David Buckingham

The Writing on the Wall

In his welded metal wall works David Buckingham absorbs, muses upon, mirrors, and upends the public language of his country, chewing on the word-image of Pop art and the imaged words of the Internet and spitting them out as profane illuminations, banners of defiance and provocation, calls to arms and calls to a peaceable future. These are wake-up calls – not because they are "political statements," which they aren't, but because they reverberate with clamor and clarion. They look noisy, they read noisy, and all they need is for everyone who sees them to read them out loud – at the top of their lungs.

Buckingham is an nth-generation Pop artist, to be sure. But he replaces Pop irony with sarcasm and realism, refashioning mundane street info and bar talk's coarse stream of consciousness into roughly elegant typographies forged from sensuously damaged scrap metal. Pop art per se presented itself as up to date and featureless, in emulation of the ads and commercials it reflected. Buckingham's "neo-Pop" brings back the original feel with a formidable twist: this time, stay mad. His approach is not "cool," like Pop's own, but rough, textured, imbued with character – and with passion. Buckingham isn't asking us to stay, or even get, mad about any particular thing (although his references to the contemporary world can be pretty pointed), but to sensitize ourselves to the outside world's enduring sensuality – a sensuality that includes epithets and descriptions as well as shapes and materials, and one that relies on imperfections and decay.

David Buckingham does not make signs. Maybe you could say that he welds poetry, but that credits him for his phrases more than he wants to be. Rather, Buckingham records the language of his time and place in a durable but flexible substance – a substance arguably as durable and flexible as language itself. What we say – and how we say it – to one another may seem like so much smoke signaling; but Buckingham thinks that our language, even at its roughest, has a monumental quality to it, and brings out that quality in a manner at once as modern as the words and as timeless as the impulse to speech itself.

Peter Frank

Los Angeles, August 2010

David Buckingham

"Dark Side of the Sun" at OK Harris, September 2008

Ex-New Yorker, now residing in LA, David Buckingham is showing a group of his metal "paintings" at OK Harris through October 11. They really aren't paintings at all, but welded constructions (the artist refers to them as sculptures) using entirely found color and materials. Yet they are pictorial in their presence, mostly rectangular in format, and surprisingly delicate in their materiality. Most striking is their array of industrial colors, aged and scarred to a luscious patina. Buckingham's work is like the secret obsession of a manic scrap metal salvage guy -- fishing loaded words and phrases from the stream of pop culture, and enlarging them into grand and beautiful icons of American grit. There's a handmade folksiness to some of these pieces, particularly the tamer works like "All the Animals Come Out at Night" and "The End", but most overcome quaintness with a boisterous tongue-in-cheek pop sarcasm that reads as a sort of swaggering switchblade Americana.

Lines from movies, "Me Love You Long Time", exclamations, "Whap!", excerpts from police handbooks, "California Penal Code", along with several large multicolor replicas of infamous handguns, invoke a film noir version of the cultural underbelly. But in contrast to the offhandedness of their subjects, these objects are meticulously crafted color arrangements that reveal Buckingham's sophisticated visual intuitions. Only one of his "Color Study" pieces is in this show -- a black & white one at that -- part of a beautiful ongoing series that eliminates the verbal element to present richly colored geometric configurations that are pared down to the refined formal underpinnings of Buckingham's project.

Steven Alexander
New York, September 2008