

# ARTSLANT

## Everything In Its Absence

by Christina Catherine Martinez

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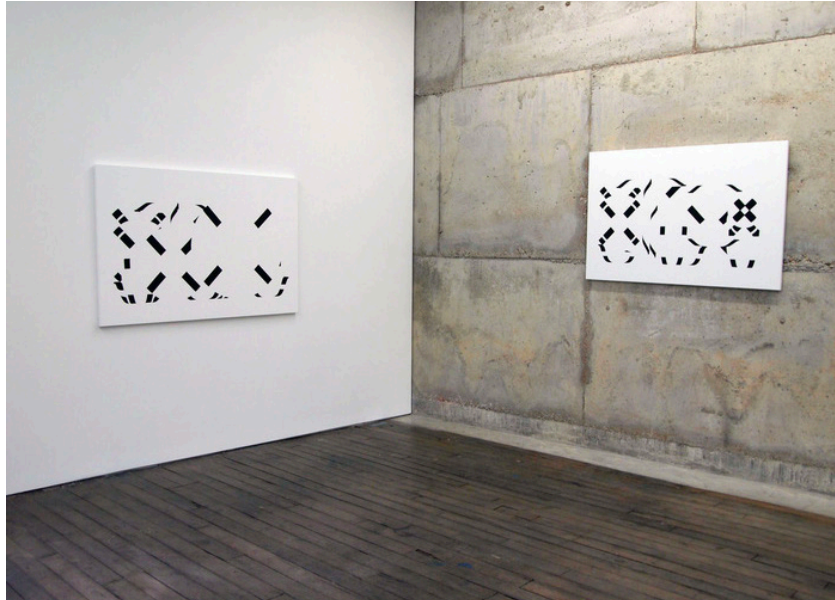
Though it has proved its mettle in disposable boat construction and DIY prom couture, the most interesting functions of tape are metaphysical. Gangly schoolchildren and polished movie actresses alike take their positions in front of a camera according to bold silver or yellow strips laid out on the floor. Toes on the line, please. Chin up. Now don't move from that spot. Art Directors and household decorators with low-levels of anal retentiveness plan out their above-sofa picture compositions with blue painter's tape before committing to deposit-compromising holes in the wall. Moveable lines demarcate space, possess the odd power to control the flow of human energy, and are often substitutes for permanent solutions.



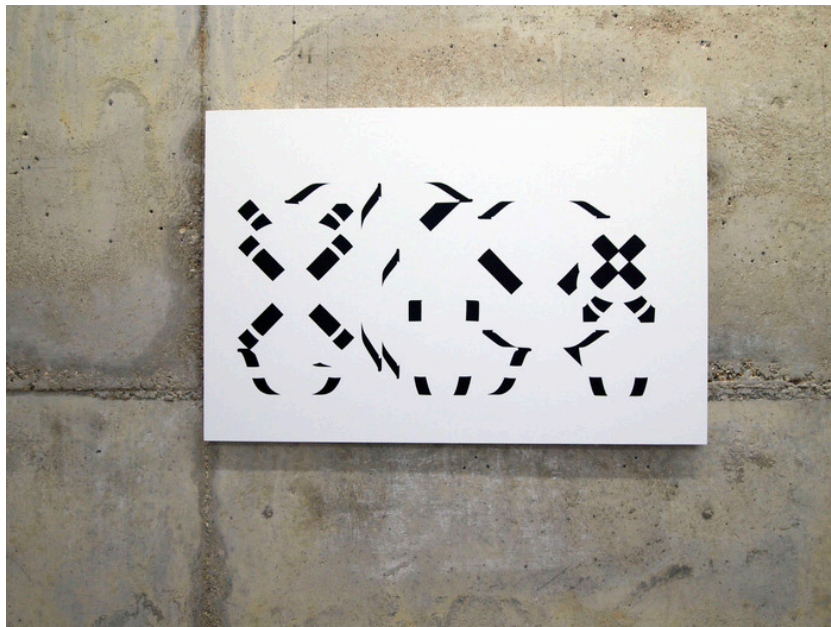
Sean Paul's stark, abstract compositions function as stand ins for more fleshed-out still life compositions. A still life of cup, bowl, saucer, and plate is replaced by black squares of tape that merely symbolize presence, space. The subsequent iterations of the composition result from a shift in the creator's point of view, but to the viewer, the shapes are merely shuffling around, and we trust, the way one trusts that the ordered yet frenzied lines of blueprints indeed represent a habitable domicile, that Paul's black semaphores point to a real still life, somewhere; their graphic clarity undertoned by something sad, clinical, almost sinister—like the cult of Helvetica.

There is so little gained by ditching the object here, and so much significantly lost: the sterile shapes have a disquieting ability to evoke past encounters with straightforward still life paintings. In the middle of the small, stark gallery I was transported to my first encounter with the painful voluptuousness of Abraham van Beyerens's 1667 *Banquet Still Life*.

It's an abstruse commentary on the nature of commercial advertising—a practice dedicated entirely to the harnessing of abstract desire and subjective memory to a tangible product, signified but not yet present—but Paul is right to point out that investment in the absence of an object is a “much more lucrative field” than the creation of objects.



“A Moveable Feast Part II - Sean Paul” installation view; Photo by the author, courtesy Campoli Presti



Sean Paul, *Arrangement 15, Front/Top/Bottom/Right/Left/Back*, 2012, Oil and acrylic on extra fine linen, 36.5 X 54.63 X 1.13 inches; Photo by the author, courtesy Campoli Presti.

These themes are touched on less evocatively in the other works. *Towel Detail, Version Glade* and *Towel Detail, Version Pond*, both 2013, attempt to complicate what it means to talk about the quality of images when digital technology offers so many concrete praxes for making “good” digital images (you know, ones that aren’t all pixelly and stuff). The sterility of these works, though, lack even the twice-removed poetry offered by the black still life semaphores. Perhaps the point is stronger here, but even hollowness implies space, allows for movement, the divining of something beneath a surface.

I’d like to think all surfaces have an underneath, or at least the memory of one.