

U N S A Y A B L E

MICHAEL BRAMWELL

“Documents submitted to the Faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of the Master of Fine Arts in the Department of Art”

2014

“Approved by”

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ARTIST STATEMENT

UNSAYABLE Michael Bramwell



"There is a politics here and although subtle should not be underestimated as simple acts are at the core of Bramwell's production." Dr. Betti-Sue Hertz, Former Curator San Diego Museum of Art

The 'unsayable' is that which cannot be expressed by language, according to Ludwig Wittgenstein, the twentieth century Austrian philosopher. What he was getting at was that certain concepts like ethics and aesthetic value are beyond the capacity of language to express and have to be demonstrated rather than said. Appropriating this concept as a conceptual point of departure for this exhibition, I employ aesthetic methodologies of painting, video and performance art to investigate "unsayable" codewords embedded in the American lexicon and critique the authority that would silence those words under the ideology of "political correctness."

Echoing the cultural validity that established language as a model for art, I reference artists

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Artist Statement
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like: Terry Atkinson, Barbara Kruger, Joseph Kosuth, Suzanne McClelland, Christopher Wool and others, and came to understand how significant language is, because of how it separates us from the animals and psychologically speaking, constructs reality through its discourse rather than reflecting it. Words enable objectification and naming of our most subjective thoughts and emotions. So what happens when certain words or language acts are excluded from public discourse and become aphasic? How can people think and maintain contact with their innermost selves and with each other?

In this exhibition, these questions are explored through a language of academic formalism: *'Unsayable'* presents a series of Twenty-three selected, hand-alphabets that sample letters from the lexicon of American Sign Language; a language whose ontological function is to demonstrate rather than say. It represents a post-structural investigation of language as part of a broader investigation of the ideological structure of society. But the *'Unsayable'* transcends the language of academic formalism by performing an act of aesthetic ventriloquism, in which issues of exclusion, ideology and power relations are articulated in silence. Audiences are not provided with secret decoder rings to help them make sense of the paintings, or the video flashing NATO phonetic alphabets; nor the sign language interpreter performing her written text. Cultural labor is required of each individual if meaning is to be made. They must unscramble letters, in much the same way Don Cornelius's required his Soul Train dancers to decode the now famous Scramble Board.

Language is reconstituted here, outside of the hurtful context in which it was originally intended and not directed toward anyone; it is simply laid bare, processed through an aesthetic filter where words are not so much considered but rather, the feelings and behavioral attitudes they name is what counts. It is important that certain words undergo this process because

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without it, they remain repressed, as the neo-Freudians like to say, within the unconscious of culture as something repressed. And will generated endless repetition of the initial problem. This is the importance of preserving uncomfortable language, least we forget how to identify our history and present circumstance. And although these words may be uncomfortable at times they nevertheless function as a linguistic nervous system alerting the social body to the presence of an historical source of pain.

UN SAYABLE

A Thesis Presentation

submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial
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Art

2014

Michael Bramwell

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA-CHAPEL HILL

“The only thought to liberate the mind is the one that leaves it alone.”
Albert Camus

SELECTED WORK

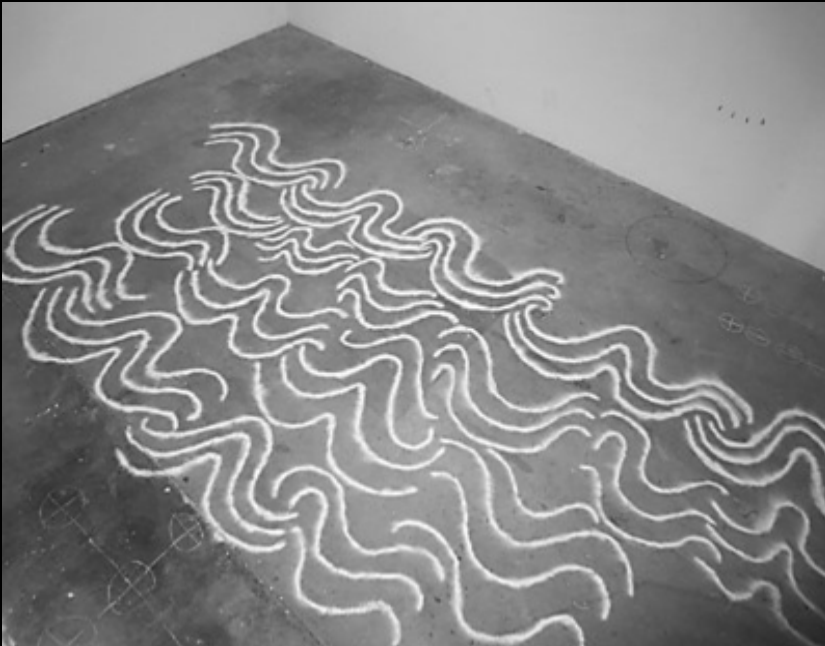


Round Midnight II, performance view

Performance-Installation Work

The image of water is a recurrent feature in various cultures from Africa to Asia and the West to represent the central form of power that permeates the cosmos.

Igha Ede



Dunce Writer



THINKING IS FORM

Bibliothek des Kunstler, folding tables, chairs, contemporary art and artbooks, installation view, dimensions variable.



THINKING IS FORM

“But what is it that is really interesting here? It is the small conversations we had about the grid and about the history of the Black or African Holocaust; those are interesting things. And we are in academia because we enjoy the life of the mind; because we get to interact with people that are smart and have cool things to say and have information that makes our lives richer. That is why we are here, that is what give our lives depth. And so the structure that houses academia ultimately becomes invisible. And so I guess this performance/installation is about making that structure visible again; an acknowledgment of the structure perhaps.”

Professor Beth Grabowski, UNC Chapel Hill



THINKING IS FORM
Lecture Series
Professor Pedro Lasch, Duke University



THINKING IS FORM
Lecture Series
Dr. Carolyn Allmendinger



ROUND MIDNIGHT

"I wanted to contact you about your installation/performance. It seemed you struck a note with your colleagues who spoke positively of your work. Congratulations."

Jim Hirschfield, Chairman, Department of Art, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



AnthroPac
RP-G3



AnthroPac
RP-G4-/GP-G5
Performance view



SUPER'S COLORS
Installation-Performance



For the Record: One Hour Exhibition of Painting and Prints
Curated by Michael Bramwell

“He [Bramwell] invited some of his fellow graduate classmates to exhibit their work alongside the work of accomplished and famous artists - from Kara Walker and Christopher Wool to Ellen Gallagher and others. He spoke of accessibility, the art market, how art needs to be seen and exhibited in order to be respected and remembered. He was leveling the playing field in his own local and beautiful way. The students were proud to have their work included and everyone there had the opportunity to experience a unique and powerful exhibition.”

Professor Elin O'hara Slavik, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



Levitation Attempt No. 33



U N S A Y A B L E

A THESIS EXHIBITION

THESIS STATEMENT

UNSAYABLE is a multi-media installation of paintings, video and performance art that investigate how cultural authorities attempt to silence certain language under the ideology of political correctness.

AESTHETIC CONDITIONS
UNSAYABLE



UNSAYABLE

“So one of the things that attracts me to your work now, is that I didn’t understand it which forced me to think. So you don’t lift the “blanket”; but I started lifting the “blanket” more and I like that. I like what it does for my brain even if it gets me angry sometimes. I like that I’m thinking on a different level. Skepticism, thinking, and knowledge I think that’s what your work is about and I appreciate that part of it.”

Professor Carrie Alter, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill





UN SAYABLE
Installation view No. 2





UNSAYABLE
Installation view No. 3

UN SAYABLE

Installation view No. 4

“Titled *Unsayable* Michael once again pushed the viewer to contemplate relationships between power structures, the art world, language, signs and meaning.”

Professor Elin O’hara Slavik, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



UNSAYABLE
Watercolors



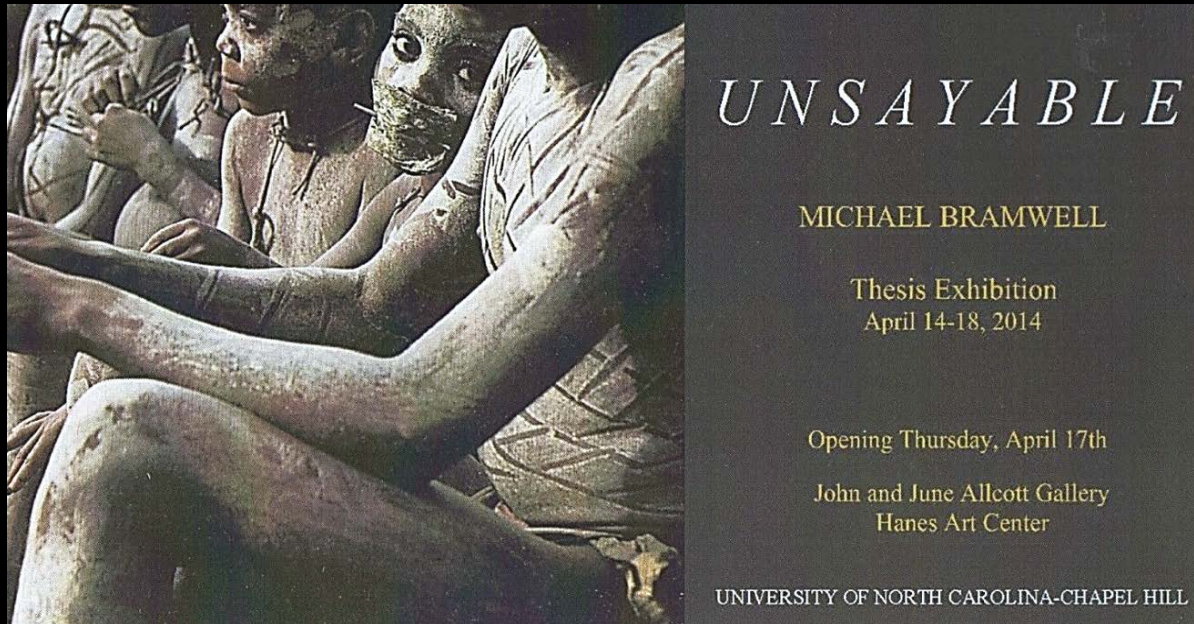
UN SAYABLE
Watercolors



UNSAYABLE
Watercolors



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