

# The New York Times

## Art in Review

Published: October 13, 2006

### **KAY ROSEN Wall Painting and Drawings, 2002-2006**

*Yvon Lambert 564 West 25th Street, Chelsea Through Oct. 21*

Kay Rosen might be described as a writer's sculptor. While strictly two-dimensional, her crisp sign-painter-style drawings and wall paintings cleave and reassemble words: highlighting, deleting or shoving together their letters and syllables to make them new in ways variously phonetic, typographic, visual and linguistic.

She perpetuates a tradition of reading-seeing that includes Stuart Davis, Ed Ruscha, Lawrence Weiner and Mel Bochner, as well as her contemporaries Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer. But Ms. Rosen's legibility arrives in separate stages, like a well-timed joke, which sets off a surprisingly physiological experience: your eyes widen, your gut tightens, and your mind changes gears.

The artist's 15th solo show in New York is a typical mixture of politics, philosophy and riddling, with the works' titles often providing vital clues or punch lines. As always, color serves as both a decorative and a surgical device. The large wall painting in magenta and violet on yellow conflates the words "Oh No Noah" into "OHNOAH." The violet singles out "NO," a big, fat denial. The title "New Orleans" alerts us to the larger context, the flood that lacked a sheltering ark.

Nearby, on canvas, Ms. Rosen uses color to extract "aft" from "raft"; the back of the bus allusion is confirmed by the title, "Back of the Boat." Race becomes explicit in a second wall painting, which consists of two versions of the name Ivory L. Brown. The first and last names conform to their colors in both instances. But the L. changes from lavender to lime. It also stands for "living." Suggesting that there is not much difference between any of us, this piece is titled "I Wish I Knew My Neighbor Better."

The other works here are smaller color pencil studies, often equally barbed and resonant. Zeroing in on language and forcing it through the sieve of form and perception, Ms. Rosen makes us see it, and the world, differently, often in sad, wise ways. Cultivating her own garden, she is one of the best artists of our time.

ROBERTA SMITH