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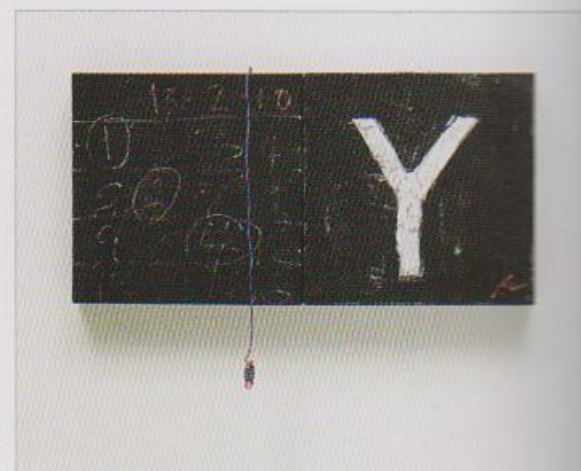
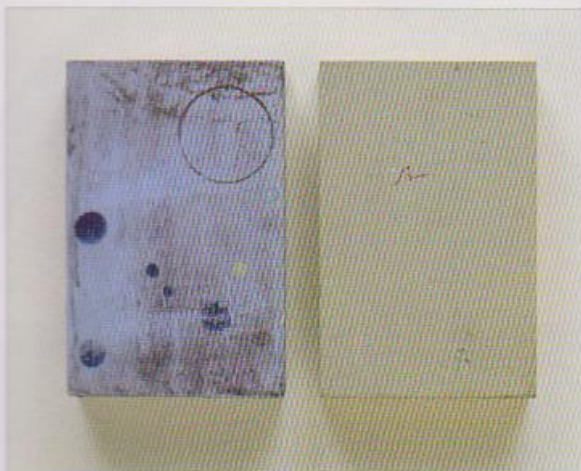
WORD *PLAY*

Prominent bartender at Tippling Club, Matthew Bax's little-known other profession as a fine artist is slowly gaining prominence. He speaks to JUDY CHEONG about his new exhibition, which asks, "IS TEXT CHEATING?"



Photos: Courtesy of MATTHEW BAX

I



With profound scribbles and illegible text, mixed-medium artist Matthew Bax hopes to stir up questions on communication. Working with different textures such as chalk, acrylic, string and wood, the self-taught artist crafted a collection surrounding the theme, "Is Text Cheating?"

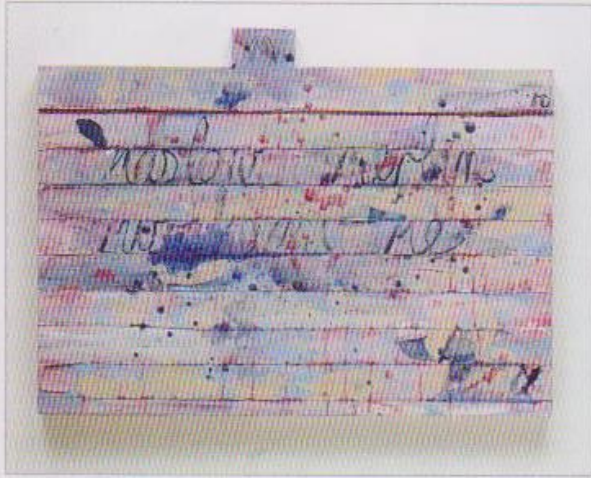
"I like to play with materials to suggest an alternative mark or expression," he says as he describes how the materials individually relate to the overall theme. "For example, using painted string to hint at a line in a notebook. The series is set in the world of text and writing material, so materials like chalk, and what could be a smudged blackboard, are apparent."

Although he spent nearly a year in preparation to create "Is Text Cheating?", Bax says that his ideas stayed with him for years – "Cooking away in my head," he describes – till they found their eventual place on the canvas. The artist collects notes, photos,

and works through sketches in his development process, exploring different aspects of his ideas. He credits Singapore's vibrant landscape as a pivotal influence in his work.

Communication being the intrinsic theme of his latest exhibition, he tries not to shed light on the matter but instead, aims to provoke thoughts of this age-old medium. Bax observes that his work is hardly a new beginning at each stage, but rather, a continuous process, or recurring theme. The story might be different, but the general message is similar. The artist seeks to pose questions, as opposed to delivering answers, and in Bax's words, to try and "clutch at something that's always moving, something that's impossible to achieve."

Sampling familiar colours of blue, white and black, in elements such as chalk, Bax played around with ruled lines and tab marks in his work to instigate the contemporary feeling of text. As he describes, the tabs are indicative of organisation, of attempts at putting one's life in order.



The semi-autobiographical exhibition itself communicates a story of observations, on insecurities, worries, fears and emotions behind the various façades of the human self.

"It's about the interplay of private thoughts in the public arena," says Bax. "The hide and seek of personal expression." Looking closer at one of his works – aptly titled *Work In Progress* – one notes a bit of chalk dangling from a forlorn string, off the side of a chalkboard. "The work hints at the impairment of things," he says, "always changing; relatively floating. We can get abit egocentric, always talking about our points of views. My point of view [with this work] is that mine is no more profound than someone else's."

When asked how he juggles time between fine art and the Tippling Club, Bax laughs, "I balance it badly, I think." Taking his master's at LaSalle College of Arts, Bax notes that he needs to be more structured with his time as he spends his time painting all day, followed

by tending the bar at Tippling Club in the evenings. This is no mean feat considering the club's tendency to change its cocktail assortment in its similarly ingenious degustation menus.

The exhibition's visual landscape belies a nod, perhaps, to a pre-digital era. Says Bax of this all-consuming new medium: "It's funny, I love gadgets, and live on my Mac, but until now it [the theme of digital] has never crept into my work. There is something too sterile for me about digital mediums and doesn't resonate with my practice. Maybe I'm just too old school!"

"IS TEXT CHEATING?"

FOST Gallery, 65 Kim Yam Road

9th – 30th April