

# Art in America

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EXHIBITION REVIEWS



View of Meriç Algün Ringborg's "A Work of Fiction (Revisited)," 2014, at Nordenhake.

## MERİÇ ALGÜN RINGBORG

Nordenhake

We are used to language being employed to describe art objects, and, at least since the 1960s, we are used to language becoming an art object. In both cases the words are paramount because they are what remain: a thing (a word printed or cast in neon) realizing an abstraction, or, in the case of art criticism, a text standing for an experience of an exhibition. The Turkish artist Meriç Algün Ringborg reverses this emphasis, and the effect is vertiginous. Her exhibition "A Work of Fiction (Revisited)," 2013–14, actualizes the example sentences that dictionary editors provide to demonstrate word usage. These are therefore generically impersonal, as free from a specific referent as language gets.

With the perverse assiduousness of an author of the Oulipo school, Algün Ringborg has assembled a 24-page melodrama out of only these phrases—the manuscript was on a table for a visitor to read—and constructed an installation out of found objects which embody them. The gallery contained the skeletal decor of a writer's study, and the viewer entering this environment became its stand-in occupant, its protagonist. Projected onto the wall was a list of the example sentences relating to the objects in the room. At first one assumes this "key" is a description of the installation's contents. That it is the reverse—the objects have been sourced to realize the sentences—has two effects on one's perception of the decor: it dematerializes it (by making the objects mere signs for abstractions) and desubjectifies it (by making them as impersonal as an objective example sentence). Significantly, these are not new furnishings, and they evince an aura of particularity: vintage wooden cabinets, a Turkish rug, a potted palm, a chalk-stained blackboard, an old manual typewriter, an ashtray full of nutshells and a cold cup of coffee. The specificity of the objects, revealed as mere illustrations of generic

language, is rendered as an excess, an inessential reification of an abstraction. If one of the intended functions of text in early Conceptual art was to resist the commodification of art (it seemed, wrongly, that nobody would want to buy a sheet of typewritten paper), then Algün Ringborg achieves something of what the Conceptualists could not. The dictionary source of the objects on view seems to divest them of an autonomy that would make them more than props. To claim such objects as art would be to possess an absence (generic signifiers) masquerading as a presence (a vintage item of decor).

And yet, as though rejecting the neatness of this conceit, interspersed among the found objects are ostensible art objects: four paintless square monochrome "paintings," made of book-binding fabric on stretchers, and two monitors showing hands tying a knot or twirling a pen. But Algün Ringborg evades the responsibility of authorship because the art objects are determined by example sentences and absorbed by the fiction of the installation's decor: among the sentences are "a video installation," "a color TV in the corner of a room," "a very common art form" and "an aesthetically pleasing color combination." The perfunctoriness of the monochromes and videos—as though they were only going through the motions of being artworks—is ironic; but that irony is short-circuited by their being proffered as mere illustrations of a set of signs that do not aspire to being anything but impersonal cyphers. But this impersonality is itself belied. Algün Ringborg's film *A World of Blind Chance* (2014), presented in another room, shows an actor performing a script composed of example sentences; he fleshes out their bland formulations with rhetorical flourishes. Ringborg's voice is spliced into the soundtrack, issuing instructions to the actor as though she, and not the dictionary phrases, were directing his gestures.

—Mark Prince