

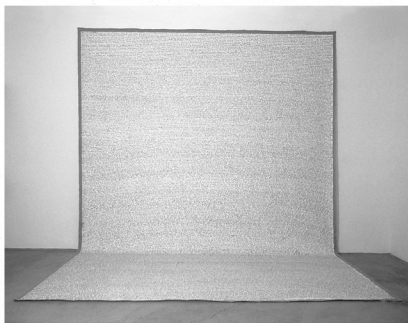
Sean Landers

at REGEN PROJECTS, 5 March–9 April

"HELLO MY NAME IS SEAN. CLEARLY I'M A SELF-OBSSESSED EGO MANIAC BUT THIS IS HARDLY RARE FOR AN ARTIST THEREFORE NOT REALLY WORTH MENTIONING...IT'S TRUE, EVEN THOUGH I AM OFTEN SELF DEPRICATING YOU AND BOTH KNOW THAT DEEP DOWN I THINK I'M FUCKING GREAT." [sic]

This glib introduction begins one of Sean Landers' wildly verbose mental meanderings. The monstrous monologue that ensues covers an enormous 17' x 14' white canvas entitled *Thought Bubble* (all works, 1994), a stream-of-consciousness ramble written in sloppy capital letters. Throughout, Landers' verbal and visual shenanigans are enticing but impossible to follow. His engaging yet annoying and contradictory work pulls the viewer in, while insistently shutting the viewer out. The first few lines of his texts may be relatively easy to read, but one gets increasingly more lost trying to find the beginning of the next line after the end of the last, or just following a single line. As one scans the overwhelming whole, pearls of wisdom emerge beside clunkers of banality, and then fade back into the morass. Here, text is as tantamount as it is superfluous.

Landers' word paintings are visually stunning. Joseph Kosuth, Robert Barry, John Baldessari, and Lawrence Weiner may have opened the door into a world of words, but it was Allen Ruppersberg who leapt through it with paintings depicting the complete text of entire novels; Landers puts an obsessively personal spin on the tradition. The impact of so many words in one's face is daunting, especially when the canvas itself spills out onto the gallery floor. While the artist has also produced videos and published a book, *Sic*, his canvases are more compelling because they maintain a hold over the viewer which is not entirely dependent upon their insouciant content. Whereas *Thought Bubble* is based on excess, a smaller canvas, *Really*, contains some blank space at the bottom. It is clearly an ironic device; this artist is not one to be at a loss for words. The themes included in this work are the same as always: his failures and successes as an artist, lover, son, and member of society. Even though in-



variably erratic and self-indulgent, Landers' compositions are unrelentingly fun, if not funny. Misspellings are the rule, and bad grammar and faulty punctuation are rampant, none of which interferes with the thrill we get from peeking into someone else's closet of purported vulnerabilities.

Among the subjects Landers addresses in *Really* is another of the works in the exhibition: a wordless painting thumbtacked to the wall and entitled *I Can't Think*, which comprises horizontal bands of color shakily painted across its width. The lines of color here substitute for lines of text; yet without the words, there is nothing to engage the viewer. We no longer get the feeling that we are reading someone

else's diary or peeking into someone's psyche. The line painting is neither an effective critique of abstract painting nor does it advance any aesthetic idea of its own. *I Can't Think* lies limp, as we must suppose it is intended to, for one part of this exhibition provides the commentary to another part of it, well before we are allowed to reach our own conclusions.

This same impetus toward adolescent deprecation drives Landers' series of *Newspaper Cartoons*. Outlining the profile of Nancy Kerrigan in black ink, Landers exaggerates her large nostrils and adds ears, transforming her into a pig on ice. He darkens Michael Jackson's facial lines to make him scarier than in real life, and draws wrinkles on the faces of Roger Daltrey and Pete Townsend, depicting them as true "grandfathers" of rock-and-roll. These are humorous one-liners, and in their current configuration they are little else. In his videos and texts, Landers often lets the viewer into his studio to witness his creative process, but these doodles are just what they appear to be: mindless exercises and not insightful commentary, nor even thoughtful comedy.

Landers repeatedly writes that he has no ideas, that he is a bad artist, and that he doesn't know what to do. While his work is consistently cheeky and fun enough to interpret his proclaimed insecurity and insincerity as a charming vulnerability—even if it is often designed to make us think it quite disagreeable—Landers is treading a thin line, daring us to take him at his word.

Alisa Tager is a writer and curator who splits her time between New York and Los Angeles.

Sean Landers
Thought Bubble, 1994
Oil on canvas
210" x 168"

Sean Landers
Bonzo, 1994
Clay on armature, maquette cast in bronze
16" x 17-1/2" x 10"