

SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

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Tony Lewis to Discuss 'Action and Language' in Art at MOCA Exhibition Talk

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While the Opening Night Party for MOCA Cleveland's Summer 2015 exhibitions isn't until next week, its latest exhibition by Tony Lewis opens this Friday, June 5. To celebrate, MOCA Cleveland presents an Artist Talk with Lewis; Chicago-based artist, community organizer and educator Anthony Stepter; and MOCA Cleveland Associate Curator Rose Bouthillier.

At 3 p.m. this Saturday, June 6, the trio will discuss Lewis' first solo museum exhibition, *Tony Lewis: free movement power nomenclature pressure weight*. Following the talk, Lewis will be present in the gallery until 5 p.m.

"In his expansive drawing practice, Tony Lewis uses action and language to explore communication, presence, and authority," says Bouthillier. "Focusing on graphite powder as a basic material element, his works emphasize the body through scale, tension, and imprint."

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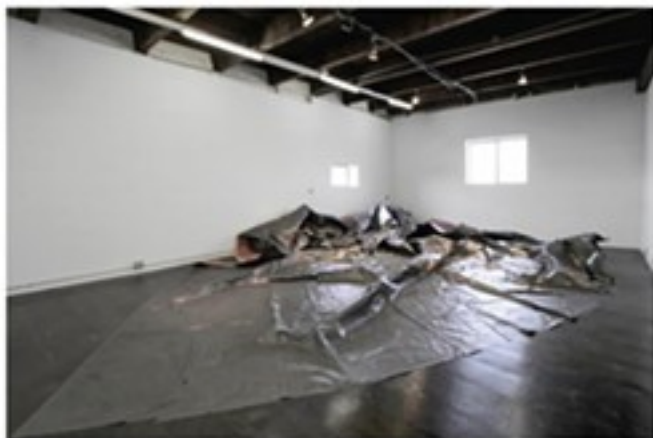
Bouthillier adds: “This grouping considers both the breadth of Lewis’s practice and the central concerns that drive it. His desire to keep things open, permeable, and tentative is evidenced in how the artist mines the multivalence of a source, a sentence, or a strategy. Rather than exhaustive, Lewis’s approach arrives at something more along the lines of conditioning. It is accumulative, has memory.”

Lewis’ exhibition includes six large-scale recent works from a new series based on obsolete **Gregg shorthand** drawings. The phonetic writing system uses particular line forms to represent corresponding spoken sounds. Each of the works represents one of the words from the exhibition’s title.

“These new pieces relate back to my older language-based work, which basically began with representational letters and words deployed in the work,” explains Lewis. “These solidified my relationship with visual language, considering it as a tool to build drawings... It’s a system that has a relationship to handwriting and spoken word, but its also extremely fluid and free, very emotional in the way some of these marks are drawn. It’s strange that this antiquated system is a way for me to understand language better, to understand communication. I’m using it to create drawings that are visually freer and bolder.”

The show also includes two of Lewis’ floor drawings. Initially, these objects begin as graphite-coated paper floor coverings for entire rooms. Once installed, they are pulled up and compressed into three-dimensional sculptural objects with unique creases, tears and marks. The process creates a unique installation each time the works are exhibited.

“The purpose of the studio is to find new ways to make drawings,” says Lewis. “Graphite and paper are traditional drawing materials that I use to play with what the most basic understanding of what drawing really is, trying to blow it up a bit... When I focus on the use of a material I tend to use a lot of it, as much as I can get my hands on, partially just to find its limitations. I want to see what it looks like when I completely go nuts with this material, push it everywhere, deal with it, have it all over my shoes and my pants, and all over my hands.”



“Considerations of Lewis’s work often lead back to the studio, an ordered space for thought that is organized around a singular purpose: ‘to find new ways to make drawings,’” adds Bouthillier. “It is a total environment, where paper, objects, texts, and the ubiquitous graphite powder collide on every surface. The floor is primary; coated in a slick layer of graphite, it is a vehicle for mark making, a tool the same way a pencil is a tool.”

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Additionally, Lewis has created a large text installation, meant to be viewed from MOCA Cleveland's unique staircase. The work is based on excerpts from *Life's Little Instruction Book* by H. Jackson Brown Jr. Lewis first encountered the book in his mother's bathroom, and it has continued to influence his life and work. The installation incorporates nails, stretched rubber bands and graphite.

"As reminders and epitaphs writ large, Lewis's rubber band drawings have an oppressive, paranoid quality," explains Bouthillier. "The materials themselves connote a subtle sense of violence; the repetitive action of nailing the wall reads like physical self-discipline, the rubber bands are tense—threatening to snap. Held in equilibrium, but also frayed (the graphite scatters, flecks, falls), these works embody the strain of continually keeping yourself in-check."

Lewis was born in 1986, and grew up in Cleveland. He currently works and resides in Chicago. His work has been featured in numerous solo and group shows around the country.

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