

Alex Da Corte
American Speech

8 Bury Street SW1Y
04 November – 18 December 2021

In his second solo exhibition at Sadie Coles HQ, Alex Da Corte presents a series of nine drawings and a new large-scale sculpture, each based on the image of the canopy structure of a movie-theatre marquee. The exhibition's title, *American Speech*, is the name of an ongoing series of work confronting the messages we make, what we hope for, and what remains.

The sculpture consists of an illuminated model of a marquee, both palpably shrunken to domestic scale and uncomfortably large, in which text is stacked vertically and horizontally. The vertical letters, fringed by a line of lightbulbs, spell out the acronym for the colours of the rainbow, ROYGBIV. Alongside and below reads: *Red Hot & Very Blue, In Technicolor*. The first half of this title is lifted directly from an old marquee at an adult theatre showing 'blue' films, while *In Technicolor* smothers it in the gloss of mid-century family entertainment. This naughty collision creates a whole. In this title is the complete stage of experience, just as full and just as wonky as the enigmatic distillation of the colour spectrum in the neon ROYGBIV, its letters gleaming in confident colours that actually don't correspond. It is a "collage of mistakes," Da Corte explains, just like the built American environment from which its volumes are drawn. The artist celebrates the estrangement of form and content, the live negotiation of culture – per Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown's 1972 touchstone *Learning from Las Vegas* – that constructs faith, fear, nonsense and progress in our world, all at the same time.



Just as the sculpture touts an unachievable totality, each of Da Corte's drawings is simultaneously archival documentation, comprising a monochrome print of an old movie theatre, and an elegiac, slipping symbol. The artist has whited-out certain architectural details or words from the theatres' facades, leaving a fragmentary image – in some cases, a near-blank interrupted by small vestiges of text, or an architectural shape evacuated of detail.

Echoing conceptual experiments in deletion such as Robert Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, 1953, Da Corte's drawings are enactments of memory and forgetting. Words become metonymic, parts standing for absent wholes. Built structures become ghostly silhouettes. The act of deletion renders the images and their component words more open-ended or, at times, more concentrated and emotive: the name of Judy Garland eclipses those of her co-stars or the movie itself, just as Garland's iconicity has blazed through the obscuring effects of time. In *XXX*, all identifying details have been removed apart from the angular outline of the marquee itself – highlighted in red – and the triple X warning of hard erotic content. Meanings, in this way, are isolated or transformed rather than simply erased.

The words *American Speech* are freighted with political rhetoric; they serve as naked acknowledgement of the artist's broadcast of his own voice, the language he inherits and continues, the responsibilities he bears. *American Speech* is also the name of the academic journal where, in 1926, the word 'marquee' was first recorded. The American speech of a marquee is a place of expectation and promise. Words, like colours, change as they mix. "It's not necessarily to cancel out whatever mysteries and meanings these pre-existing icons have," Da Corte has explained of his work, "but to make them my own, to embrace them and add on to them. It's about mutating more than erasing."

Alex Da Corte (b. 1980, Camden (NJ)) obtained a MFA in Sculpture from Yale University, New Haven (CT) (2010) and a BFA in Printmaking and Fine Arts from The University of the Arts, Philadelphia (PA) (2004). Da Corte has exhibited internationally, with recent solo presentations including: *As Long as The Sun Lasts* a site-specific sculpture made for The Met's prestigious annual Roof Garden Commission, New York (2021); *Rubber Pencil Devil*, Prada Rong Zhai, Shanghai (2020) marking the artist's first solo exhibition in China; *Helter Shelter or: The Red Show! or...*, Sadie Coles HQ, London (2020); *THE SUPERMAN*, Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne (2018); *Harvest Moon*, New Museum, New York (2017); *Slow Graffiti*, Secession, Vienna (2017); *50 Wigs*, HEART Herning Museum of Contemporary Art, Herning, Denmark (2016); *Free Roses*, Mass MoCA Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams MA (2016); *Easternsports* (with Jayson Musson), ICA, Philadelphia PA (2014); *The Kind of Dog that Keeps You Waiting*, Yale Gallery, New Haven CT (2010). Current and recent group exhibitions include *Super Fusion-2021 Chengdu Biennale*, Tianfu Art Gallery, Chengdu (2021); *Topologies of the Real*, CAFA Art Museum, Beijing (2020); *May You Live in Interesting Times*, 58th International Art Exhibition, Venice Biennale, Venice (2019); *Carnegie International 57th Edition*, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh PA (2018); *Warhol 1968*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2018); *Dreamlands: Immersive Film and Cinema Since 1905*, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2017); *Fire Under Snow*, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark (2016); *Taut Eye Tau*, Musée d'art contemporain de Lyon, Lyon (2015) and *First Among Equals*, ICA Institute of Contemporary Arts, Philadelphia PA (2012).

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