

Time didn't exist,

Space didn't either

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Erasure leaves a void. Covering and concealing a text or image embodies a certain violence. Diana Kogan's exhibit, "Time didn't exist, space didn't either," is comprised of hundreds of pages torn out of books on which the artist erased portions of the text, leaving fragmented sentences which, as if through a miraculous alchemy, are transformed into poetry.

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Kogan finds books in the streets, abandoned, rejected, and scorned. Like an act of healing, Kogan takes them in, acknowledges the yellowing pages as a readymade, and restores them to the world of culture.

With pencil strokes in soft lead, she covers the printed lines, painstakingly preserving the paragraphs and spaces; the individual words and parts of text that she leaves uncovered come together into short, poetic sentences.

Erasing images and text for ideological reasons or for reuse as a palimpsest are phenomena well known throughout art history. Valuing erasure as an autonomous work of art was established in the 20th century with American artist Robert Rauschenberg (1925-2008) making a visual statement in his *Erased de Kooning Drawing* (1953). Rauschenberg obtained the drawing from Willem de Kooning (1904-1997) and by erasing it turned it into his own.

Erasure as part of the perception of modernism was manifested in *Black Square* (?1915) by Kazimir Malevich (1879-1935), a towering figure of the Russian avant-garde. This trailblazing work is a symbolic erasure of the history of art to ensure its recalibration from zero. Such a starting point was part of the vision of 20th century art movements such as Suprematism, founded by Malevich

(from the Latin word *supremus*), holding geometric abstraction as the sublime. The idea of erasure was essential for the ideology of totalitarian regimes who promised a "new world order" on the ruins of the old.

In 1986, American conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth (b. 1945) made his site specific installation *Zero & Not* in which he covered passages from Freud's writings in black tape, but left some of the letters exposed. The text, alternately present and concealed, is associated with the unconscious, the Freudian concept that generated change in the western way of reading the world. Similar to Kosuth, Kogan preserves the contours of the paragraphs, resulting in nearly black rectangles and squares. The text emerges from the art work as a memory. The sentence "Then everything went black" that remains exposed on one of the pages, may be read as a reflective gaze on the work process.

Kogan's art is complex. The erasure in Kosuth's installation and in Kogan's books is an act of appropriation and demonstration of authority: blacking out text is identified with censorship, hiding information in the name of "state security" or "safeguarding privacy." We can also think about Kogan's act of erasing in terms of reductive sculpture; erasing as excavating into material, leaving only selected words and sentence fragments exposed. Kogan covers texts but does not obliterate them. Close observation reveals what was concealed (as in Kosuth's work, it is possible, with a certain effort, to read what is covered). Thus, the observer becomes an archaeologist of sorts, carefully brushing aside a layer of earth so as not to harm the artefacts, painfully aware that every piece of information, any evidence, will be absolutely rare.

The longer one looks at Kogan's works, the relationship between the suppressed and the exposed becomes less dichotomous. The texts float in the fields of the covered letters, resulting in visual poetry.

In his essay, *Death of the Author* (1967), French semiologist and cultural critic Roland Barthes (1915-1980) stated:

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single “theological” meaning (the “message” of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture.

Roland Barthes, *Death of the Author*, extracted from Barthes, R (trans. S Heath), *Image, music, text*, (pp. 142-148), (London: Fontana, 1977), p.146.

The pages are the site of an encounter between the manual action applied to them and the print, between the forgotten and the emphasized. The concealed-erased text is like a husk in relation to the exposed-emphasized text. Although the act of erasure-the making absent that Kogan creates is reminiscent of sculpture, the expressive painterliness of the line has an intense presence.

Kogan disrupts and works with books in English, a language she acquired. She takes advantage of its foreignness to gain attentiveness and generate a new gaze. She selects sentences from the torn pages that refer to art and the search for meaning in the world.

Row upon row of pages surround viewers; cylinders lean on the walls like poles from an unknown game, or closed scrolls. The cylinders are covered with monochromatic graphite, while a close examination shows that they resemble the texture of skin. The

“pillars” are undecipherable, as if they emerged from a Romantic painting of ancient ruins destroyed in violent events, in a dialogue with the torn-out pages. They evoke the cyclic nature of time and the stratification of knowledge, the way in which images change yet stay engraved in cultural memory.

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Kogan’s covered texts, pages from discarded books, cradle poetry:
“Time didn’t exist, space didn’t either”

Dr. Smadar Sheffi
November 2021

THE TWENTY YEARS

ing what he had gotten into, longing for company, he went

Helen lay still in the light from the lamp. Asleep
without her make-up, she looked defenseless, childlike. For
the first time he wondered how old he really was. He
wanted to wake her, ask her to listen to the silent record
with him, to look at the colored photograph. Finally he
shrugged, turned on the light and went to sleep.