

ARTFORUM

Aaron Garber-Maikovska

GREENE EXHIBITIONS

By: Jan Tumlir | December 2012



View of "Aaron Garber-Maikovska," 2012.

If there is one common aim that runs through the entire course of avant-garde art, it is to grind up and reinvent words, whether spoken (as in the Futurists' *parole in libertà*) or written (as in the rebuslike cryptography of the Lettrist International). Implicit in these various projects is a critique of our given languages as either inadequate, unable to account for the full scope of contemporary experience, or, worse, coercive and actively constraining that experience. Some of this animus finds its way into the work of the LA-based artist Aaron Garber-Maikovska as well, but here, in a show titled "Counter Moves," it is leavened with a concertedly populist range of absurdisms, from the free-form miming of Harpo Marx to the linguistic pile-ons of hip-hop. Garber-Maikovska shares with these forms of counter-communication a focus on "mad skills," or the pursuit of an expressive grace to override the alienation effects that might otherwise predominate. No particular urge to make oneself understood or, conversely, to thwart understanding drives this work; rather, the point is to suspend any such readings on our part in favor of accessing language in a state of emergence.

Projected onto the reverse side of a wall salvaged from an electronics trade fair and re-erected just a few steps past the gallery entrance was a video of the artist dancing around his kitchen, interacting with the stove, cabinetry, and countertops almost as if these were the keys of an instrument for which he serves as both operator and mouthpiece (*Kitchen*, 2012). Constantly modulating the quality of his touch, he emits a likewise variegated succession of preverbal vocalizations that correspond as much to the gesture as to the object he is engaging. One might think of an inarticulate infant feeling his way through the space of the home, expressing a relation to all those things held within it that have yet to be coded in terms of utility or value. Certainly, there is a regressive side to this process, and yet Garber-Maikovska executes it with a highly practiced determination that is anything but.

The play of repetition and difference that guides this artist's performance was here given a graphic treatment in a series of identically sized ninety-five-by-forty-seven-inch panels, also sourced from the trade show, that wound around the remaining three walls of this modest space. Here as well we witness the return of language to the body as gesture, but now via a static

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series of signs that, much like graffiti, are both written and drawn. A central panel (*Stevens*, 2012) inscribed with numerous rows of hand-drawn characters operates as an insular alphabet, or index. In the remaining six panels, individual instances have been selected, enlarged, and painted in a manner that simultaneously calls to mind Chinese calligraphy, Abstract Expressionism, and the cartoonish stylizations of tagging. Symbolically illegible, these fragments of a language that has no socially established meaning nevertheless beg an empathetic response, owing to their vague but insistent anthropomorphism as the signatures of a body that also wants to represent itself whole.

If all of this seems historically familiar, a second video (*Staples*, 2012) of Garber-Maikovska and an assistant filmed behind glass within the narrow confines of a Staples storefront gave this body of work a very up-to-date spin. The store is given the same sort of treatment as the kitchen, but as the artist is now observed in public through a window, his every move doubled by that of his cohort, the performance begins to point toward reproduction. The prefab commercial background against which the piece is shot and the flat-screen monitor on which it is shown likewise bespeak a whole other order of communication, one in which the word and the image are digitally fused from the start. Garber-Maikovska responds to this non-space of info-tech as well, contorting his frame into a hieroglyph, an ideograph, a rebus. Whatever naïveté one might want to attribute to the artistic quest for the prelinguistic is dismissed at this point, leaving us with the pressing problem of embodied communication in a virtual world.