

# HYPERALLERGIC

## Mel Bochner's Linguistic Trickery

By Seph Rodney | 20 June 2017



*The artist's paintings at Peter Freeman, Inc. move language from mere representation to lived experience.*

What's the point of creating paintings with text? Some of Mel Bochner's pieces in his exhibition *Voices* at Peter Freeman, Inc. show me. One of the works that best exploits the recruitment of language into the realm of painting is "Squawk" (2016), which gives a gleeful rundown of various words like the title: "SNORT!," "SQUEAL!," "HOOT!," "HOLLER!," "HOWL!," "BELLOW!," and "BAWL!," among them. They're all in caps, all punctuated with exclamation points as if urgent or intended as imperatives. Each calls to mind the kind of sound it indicates, so I feel impelled to enact it, at least in my own head — I think of what a snort sounds like, and language moves from mere representation to lived experience. Bochner does a similar thing with "Amazing!" (2015), but here the emphasis is on words that convey the ginned-up enthusiasm of PR employees hawking their clients' wares or interviewers talking to celebrities on the red carpet: "OMG!," "SHUT UP!," "YES!!!" I get the feeling that Bochner had fun making these paintings.

In a different vein, there is the very clever "Blah, Blah, Blah" (2016), not the yellow one, but the one on the orange painted canvas. Bochner sets the repeating "blah"s at an angle, repeatedly imprinted over each other as if made with a rubber stamp. The words drip, their white pigment intermingling with the orange background, like a voice trailing off at the end of a sentence when the speaker has run out of steam. I genuinely love the simple trickery of "Yes!/No! Maybe" (2016), which clumps the "yes"s and "no"s in the top half of the canvas on a black background, while leaving one solitary, imperious "maybe" on the bottom in a field of gray. It's a field of experience where most of us live a good deal of the time.