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Kay Rosen

Ten in One Gallery
526 West 26th Street, Chelsea

Paul Morris Gallery
465 West 23rd Street, Chelsea
Through April 29

To contemplate Kay Rosen's dryly amusing painted wordplay is to feel one's brain being reprogrammed for greater flexibility. Working with the skills of a professional sign painter, the former linguist traffics in puns, anagrams and palindromes and further complicates matters by strategically adjusting visual form to conceptual content.

At Ten in One, five white canvases, each bearing a short column of words, are hung around the room at varying heights. By altering one or two letters in each case, Ms. Rosen creates a head-spinning mix of the literal and the figurative.

One that leans on the floor reads "Stack, Stick, Stack, Stick" — in other words, some words stacked like sticks. The low-hanging position of another canvas is reflected in its text: "Droop, Droop, Droop, Drop"; a higher one says appropriately, "Climb, Limb, Limb, Limb." Then you arrive at one hung way up high with just two white words spelled from the same letters on a sky blue field: "Float" and "Aloft." They float aloft like transcendentalist clouds.

At Paul Morris, Ms. Rosen is showing seven recent drawings beautifully made in graphite on paper. "Hannah and Her Family" is a psychologically charged collection of palindromes: "Hannah, Sis, Sis, Mom, Dad, Nan, Pop." For "Between You, Me, & the Lamppost" the artist has drawn just two commas and an ampersand, which is puzzling until you realize those are indeed the elements that come between the words in the title.

KEN JOHNSON
