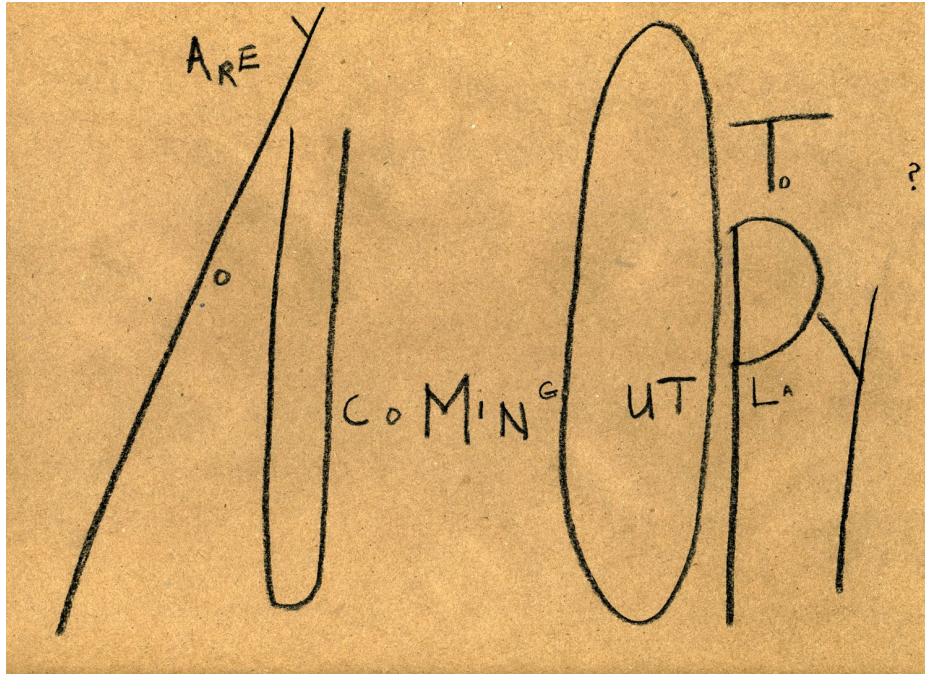


JOSEPH LA PIANA



Luke Brown meets New York-based artist Joseph La Piana at his studio to discuss poetry, sexting, and spatial disorientation.

So this is your workspace? This is. Some of the larger pieces I do elsewhere just because this has kind of become more of my thinking tank. So I do small pieces, and the archive of my work is all here. There is a really good combination of lots of different things here and the work sort of builds on itself. There is a relationship between my initial work, from 15 or 16 years ago, through to the present.

When will your next show be? I'm working on a project with another artist, Federico Diaz. We were at the Venice Biennale last year together and we have a similar conceptual processes. He is having a show that opens at the Brooklyn Museum in September and then he and I are going to coordinate an exhibition around our own project.

What do you guys have in mind? It's a combination of his project that was at Venice, which was dealing with gravity and suspension, and my text project, which is the exploration of dialogue. It's a really interactive and conceptual piece that we are developing software for. There are going to be two people in a glass chamber who are separated by, like, an 'etch-a-sketch'.

They are communicating by messages that are being sent by the public as an interface, but they can't see each other.

Tell us about your recent work and how you've involved text and poetry with sculpture. I think the text project, as it evolved at the Venice Biennale, really had to do with the exploration of Allen Ginsberg and Walt Whitman and the poetry that exists between them. So the sculpture is another extension of that dialogue. [Pointing to an artwork] I like to call that piece over there a 'sexting' piece; it's really a harness of dialogue, of information that's being transferred from one person to another. My realization that this could be documented came when texting really began and I thought, 'Are people really going to be able to communicate and relate in a way that's honest and sincere? Or, are they hiding behind this instrument?' And I think people have more of a tendency to be open, because they're not looking at someone face to face. And especially when you're talking about something like sex or your emotions, or you're talking about what you're into sexually, I think you're more prone to say what's on your



LEFT: **ARE YOU COMING OUT TO PLAY**, 2010, Charcoal on craft paper, 8.5 x 11 inches, 21.6 x 28 cm ABOVE/BOTTOM: **UNTITLED**, 2004, Chromogenic print, 48 x 90 inches, 121.9 x 228.6 cm (GPB/ 020) ABOVE/MIDDLE: **Movement Untitled Study**, 2009, Ink on watercolor paper, 7 x 10 inches, 20 x 25 ABOVE/TOP: **NUMBER: Lab + Joseph La Piana**, Spring 2012

mind. Because of the distance, you're not going to be judged or criticized or whatever, so it's another extension of that exploration.

Of perception and the distance in forms of communication?

Right. And the text show at the Venice Biennale really had to do with that exploration. Because you know Allen Ginsberg was fascinated with Walt Whitman. And Walt Whitman in many ways had lots to say, but even then there was this screening mechanism. To this day, we don't really know what his sexuality was.

So the text on the columns of the two towers installed in Venice for the Biennale, was that texting communication or was it more poetry-oriented? That was the poetry of Allen Ginsberg, *Supermarket in California*, and exploring the dialogue of Walt Whitman's *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry*. The reason I chose those two poems is because there is a reference on both of their accounts in each one of the poems. It was just another exploration of how people communicate. People ask me if there is any reference to the twin towers, and for me it really had very little

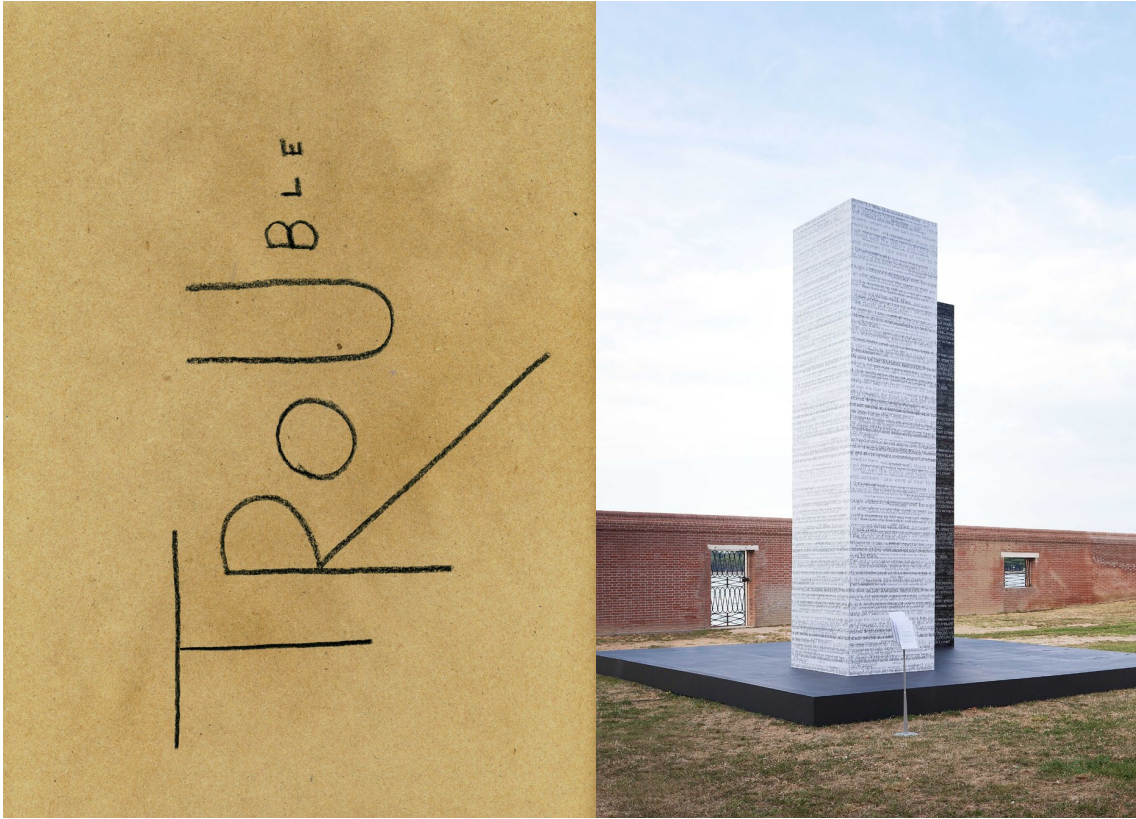
to do with the towers other than these two posts communicating with each other. And then the conflict that occurs from not understanding one another represents the demise, or the breakdown, of any relationship.

So there is a fragmented dialogue continuously running through your art? That's a good way of putting it. My work, and the

process of my work, is really all about fragmentation and breaking things down until they are unrecognizable and then building them back up. And genetically they're still linked to that body of that work, yet they are part of something new.

I've noticed a transformation from two-dimensional to three-dimensional format in your work, and also the reverse. Can you talk more about that? Yeah, I think that is a good observation because

a lot of my work starts with a one-dimensional plane, and even though a lot of my work - in the kinetic paintings that revolve around the study of gravity and force fields in storms and hurricanes - is one-dimensional, I like creating space. Spatial disorientation, I call it. This optical illusion where



LEFT: **TROUBLE**, 2010, Charcoal on craft paper, 8.5 x 11 inches, 21.6 x 28 cm RIGHT: **THE VENICE TEXT PROJECT**, Venice Biennale, 2011, Wood Panel, Pigment Ink on UV Vinyl with Audio CD ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND ROBERT MILLER GALLERY.

you're not quite sure if those forms are static or stable on a one dimensional plane. But then taking it one step further, and then one step further again, I like bringing those forms to life through two and three dimensional objects.

In terms of multi-dimensional work, how do you feel about the collaboration you did with the designer Luis Fernandez?

When you think about the collaboration I did with Luis, he came to me and was fascinated by this body of work called 'Refraction.' For me, it was the first fashion collaboration that I had done, but I just felt like it was a good starting point – it was a small capsule collection that we designed together and that was based on my work. It was about taking this one-dimensional surface and bringing it to life through another medium.

Has technology and the advancement of communication inspired or, at the very least, influenced your work? Well, it has allowed me to want to explore it. But I think I would say that I am very old school in my approach to my work. For me it's about the material, it's about the conceptual, the execution of the material and using it in a different way. It's all about the psychology behind the way in which we communicate.

It also seems like your work is a kind of scientific exploration. Yeah, actually the curator for the contemporary art from the Brooklyn

Museum was here yesterday and she asked me that same question. It is scientific to a certain extent, but I arrive at things through these mathematical equations that are very rudimentary.

So how did you come across the mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot and references to fractal geometry? I was just fascinated by this whole fractal theory, subfractals. There was a scholar in Boston who had spoken to a dear friend of mine, Charlie Bergman, (who was the Chairman of the board of the Pollock-Krasner Foundation at the time) and he said, 'You know Jackson Pollock? There were some studies based on trying to validate paintings that were 'fakes', forgeries of his work, and when the scientific data was evaluated there was a fractal component to his work.' So I came to Mandelbrot through having explored that study. There was a whole study of information that he sent me to look at, and when I was reading the scientific and mathematical association to what fractals are, it was exactly what I thought in my head already. But I wasn't applying any scientific or mathematical sort of theory behind it. So once I did that, then I was fascinated. I thought, I can take any form and shape in my work and sort of create a refraction or fractals of that work. WORDS BY LUKE BROWN.