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Four Art Gallery Shows to See Right Now

Jonathan Berger through Oct. 11. Participant Inc

Roberta Smith, July 22, 2020

“An introduction to Nameless Love,” Jonathan Berger’s large, text-based installation at Participant Inc., is one of the sleeping beauties of the New York gallery lockdown. Luckily, it will reawaken Sept. 9 for a month.

I saw it during its initial opening five months ago, and was dazzled by its silvery texts, seeming to hang in midair and surrounded by darkness. They have stayed in my mind, aided by the wise and generous love-knows-no-bounds title; the crucial phrase is Allen Ginsberg’s, from a 1974 interview. The pieces make us privy to six unconventional relationships detailed in carefully culled words, and reiterated more abstractly in two tenderly handled complementary materials.

The show is an extensive collaboration, most of all between Mr. Berger and the people writing or talking about their own relationships or those they have witnessed. He knows most of them well, and participated in the creation of their texts, as did other friends, acting as facilitators or editors.

Made of one-inch letters punched out in a combination of tin and nickel, some of the texts are the size of walls; others aren’t much bigger than the tops of card tables; one is in the shape of a sphere. The words pull you in. “My aunt Rhoda died at the age of thirty-seven when I was fifteen years old,” begins a bit of memoir from Mady Schutzman’s book “Behold the Elusive Night Parrot.” She describes how inheriting and using her aunt’s clothing, jewelry and artworks led her to become a “living archive.”

An expanse of words in the shape of a towering gateway presents “The Tunnel,” in which Maria A. Prado is interviewed by Margaret Morton, known for documenting the homeless, with Esther Kaplan, the



Jonathan Berger’s installation “An Introduction to Nameless Love,” which is on view at Participant Inc.’s website.

Mark Waldhauser



Among the installation’s texts are this excerpt from Mady Schutzman’s “Behold the Elusive Night Parrot.”

Carter Seddon

executive editor of the Reveal Center for Investigative Reporting. Ms. Prado, a former resident of New York City's underground homeless community, describes how the experience shaped, and maybe saved, her life, making her more sensitive to others and also more assertive.

The turtle conservationist Richard Ogust recounts the chance meeting with a diamondback terrapin — a true romance in many ways — that set him on course to gather and oversee the second largest captive group of endangered turtles in the country. We also hear from the Shaker Brother Arnold Hadd; the autistic writer and philosopher Mark Utter; and former assistants of the dynamic design duo Ray and Charles Eames, about whom Michael Stipe has written a song — “My Name is Ray” — whose lyrics surround the sculptural sphere.

The darkness enveloping all this shimmering language is most notable for a mysterious floor that seems covered entirely with tiny black tiles, strangely soft and a little dusty looking. They are actually small cubes of charcoal. This expanse of beautiful, immediate, absorbent, dumb material couldn't be more different from the equally beautiful noise above. Constructed with great care — and no adhesives — the floor is a palpable act of love that, despite its muteness, amplifies the entire show as such.