

(below)
Giles Round
Pictures emerged from letters
2008
pigment ink, acrylic paint, pencil
and primer on linen, purple
heart wood, steel bolts and
cross dowels
157 x 157 x 120 cm
courtesy the artist

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Giles Round

XLOMFCNHNGNCINUDCWGENMMNCH



During the machine age, photography and film altered the way humanity saw itself. With similar logic but a different typesetting, one could argue that in the graphic-design age, photography and typography altered the way humanity identifies itself. Perched between Giles Round's austere day bed and his cultivated wall lettering, one might identify oneself inside an avant-garde advertisement: angled, poised, reflective. However, subjected between these particular objects and letters, our product remains undisclosed; an obscuration reflected in the exhibition's enciphered title *XLOMFCNHNGNCINUDCWGEN-MMNCH*.

Four Gallery recently opened the doors of its new premises to a solo exhibition by London-based artist Giles Round (b 1976), whose works are spread between its small and naturally lit Victorian rooms. One work is a large freestanding painting, which assumes an entire room. The canvas appears to have been unpicked from its simple wooden frame, swung from a pivot off-centre and fixed at an angle perpendicular to its frame, so it now faces the window. Its composition is modular, containing numerous black shapes surfacing from a white background, often identical and repeated or in some places left blank. These shapes form Round's own typography, marked by the darkened negative space they eagerly abandon. These letters move in and out of intelligibility, at times clear and legible, at others abstract and rhythmical, playing out the work's title *Pictures emerged from letters* (2008) in a range of systems.

Emergence, be it rhythmic or semantic, physical or formal, is a process that underscores all the works in this exhibition and is also evident within the artist's broader practice. Previous solo exhibitions and collaborations (with Mark Aerial Waller on their ongoing *Wayward*

Cannon screenings or his sculptural installation with *Assume Vivid Astro Focus* in 2005) have revealed Round's capacity to radically alter environments by using neon or strobe lighting at unexpected times or in unorthodox locations, or by configuring trashy lo-fi props, alongside highly crafted objects which make formal reference to minimalist sculpture and modernist interiors. However, *XLOMFCN...* shows Round's mediated installations move away from a hyper-colour-magic-eye brand of emergence, or deliverance, towards a more self-conscious variety, where the work allows and encourages pause and reflection.

In the other room, *Day bed* (2008) is laid in the centre. Supported by a simple stainless steel frame with an unadorned cushion upholstered in a taupe-coloured linen, the bed sets a somnolent environment to both observe and inhabit. *Rise & fall* (2008) hangs above it, a lightbulb dangling from an electric flex, which has been threaded through a series of pulleys fixed alternately to the ceiling and floor, in an extended W-shape. Beside its source, *Pictures emerged from letters, wallpainting* (2008) has been painted on the wall. Still modular, this composition is articulated in a similar scheme to the previous canvas, but here a grey spiked shape appears repeatedly between each black form and white background to spell out the exhibitions' long title. The meticulously calculated lettering provides an experience more visually mesmerising than semantically rewarding, a conceit which extends into our physical space by the illuminated W above us. Sitting on the daybed, the obscuration of the letters' identity and collective meaning is perhaps a conscious gesture by the artist to provoke an interesting, if unusual, obstruction between the act of seeing and the habit of reading.

Round's articulation of this muted, mini-chromatic typography and his ascetic arrangements of domestic objects pay formal tribute to work produced by the early avant-garde. Modernist designers such as Ernő Goldfinger and Eric Gill are explicitly cited in his previous works, designers who proposed a synthesis of graphic design and spiritual life, personal hypotheses that were later, and quite publicly, debunked. In a vein that echoes these original beliefs, *XLOMFCN...* uses the gallery space to its best potential, touring the works from pristine exhibition conditions to a seemingly domestic setting and so allowing its various nuances unfold. The installation appears set in the early 1920s before any debunking, before the divergence of design from contemporary or fine art, when architectural and typographic designs held the same clout artistically as they did commercially and politically. Round is one of a generation of artists revisiting the histories of graphic and interior design; however, his exploration seems more consumed with the reiterations of its various surfaces rather than in the exploration of its subsequent impact and for that reason the purpose of these letters' semantic obscuration is somewhat unclear.

Despite these loose ends, *XLOMFCN...* is by no means unsuccessful. The works are finished with a sophisticated and often playful economy, encouraging questions about a point in history worthy of revision, and arranged in a manner that both inspires and encourages it. In Four's new space, at Round's new juncture, this advertisement remains gratifyingly undefined.

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