



Kay Rosen, *Blurred*, 2004, sign paint on wall, 6 by 38 feet (courtesy Second Street Gallery © Mathias Tornqvist).

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA

By Paul Ryan

Describing literature as a kinetic art, literary critic Stanley Fish discusses how the viewer of a kinetic sculpture must be aware of it as a "changing object" and aware of him/herself as "correspondingly changing." This observation neatly summarizes Fish's belief in the idea of "meaning as an event"—a Deleuzian proposition that the reader/viewer participates in a happening, sharing in the creation and experience of meaning rather than its discovery.

Based upon the inherent kinetics of language—where certain internal (authorial) decisions, external (cultural) stimuli/context and the willing play of the reader set interpretation in motion—the word art of **KAY ROSEN** invites the viewer to transform words into events. Embracing key elements of linguistics and visual art, for over thirty years Rosen has created usually spare text-as-image structures that convey language's range of expressive possibilities: irony within words and phrases; serendipity; playful uncertainty; and an equal conjoining of concreteness and elusiveness. Rosen's recent small retrospective and first exhibition in the southeast, "New

Word Order" (Second Street Gallery, March 5—May 1, 2004), included sixteen works from 1984 to the present. The focus of the show is *Blurred*, a 6 by 38 foot site-specific wall painting that consists of the bold, all upper-case word **BLURRED**. Creating this piece during a presidential election year and installing it in Virginia, which has produced numerous presidents and prominent ideals in the construction of our democracy, Rosen infused the letter-forms with oblique political content. Reflecting the media's use of color to designate party affiliation in election maps, the letters "BLU" are formed with blue sign paint, and "RED" with red. The first "R" of the complete word is painted in corresponding violet, signifying a union of opposing voices and an element of optimism within an otherwise pessimistic and sensationalized arena.

By skillfully merging visual form with linguistic content, and linguistic form with visual content, Rosen masterfully suggests the presence of a full text in a short phrase or single word. This full text is invisible yet very present, and the viewer/reader is often privileged to be its author. This is how *BLURRED*, as Stanley Fish might describe it, becomes "an action made upon a reader." Standing alone, *BLURRED* lacks verbal con-

text. But its form and inherent linguistic power infuse it with a social/political meaning that touches a number and variety of narratives, all dependent upon the viewer's persuasion and curiosity. For example, consider these possibilities: the origin and evolution of the definition of the word "blur" and its function as either noun or verb; the keystone of the word at the point where two gallery walls converge at a 90° angle; the work's reference to the nearly indistinct election tally in the 2000 presidential election; and the literal and figurative staining or sully of the election process in Florida in 2000 (the infamous "hanging chad" as a definition for blur).

Additionally, existing in an art gallery, the word generates a range of issues important to the contemporary art world: the prominence of cross-disciplinary practices that obscure conventional boundaries; questions of hierarchy; the blur of art and image culture; and the Duchampian flow of art and "nonart" through galleries and museums. Clearly the directness and apparent simplicity of *BLURRED* equals its complexity.

In a humble critic-as-artist gesture, I offer the following structure of two words to echo Rosen's architecture and poetry, and perhaps to summarize her job and intention as an artist, as well as the experience she desires her audience to embrace:

WORD
WORK