bitforms gallery

Beryl Korot
A Coded Language
April 12 – May 20, 2018

Opening reception: Thursday April 12, 6 – 8 PM
Gallery hours: Wednesday – Saturday, 11 AM – 6 PM & Sunday, 12 – 6 PM

bitforms gallery is pleased to announce *A Coded Language*, Beryl Korot's second solo exhibition with the gallery. It features paintings on traditional and handwoven canvas, video, and drawings with ink and thread, highlighting the breadth of the artist's practice across multiple media forms from 1980 to 2017. The works on canvas represent a period of her work in the 1980's which is virtually unknown and are shown for the first time together in this exhibition.

In 1980, several years after completing her seminal multichannel video and textile installation, *Text and Commentary*, Korot began to weave her own linen canvases and invented a coded language based on the grid structure of woven cloth. *Babel 1* (1980) and *Babel 2* (1980) translate the Tower of Babel text from Genesis into this language. The Tower of Babel interested Korot because it is an ancient text about the impact of technology and language on human behavior and cultural change, issues she'd been concerned with as an editor of the video journal, *Radical Software* (1970-74). In these works language is contemplated as pure form.

In the paintings, *Anordnung: Clearly Visible/Strongly Sewn* (1985) and *A=Girl* (1986), Korot uses traditional canvas where the visible structure of the grid is less apparent and a more calligraphic gesture becomes a landscape for the human figure. A young girl from a photograph from the Holocaust appears silhouetted in these paintings. In *Anordnung* she appears as a patch, amidst both the landscape of Korot's abstract language and the specific words, "one language one speech," which refers to the first line of the Tower of Babel. In *A=Girl*, the silhouette appears as the letter "A" in L-A-N-G-U-A-G-E, spelled out at the top of the painting. These paintings are created from layers of oil paint, washed away in turpentine and embedded in the cloth to create a palimpsest of recorded time.

Etty (2009-2010) is a video inspired by the diaries of Etty Hillesum, a Dutch Jewish writer living in Amsterdam at the time of the Nazi invasion of Holland. To get messages to friends she devised her own code: *book=butter, writing=jam, ink=rye bread, shoelaces=fruit*. When she was finally transported to Auschwitz, she managed to throw a postcard from the box car with the words "we left the camp singing." The slow, rhythmic falling of words against a background woven from moving video images, creates a new sense of reading and time. A soliloquy is created from short selections of Etty's words edited from hundreds of pages of her writings.

Korot's recent series of digitally embroidered drawings, *Curves* (2016-2017) refers back to *Text and Commentary*, which places ancient and contemporary technologies in dialog, tracing the origin of the computer to the loom. This exchange is continued through the exploration of the artist's hand and that of the machine: here a sewing machine is programmed to sew the surface of the paper in pre-designated areas. The texture, color, and shape of the sewn thread contextualizes and converses with the original hand-drawn marks.

Korot notes "Text (textus) and weave (texo) share the same Latin root. Text is a tissue or fabric woven of many threads. It is a web, texture, structure, a thought, something that can be built, raveled and unraveled."

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Throughout her lifelong practice, Beryl Korot (b. 1945, New York. NY) has brought the ancient and modern worlds of technology into conversation. An early figure in the history of video art, Korot was first known for her multiple channel video work in which she applied specific structures inherent to loom programming to the programming of multiple channels, constructing nonverbal narratives. Later, she invented a visual language based on the grid structure of handwoven canvas. Translating texts into her own language, she illuminated what thought might look like devoid of specific meaning. The sources for much of her work reach back to the technology of the ancient world, whether the technology of the loom or of writing itself. In her work, there is both the visualization of an interior landscape based on language and a spotlight on the intersection between technology and thought.

Co-founder and co-editor of *Radical Software* (1970-1974), the first publication to discuss the technical and formal possibilities of the new medium, Korot was also co-editor of *Video Art: An Anthology*, published in 1976. Her first multiple channel works—*Dachau, 1974* (1974) and *Text and Commentary* (1976-1977)—have been exhibited at The Kitchen, New York, NY (1975); Leo Castelli Gallery, New York, NY (1977); Documenta 6, Kassel, Germany (1977); the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY (1980, 2002); The Koln Kunstverein (1989), the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA (1990); the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT (2010); bitforms gallery, New York, NY (2012); the Whitworth Gallery, Manchester, England (2013); Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach, Germany (2013); Art Basel, Basel, Switzerland (2014); the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA (2014); Tate Modern, London, England (2014); the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH (2015); and SFMOMA, San Francisco, CA (2016), Santa Fe Thoma Art House (2017), LOOP festival, Barcelona (2017), ZKM 2017-18, MoMA NYC (2017-18), among others.

Other video installations and works have been exhibited at the Hood Museum, Dartmouth College, NH; Locks Gallery, Philadelphia, PA; Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow, Russia; and Historisches Museum, Frankfurt, Germany, among many others. Two collaborations with composer Steve Reich—*The Cave* (1993) and *Three Tales* (2002)—brought video installation art into a theatrical context and toured worldwide. Both works continue to be performed and were exhibited as video installations at venues including the Whitney Museum; the Carnegie Museum; the Reina Sofía in Madrid, the Kunstverein in Düsseldorf, Germany; and ZKM in Karlsruhe, Germany, 2008.

Korot's work is in both private and public collections including the Sol LeWitt collection, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Kramlich Collection's New Art Trust (shared by SF-MOMA, MoMA, and Tate Modern) the Thoma Art Foundation, the Hood Museum, among others. A Guggenheim Fellow (1994), Korot is the recipient of numerous grants including The National Endowment for the Arts and Anonymous Was a Woman (2008). In 2000, she was a Montgomery Fellow at Dartmouth College with Steve Reich and in 2011 she was an Artist in Residence at Dartmouth College.