

# TWO COATS OF PAINT

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## Erasure as aesthetic principle at Pierogi

11:11 am by Editor



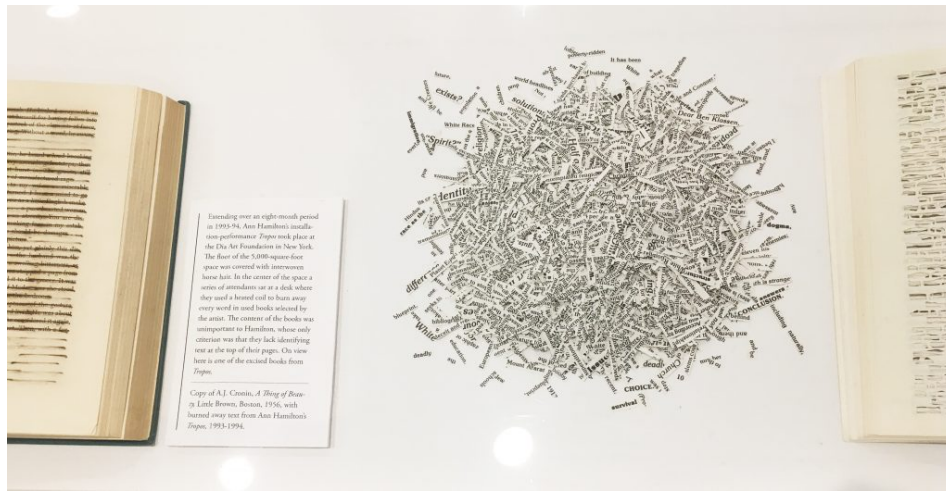
Left: Wall text of artists' and writers' names, November 28, 2018 – January 27, 2019 at Pierogi Gallery. Right: Joseph Kosuth, *Zero & Not*, 1986, 30 x 30 inches. Collection of Jean Castelli, New York.

Contributed by Gina DeCagna / Capacious and compelling in content, "Under Erasure," co-curated by Raphael Rubinstein and Heather (Bause) Rubinstein on view at Pierogi Gallery through January 27, yields a significant platform for discourse on an evolving area of intersectional media and politics: written language and visual art. The exhibition – which focuses on works that employ erasure as a technique – serves like a sophisticated Wikipedia entry that outlines who has been in conversation with whom, itself a kind of discursive palimpsest. It gives updated definition to the predominantly New York-based practitioners working at this intersection since the 1960s, showcasing how the distinctive features of abstract or representational painting – as well as experimental or conceptual writing, poetry, and conceptual art – have all comingled and blurred boundaries to create meaning. The semiotic underscore is that "Under Erasure" is neither of *art*, nor of *literature*; it is of both, simultaneously, as a tangled exchange.



Detail of Ariana Boussard-Reifel, *Between the Lines*, 2007, words removed from the white supremacist book, *RaHoWa* (Racial Holy War).

Subversion can be seductive, a well-known premise evidenced throughout the exhibition, as some practitioners have playfully used the revision of language as painterly material or literary device – while many others have erased and redacted as a cogent political stance. Breaching authority, we see this in cross-outs on formal documents or via poets on Twitter, as [Rachel Stone](#) analyzed in *The New Republic* or via [thedeletionist.com](#), included in the exhibition. Art that relies on language as material (or as image) exhibits a need for greater control over that artwork’s interpretation. Jean-Michel Basquiat, included in the exhibition and cited within the catalogue, explained that he “cross[ed] out words so you will see them more; the fact that they are obscured makes you want to read them.”



Left: Partial photo of Ann Hamilton, *tropos • books*, 1993-1994, book with burned away text, performance / installation at Dia Center for the Arts, New York. Private collection, New York. Center. Right: Ariana Boussard-Reifel, *Between the Lines*, 2007, words removed from the white supremacist book, *RaHoWa (Racial Holy War)*. Center: pile of the redacted words.

Feminism also surfaces in the exhibition. Some of the work by female artists uses language specifically as reclamation: to overpower patriarchal implications and to showcase the complexity of their own intellect. During the panel discussion at Pierogi Gallery, **Mira Schor** hearkened back to Virginia Woolf's seminal text regarding the matter, *A Room of One's Own*; this reminded me of conversations surrounding Lisa Pearson's *Siglio Press*, which publishes visual-written material by women artist-writers with unique visions.



Installation view, featuring individual text-based works by **Ray Johnson**, **Guerrilla Girls**, **Richard Prince**, **Xiaofu Wang**, **Luca Pancrazi**, **Mark Lombardi**, **Emilio Isgrò**, **Gene Beery**, **Jean-Michel Basquiat**, **Arnold Mesches**, **Ridykeulous**, **Tom Phillips**, and **Jen Bervin**.



*A selection of literary works employing redaction, including M NourbeSe Philip's Zong!.*

Throughout the show, the process of using erasure and rewriting to question and redistribute power is evidenced in rich examples of individual experimentation. The curators could have included more cross-generational play, such as the instance when [Rauschenberg famously erased a de Kooning](#). They also might have engaged in the contemporary “decolonist” discourse around the power and exclusion inherent in the Euro-centricity of the New York art world, which [Basquiat](#) and [Glenn Ligon](#) begin to address in their cross-historical pieces. [M. NourbeSe Philip's Zong!](#), a book-length poem included in the show, poignantly addresses injustices during the 18th-century slave trade. For an expanded, more global survey, readers should see [The Word is Art](#) (Thames & Hudson, October 2018), a new book by [Michael Petry of MOCA London](#) that includes more than 150 international artists who continue the visual conversation across languages.

[“Under Erasure,”](#) co-curated by Heather (Bause) Rubinstein and Raphael Rubinstein. Pierogi, New York, NY. Through January 27, 2019.

**About the author:** Originally from the New York metro area, [Gina DeCagna](#) is an artist, writer, and editor living and working in London. She is pursuing her MFA at Goldsmiths, University of London.

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