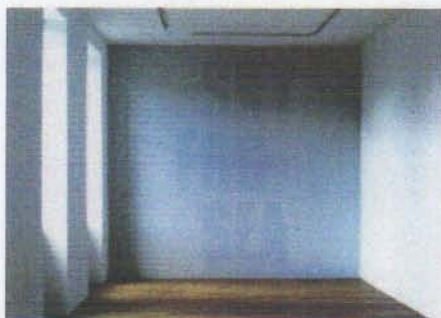


# frieze



Kay Rosen  
Seascape  
2008  
Wall painting  
Installation view

## Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh, UK

Since opening a floor of their Georgian townhouse as a gallery in 1998, Florence and Richard Ingleby have shown the work of many artists, notably James Turrell, Sean Scully, Callum Innes and concrete poet, sculptor and avant-gardener Ian Hamilton Finlay, whose estate they now represent and whose legacy has proved to be something of a point of ordination for the gallery over the years. The gallery recently moved to somewhere significantly larger and more public - three floors and 6,000 square feet of space in a Victorian building overlooking the back of Waverley Station. Until two years ago the building housed the atmospheric and grimy night club The Venue, where, once upon a time, the club Pure launched techno music upon Scotland. It was along this street that Irvine Welsh's anti-hero Renton sprinted in the opening sequence of *Trainspotting* (1996) to the strains of Iggy Pop's 'Lust for Life' (1977). Although the building has been completely remodeled, there is still a noticeably edgier atmosphere here than in their previous gallery.

The inaugural exhibition by American artist Kay Rosen is of a series of works that address many of the ideas contained in Hamilton Finlay's oeuvre, although they also relate to the text-based American conceptualism plotted by Ed Ruscha, Lawrence Weiner and others. Rosen studied and was a lecturer in linguistics, before concentrating on minimal and vivid visual expressions of the graphic and grammatical components that affect reading. She commented in a 2006 interview that, 'the word is a construction that contains aspects of other physical constructions, like buildings or bodies.' Her text-based word drawings and wall paintings are in some important sense a response both to the current site and to the history of the gallery. One of the two wall paintings in the exhibition is *Memory of Red* (2008), which consists of the word 'remembered' spelt out in block capitals. By painting the last three letters of the word in pale pink, Rosen gives a practical demonstration of the subjective recollection of colour.

This exhibition of works on paper and wall paintings is called, fittingly, 'Huen', as almost all of the work uses colour as a way of interrupting

the meaning of words. Colour composition, like Rosen's use of spaces, punctuation, upper or lower case letters and margins, is a way of making words strange, as in *Pain* (1997-2008) which splits the word yellow into two constituent parts ('yell' and 'ow') to make a pun on the colour associated with cowardice. For the piece entitled *Flaming O* (2008), Rosen inscribes 'flaming' in salmon pink and the 'o' in red pink. The work and the title undo one another; the signifier for a pink exotic bird is upstaged by the more intriguing idea of a flaming 'o' - whatever that might be.

Rosen has described her text-based works as 'resignifiers' of meaning. In deciphering the legend contained in the drawing *Look Out (Up and to the Right)* (2003) the word 'locus' is transformed into 'locust' when the viewer follows the instruction to read away from the central word and to see the letter 'l' at the margin. More allied perhaps to the deadpan phraseology of Ruscha than to the sloganeering of Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer, her work nonetheless does articulate something of the political uses and abuses of language, as for example in the drawing *New Orleans* (2005-6) in which the letters OH NO AH hint at the inadequate response of the Bush administration to the catastrophic flooding of that city and to the Biblical rhetoric the incumbent president employs.

Perhaps the key work in the exhibition is *Seascape* (2008): a wall painting of three grey words on a lighter grey background. The words are: sky, fog, sea. This work only half rhymes with the poetic envisioning of Scotland that found memorable expression in Hamilton Finlay's garden, *Little Sparta*, and his *Wild Hawthorne Press*. There is a blunt paucity to the block capitals rendered in industrial paint that is suggestive less of Utopia than it is of something leaden. The mutability of the beach is outside somewhere. In this work Rosen draws together her own Conceptual background and the contained lyricism of concrete poetry. It's a piece that brings to mind the first point made by Sol LeWitt in his 'Sentences on Conceptual Art' (1969): 'Conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach.'

Sarah Lowndes

# Kay Rosen