

New York Gerald Ferguson

CANADA

55 Chrystie Street

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The late Gerald Ferguson, a revered fixture of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, was included in the foundational 1970 “Information”

exhibition at MoMA, and his work—remarkably—didn’t appear in New York again until now. This survey, curated by Luke Murphy, includes eleven stenciled and frottaged paintings that bear all the marks of Ferguson’s consistently matter-of-fact approach.

In the 1960s, Ferguson made drawings with typewritten text, spray-painted stenciled grids of letters and punctuation marks onto canvas (three of which are on view here), and eventually assembled *The Standard Corpus of Present Day English Language Usage* arranged by word length and alphabetized within word length, 1970—a self-referential index of fifty thousand words (inspired in part by the poems of Carl Andre). In subsequent work, Ferguson’s aesthetic investment in the rugged Halifax landscape (he became an expert on Nova Scotian folk art) met his tendency for procedural remove. This rough-hewn combination comes through in his frottage paintings, which he produced—from 1992 through 2009—by rolling black enamel onto canvases (or, in a few cases, onto leftover house-painters’ drop cloths) that were stapled over domestic and utilitarian objects from clotheslines to drain covers, doormats, and the bottom of his studio trash can. Implements of manual labor here rub up against abstraction’s often lofty claims, and though steeped in associations—from Hans Hartung’s prints to Richard Serra’s paint stick “Rounds” and “Solids”—Ferguson’s frottages act as foils for overdetermined extrapolation. These paintings record object and action at once, just as the materials that Ferguson chose practically embody functionality in their very names (as nouns that, for the most part, connote their use when read in verb form—rope, fence, hose, etc.). The works’ deadpan impressions also register their relatively mechanized yet rudimentary process on the bare canvas in ways that recall the basic grounds on which Ferguson’s practice, and those of many of his Conceptualist peers, began—the typewritten page.



Gerald Ferguson, *50 Ft. Rope*, 2000, enamel on raw canvas, 28 x 21”.

— Annie Ochmanek