



Karina Bergmans: Have You Hugged Your Lexicon Today?

CANADIAN ARTIST Karina Bergmans's ongoing series *TEXT-ING* continues her investigation of human behavior through the warm and tactile medium of textiles. The series features colorful stuffed letters made with a wide variety of reclaimed fabrics and fillings.

Beginning in 2007, Bergmans's alphabet slowly emerged as she created and documented humorous and apt outdoor installations in Canada and the United States. With a BA in psychology from Carleton University, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, Bergmans is just as concerned with exploring emotional and mental states as she is with fashioning well-made objects. By inserting words such as "cozy," "warm," "clean," and "safe" into public settings, she both interrupts and mirrors the dazed pedestrian's internal monologue. Seated on subway benches, propped against brick walls, or wedged into the body of construction vehicles, these cuddly words express human cravings experienced in potentially threatening or alienating environments.

There is a clear link between the site-specific letter pillow installations and Bergmans's formative works such as *the Lost Mitten Project* (2001–2007) and *Mitten Sleeping Bags* (2005–2006). These projects dealt with the winter blues and big-city fatigue through the recovery and repurposing of winter hand wear. The re-use of discarded materials is a key aspect

LEFT, TOP: TEXT-ING Parliament Hill, part of Blink Gallery installation, Major's Hill Park, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, 2009. LEFT, MIDDLE: TEXT-ING participants at D.U.M.B.O. Art Under the Bridge Festival, Brooklyn, New York, 2009. LEFT, BOTTOM: CLEAN in NYC subway, 2009. All works are from the series TEXT-ING, (2007–ongoing); reclaimed fabric, clothing, and fillings; machine- and hand-stitched; each letter about 18" x 15" x 4" (installation dimensions variable). Photos by the artist.

of her artistic practice. The items she chooses—pillow stuffing, dressmaker's remnants, and used apparel—are loaded with personal and cultural baggage.

This fall, the huggable characters will inhabit the Mississippi Valley Textile Museum in Almonte, Ontario, Canada, in *TEXT-ING et al*, one of several exhibits celebrating the museum's twenty-fifth anniversary. Visitors will be able to comfortably lounge about on a circular piece of Astroturf and engage in random acts of word construction. Based on occurrences during a similar 2009 incarnation of *TEXT-ING* at the D.U.M.B.O. Art Under the Bridge Festival in Brooklyn, New York, the artist expects to see spellers negotiate and trade to have their say. Language itself is the project's primary subject but specifically, language as a social, lived-in entity. Bergmans's experiments evoke lexicon as something socially malleable and collaboratively woven from everyday interactions. In an effort to make the exhibit more inclusive and broaden its interactive appeal, she has



LEFT: WARM in storm, 2008.

created words and letters from scripts other than the Roman alphabet such as Cyrillic, Hindi, and Mandarin.

The title *TEXT-ING et al* also expresses Bergmans's intention to engage with contemporary technological issues in communication. Again addressing alienation, the artist reinserts physicality and face-to-face contact into the disembodied, speed-driven mode of communication known as text messaging. Participants will be asked to photograph the words they build and upload them to the online photo management site Flickr. A webcam

with a view of the gallery space will also make events available to a broader audience online.

Finally, the exhibition will feature a few classic devices of childhood wordplay, including magnetic and Velcro tablets furnished with movable alphabets. These nostalgic items call to mind our first encounters with language and text through early learning games. They encourage us to revisit a time when letters had personalities and adventures of their own. Bergmans wishes to facilitate a similar imaginative and expansive approach toward language and communication. ■

The artist's websites are www.kaleidoscopeart.com and www.kaleidoscopeart.typepad.com. *TEXT-ING et al* will be on display at Mississippi Valley Textile Museum, Almonte, Ontario, Canada, October 20–January 23, 2011; www.textilemuseum.mississippimills.com.

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