

THE BROOKLYN RAIL

Siegel, Maia. "Lingua Franca." *The Brooklyn Rail*, 15 July 2022, <https://brooklynrail.org/2022/07/artseen/Lingua-Franca>.

Lingua Franca An Exclamation Point in Any Language

You might die on the elevator up to Kapp Kapp Gallery. The elevator shakes you awake, and you can harmonize with its screech if you're alone. But it's worth the gamble. The new group show, *Lingua Franca*, opened June 18th, and runs to July 29th. Daniel Kapp, who curated the show, finds a common language between nine very different artists.

And what is a universal language, if not play? There is, at *Lingua Franca*, a concentrated focus on play: the colors are bright, the shapes are organic, and the materials bring to mind an arts and crafts table crowd-sourced from junk drawers. From the little red wagon of Louis Osmosis's *Bottle Wall* (2022) to the cardboard of Richard Tuttle's *Prehistoric Writing, 1 and 11* (both 2016), childhood games become serious: a wagon's empty bottles, perhaps on the way to a lemonade stand, solidify in cement, and scrunched cardboard becomes a form of prehistoric communication.

And what is a universal language, if not play? There is, at *Lingua Franca*, a concentrated focus on play: the colors are bright, the shapes are organic, and the materials bring to mind an arts and crafts table crowd-sourced from junk drawers. From the little red wagon of Louis Osmosis's *Bottle Wall* (2022) to the cardboard of Richard Tuttle's *Prehistoric Writing, 1 and 11* (both 2016), childhood games become serious: a wagon's empty bottles, perhaps on the way to a lemonade stand, solidify in cement, and scrunched cardboard becomes a form of prehistoric communication.

The games keep changing. Justin Chance's *Fast Car* (2020-2021) is a puzzle and word search of Tracy Chapman's famous song, spotted with smiley faces and blotches of yellow and green. The word *innocent* is circled. A red cat toy hangs from Hannah Beerman's *pinky* (2022), its end-feather swinging. Brian Belott's *Marshmallow Painting I and II* (2022) are reminiscent of putting Peeps in the microwave. Or, alternatively, of the famous 1972 Stanford marshmallow test, where children could get one marshmallow immediately, or wait and get two.

A highlight of the show is Hannah Beerman's painting *lickity split* (2022), which bends the show's playful impulse into something strange: photos collaged onto the brightly streaked canvas include a bowl of porcelain fruit, a bodybuilder, and a naked woman on all fours. Louis Osmosis's *Various Masses* (2022) also leans into the strange: it evokes a slumped figure, a bindle stabbing through the head of the bulbous plastic object. This is not the red-checked bindle of Norman Rockwell's boy on the run. Here, the bindle is a blunt-force weapon. No one is running anywhere.

There is also an eeriness in Mary Manning's *Milling Around the Village* (2022), in which photographs of friends create a frame around empty space. This sets up a vague map of sorts,

drawing boundary lines for the Village with the people of the place itself. The piece evokes the grid structure of a phone's photo album, only with the middle carved out. All this play—joyous, beautiful people draped on other smiling people—circles an emptiness. Clare Churchouse's *canary* (2022) also creates an absence. Tape, photographs, mesh, wood, and other materials create a frame of sorts on the gallery wall. When you enter the gallery, it's at the farthest wall, facing the viewer. It makes the gallery wall a window, a portal. With both Manning and Churchouse's work, we are given a framed void and are left to imagine a center, a core. What could be framed by Manning's faces, Churchouse's thread? What games could be created by linking around an emptiness?

The best games are about finding something hidden, something secret. Susan Cianciolo's *Communicating Telepathically and energetically, ("I LOVE YOU")* (2019-2022) is made of textiles sewn together, but the eye is immediately drawn to the cardboard box in its corner, its top cut away, revealing a drawing, words written on cardboard. Her piece conjures up the feeling of sitting on the carpet, looking through a box of love letters you hid under your bed. There is a type of void here, too—the distance between sender and receiver, between writer and reader.

Brian Belott's *Puff Painting* (2022) has, carved out of the middle, a gum wrapper-shaped section lined with small rocks and beads. They feel like the teeth of the painting, or maybe the control panel. The textures are frustratingly touchable; I kept thinking of fidget cubes, or slime videos where beads are kneaded into the mixture. It takes all your willpower not to reach out.

This focus on texture was present in Rachel Eulena Williams's *Flag* (2022) too, in which a rope snakes through paint. The rope curves around inky blue, its ends splaying out in bright orange. Its orange end-note would be an exclamation point in any language. But, as I looked around the exhibition, I saw exclamation points everywhere: in a black bindle poking through a sculpture, a piece of zipper glued to a painting, a red cat-toy feather. And perhaps that's the link between these artists—it's not their language, but their punctuation. They seem to say: *We are just so happy to survive the elevator, to take pictures of our friends in love, to paint marshmallows bright pink.*