

Dear Heavenly Father!
 You are sorry and Holy to
 be praised this wonderful sabbath.
 We thank thee for giving us the
 opportunity to worship ^{you} ~~thee~~ on
~~this~~ this sabbath. As we
 came here, here are other at
 here who are suffering from ~~the~~
 of ~~the~~ ~~the~~ ~~the~~
 all sorts of problems we pray that
 you be with them and strengthen
 them.
 Father bless
 a the he leads us in his
 program. ~~May~~ ~~the~~ a
~~in~~ All in all we ask for
 your blessing on this sabbath
 may it be a inspirational and
 meaningful sabbath to all
 of us here to



dianne tanzer gallery + projects

108-110 Gertrude Street Fitzroy VIC 3065 t: +61 3 9416 3956 e: dtanzer@ozemail.com.au
 Opening Hours: Mon - Fri 10am - 5pm Sat 12pm - 5pm
www.diannetanzergallery.net.au

Cover: *Untitled (Call me)*, 2011, Craftboard, cardboard, thermal adhesive, polyurethane resin, laquer and enamel, Dimensions variable
 Centre: *Untitled (INA LA)*, 2011, Craftboard, cardboard, thermal adhesive, polyurethane resin, laquer and enamel, Dimensions variable
 Back: *Untitled (unfinished prayer)*, 2010, Graphite on watercolour paper, 240 x 150cm
 Photography by Sam Scoufos



SHAUN O'CONNOR
Youse

25.06.11 - 16.07.11

Shaun O'Connor, *Youse*

June – July 2011

*The city... does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls.*¹

Imagine writing is a gesture arrested, a narrative composed not just of certain words in a particular order, but the *how* of those words; the writing's style, clarity, its visible architecture captured and able to be analyzed, forming a meaning as complex as a facial expression, like a smile at a funeral.

Shaun O'Connor's work isn't just a study on these arrested gestures, but an exploration into the personalities that lie behind them; behind what it is we write, how we write, what meanings—vulnerability, uncertainty, depression, joy—lurk just below the surface of our letters. O'Connor's pieces hold up a magnifying glass to the detritus of writing we leave behind us; the words, letters, slogans that, like Hansel and Gretel's breadcrumbs, form a trail leading back to the author—to us.

Untitled (INA LA) combines a certain mystery—is the text cryptic, or incomplete?—with a telling writing style composed of harsh angles, as if a single coat-hanger was bent and reshaped to form each letter. With its heavy lines and long, purposeful strokes, it appears gouged into the surface like a tattoo, or a scar, and the piece bristle with edges, like daggers tucked into a belt. Every vertical line is intersected—no, being threatened or stabbed—by a horizontal line. Whatever context O'Connor pulled *Untitled (INA LA)* from, augmented as it is, it appears aggressive, violent.

But then there's a centrally intrinsic, juxtaposing fluidity in the “L;” how it appears to be composed by one uppercase “l” stitched to another, horizontal uppercase “L.” It's as if the author captured two gestures: one of someone standing proud, erect, followed by their fall, their back arched and their head bowed as if wounded, as if the rest of the piece bleeds out beneath them.

Untitled (unfinished prayer) is a startling mixture of formulaic, impersonal faith layered with disturbing, and personal entropy. Follow the piece's refrain of “Sabbath,” not as a word, but an image, and watch a startling sequence of deterioration that suggests, even though the same hand penned the prayer, the person who began writing it was

not the same as the one who finished. The beginning's “Dear heavenly father!” is clear, bubbly, energetic, and enthusiastic; whereas the last line is incomplete, indecipherable, meaningless, and, hauntingly, oddly symmetrical in how the “of” and the “to” look like mirrored images of each other. Nearly every letter with a vertical slash is intersected, so the piece is, on the one hand, populated with the “Father,” his crosses, a congregation's “we,” but, loudest of all, is shared with a blank space surrounded by more space, and the complete absence of an “l.” *Untitled (unfinished prayer)* challenges the author, as it challenges us, grasping at the ungraspable, scarred by what we've crossed out: thoughts we couldn't articulate, prayers we couldn't complete.

In *Untitled (Call me)*, we see not just an imperative attached to a phone number, but a plea precariously constructed—crimped lines stacked shakily atop each other, like a tower teetering, ready to fall. Each line measures less than a breath; read musically, it's like a heavy, staccato phrase—not beautiful, but urgent. The “Call” forms a pretty dome for the piece, but then why does the “me” slant so far downward, as if it's leaking, or trying to escape? Graphologically, text that plunges into the lower margins suggests sadness, anxiety, depression. Did the author, seeing this on the next line, abandon the lower-case “n” of “on” and add an additional slash, unnecessarily capitalizing it to “N,” but, more importantly, visually creating a wall to prop the phrase up?

Often we embed images in our handwriting without realizing it—a falconer might unknowingly form a bird in his signature; Elvis Presley's signature, embodying his social image as a rock star and sex icon, has a phallic and engorged “y.”² The final line of *Untitled (Call me)* is indecipherable—is that first number an 8 written over a 5? A 7 cutting across an elongated 3? Does the “5” bleed into a 1, or is the last number a 7 butting heads with the “5”? Note, though, halving the line into the scribble and the numbers that follow it reveals an interesting image—on the right, it appears almost like the outline of someone with a turned head, their stare aimed at the left. Assuming they're watching a person, the left image becomes like a person crossed out. Could this be the author, crushed by uncertainty, cutting themselves out of their note, thus destroying its most crucial information? Are they intimidated or turned off by the implied “other's” stare? Either way, if the last line is also the text's foundation, then *Untitled (Call me)* topples.

Todd Dillard

New York City, 2011

¹ Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

² Examples from Michelle Dresbold's *Sex, Lies, and Handwriting*