

## Close Encounters

### SAVAGERY AND SUBTERFUGE IN PHILADELPHIA

By Linda Yablonsky | Sep 28, 2011

Given the way context changes everything, it's always interesting to see what happens when artists from New York take their work to the provinces. At the moment, Philadelphia boasts two shows that New York won't see, and both are worth a trip to Pennsylvania. The Institute of Contemporary Art is presenting the abstract painter Charline von Heyl's first retrospective, while Locks Gallery is exhibiting recent and past work by the conceptualist Rob Wynne.

Over the last ten years, the German-born von Heyl has had shows at the Friedrich Petzel Gallery in New York as well as in Europe. Wynne, a New York native, has been around since the '70s, and now has a higher profile in Paris. Neither is a brand name in their hometown, but that's not a good enough reason to pass over their presence in it. Then again, seeing their work out of competition, as it were, rewards the intrepid viewer with a focused attention too often denied by the swarm of exhibitions always buzzing around New York.

Hornets, drawn with colored glass beads sewn onto vellum, figure in "IN COG NITO," Wynne's show at Locks. The materials might be too beautiful to lavish on a bug, but Wynne gets a lot of mileage from Dadaist absurdity. The insects -- there's a glass-bead spider web too -- are in a patchwork installation of works on paper that go back to his earliest, which includes a reassuring 1972 telegram sent to himself that reads, "I am still alive."

At the time, Wynne was an avid participant in his mentor Ray Johnson's New York Correspondence School. He also favored the Duchampian double-entendre. A small collage, begun in 1970, has the image of a man's bathrobe laid sideways on a stick between the typewritten lowercase words, "someone told me that if you sleep on the left side it wears the heart out/faster."

Another Fluxus-like work is a typewritten document that reads, "a drawing is going to be made during the winter and then it will be made again and again." The stenciled word "COPY" is stamped on it.

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IN COG NITO, 2011, poured and mirrored glass, 41 x 25 inches



Red Eye Hornet, 2010, glass beads and thread on vellum, 27 x 21 inches



These pieces testify to a young artist trying out the waters of appropriation and its discontents. Since then, Wynne has focused on the slippery slope of fixed meaning, a territory he explores differently than a Joseph Kosuth, Lawrence Weiner or Kay Rosen, artists who also employ language as object or image.

Actually, Wynne's visual syntax aligns him more with the text paintings of Christopher Wool. The overheard phrase, the passing thought or the juicy quotation are his stock in trade. For the last decade, he has been working in glass as well as thread and specializing in ideas that are hidden in plain sight by layers of irony.

At the center of "IN COG NITO" is a word sculpture called Invisible that is anything but. Made of hand-blown, clear glass letters spelling the title across a gentle mound of white sand, it is solidly present yet inescapably "invisible." It first saw the light of day at the Holly Solomon Gallery in 1994, when it seemed to inhabit a country alien to that of Wynne's paintings -- canvases printed with enlarged details of Meissen figurines and embroidered in contrasting colors with enigmatic and incongruous word pairings like "Always" and "Sometimes."

At Locks, the sculpture anchors an array of silvery, poured-glass wall reliefs that hover between the literal and the ephemeral. The largest is a whirling constellation of 534 silvered-glass discs based on the spiral image in a Cocteau drawing, The Vortex of Narcissus. The other reliefs are spatial plays on words spelled out in letters of different sizes that have the look of handwriting. They're decorative, sure. But so what? They also function as poetic forms of the art of contradiction, perfectly embodied here by Visible Silence.



Copy, 1978, typewriter on paper, 13 3/4 x 11 1/4 inches



Installation view, "Rob Wynne: IN COG NITO", Locks Gallery, Philadelphia



I Am Still Alive, 1972, telegram, 9 x 12 inches



Someone Told Me..., 1970-80, typewriter and collage, 17 3/4 x 15 1/4 inches



Installation view, "Rob Wynne: IN COG NITO", Locks Gallery, Philadelphia